Legacy of Evil

by Psychic_Refugee

Summary

Crown Prince Ben had declared that children of villains be given a second chance and invites the four children of the most notorious villains. Mal, Carlos, Evie, and Jay try to navigate Auradon Prep with the burden of an Evil Legacy.

Notes

My take on a darker version of Descendants. Please note that I am hardcore cherry picking things I want from not only Descendants but every version of every fairytale (Disney or otherwise) to suit my needs. Please feel free to ask me questions. For the majority of this story, I am purposefully choosing to omit some stuff from the Descendant movie/book universe as I thought they didn’t make sense, or had too much “Disney Glaze.” Meaning Disney introduced complex and “unpalatable” issues, e.g. poverty of the Isle, and completely ignored or glazed over them. But it’s also possible that I missed something and it’s a continuity error. Either way, please review and ask as many questions as you want.

My tumblr is psychic-refugee (psychic-refugee.tumblr.com) is you prefer to do asks and the like that way.

If any dialogue looks familiar it's because I straight jacked it from the movie.

I make no le fric and all other useless disclaimers about how I don't own Descendant's as Disney has better things to do than sue a broke student which they would probably lose anyway due to Fair Use, 17 U.S.C. § 107. Also, if anyone asks this work is a nonprofit educational tool. ;-D
See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1

It was another sleepless night for the Crown Prince of the United Kingdoms of Auradon.

Crown Prince Ben stood at the terrace of his suite, looking out to the ocean. Normally the peaceful vista calmed him; the sound of the waves a constant lullaby to urge him to sleep. But the last year, he had been bothered. He saw the Isle of the Lost in the distance, the prison island where the United Kingdoms of Auradon, UKA or Auradon, were banished twenty years ago. His father had personally hunted down the worst villains and their minions and corralled them to a lifetime imprisonment to the island. Most citizens had forgotten about the villains, enjoying the peace that came with a villain-less country.

But Ben had read and learned about the island. How it had no magic, it had no technology other than what the citizens of Auradon cast off which was years behind and probably barely in working condition, and further how it had no oversight. King Adam had dumped the villains there and left them to govern themselves. There had been plenty of reports of the squalor the island had become, with little to no health or social services. Most Auradon citizens felt it was just what the villains deserved, and he had grown up thinking the same. How many stories had he heard growing up of the evil fairy or queen attempting to kill someone? How an evil sorcerer attempted to take a throne that wasn’t his? How many had died and suffered for their greed, vanity, and ambition?

But then he saw the children, from infants to teenagers his age. All looking gaunt and underfed, dirtied from barely any clean water and the constant pollution. The entire documentary portraying the island as grim and dirty, the poisoned sky constantly overcast. An overwhelming sense of pity filled him when the picture he always held about the Isle and the villains that inhabited where changed. The villains perhaps were getting what they deserved, but what did their children do to deserve the same punishment? How could Auradon and its citizens claim to be the heroes when they abandoned the most vulnerable among them?

The guilt had plagued him since he turned seventeen, a year away from inheriting the principality of Auradon City. As Crown Prince, he would take over ruling the princedom as practice before inheriting the throne from his father. King Adam was years away from retiring and in perfect health, so Ben would have plenty of time to hone his skills for ruling.

He knew what his first edict would be. Auradon Prep was located within Auradon City, which meant that the school fell under his jurisdiction. So he would proclaim that the children be given a chance at becoming good. He wanted them all to have places at Auradon Prep or Auradon Academy if they were too young, he could show his father and all his subjects that parents were not destiny.

A person chose their destiny; he believed that with all his heart.

His plan was better in theory than it was in reality. While he had been getting tailored for his coronation suit, his mother and father had come to see him.

“How is possible you’re going to be Crown Prince of Auradon City next week? You’re just a baby,” King Adam of House Bourbon said jovially as he walked into Ben’s suite, arm in arm with his Queen, Belle. His father wearing his customary three piece suit, absent was the Crown of Auradon as it was a heavy clunky thing that he only wore for special occasions. Belle was in a cheerful lemon dress and wore a tiny coronet; she had never been one for big jewelry.
Big libraries, however…

“He’s turning eighteen dear,” Belle answered playfully.

“Hey pops,” Ben answered, not as enthusiastically; trying to muster the courage to tell his father of his plans.

“Eighteen? That’s far too young to be Crown Prince. I didn’t make a good decision until I was… forty-two.”

“Uhhh… you decided to marry me at twenty-eight,” Belle reminded him, looking incredulous and slightly offended, not believing he had just said that.

“Well, it was either you or the teapot,” he teased his wife, winking at his son.

Ben laughed, forgetting his anxiety and happy to see his parents tease each other; still in love after all these years.

“I’m kidding.”

“Mom, dad,” Ben started, forgetting he was getting fitted for a suit and stopped when the royal tailor made some noise to remind him he was still getting pinned.

“I’ve chosen my first official proclamation as Crown Prince.”

Belle and Adam were surprised but happy and proud their son was taking his position so seriously. When other young nobles, even those of royal blood, were still thinking of parties and shopping, their Ben was clearly busy making plans. They eagerly awaited what he had to say.

“I’ve decided that the children on the Isle of the Lost will be given a chance to live here in Auradon.”

Ben gave them a moment to digest his idea, a sinking feeling when his parents stared at him in shock, his mother dropping the sports coat she had picked up; ever mothering him and trying to tidy up.

“Every time I look out to the island, I feel like they’ve been abandoned,” he went on, defending his point.

“The children of our sworn enemies,” King Adam restated, wanting to be clear that’s who they were speaking of. “Living among us?”

“They’re the ones who need our help the most. You’ve seen what conditions they live under, how can we just ignore that?”

“I knew that hippy documentary was a bad idea. They never should have been allowed to go to that damned island.” King Adam growled out, regretting signing off giving that investigative reporter access to the prison. “You have lost your mind son, these are villains, and they are guilty of unspeakable crimes.”

“Not the villains, their children,” he stressed, not wanting his point to get lost in his father’s anger.

“I know we’ve sheltered you Ben, but you can’t truly believe these children are all that different than their parents. Bad blood will out,” the King warned.

“That’s exactly what I want to disprove. These children have done nothing but they’ve been sentenced to a life in prison? What is their crime? Being born to the wrong parents? How is that
justice?"

“These villains each have tried to kill our closest friends and allies. Do you really think that Queen Aurora, King Phillip, Queen Snow White, King Ferdinand, Sultana Jasmine and Prince Consort Aladdin and the countless others who make up the United Kingdoms would stand for this? I won’t hear of it.”

The King and Crown Prince had raised their voices, the tailor and servants dutifully left the room to give them some privacy, as well not be witness to a private family moment.

“How about second chances? What is the point of prison without rehabilitation? And I’m not even speaking of the villains, I’m talking about innocent children who have never known anything other than the island. Don’t they deserve to know a normal life? Or are second chances only for cursed royals?” Ben angrily pointed out, not appreciating that he was being treated like a child and his ideas being dismissed.

King Adam felt the long dormant beast inside him stir; his son dare bring up the years of his curse where he withered in isolation and what he thought of as unlovable and hopeless creature.

A deep growl emerged from his chest and his son returned in kind not willing to back down from his father. Adam had never really purged the Beast from his system and his son inherited certain characteristics that emerged during heightened emotions. His beloved wife Belle had placed a hand above his heart and he did the same to Ben; coming between him and their son, both immediately calmed.

They would never hurt her.

“That’s enough,” she said sternly, brooking no argument. “Adam, Auradon City is Ben’s responsibility. We have to trust that we have raised him to be wise and dutiful to the people. Remember, I gave you a second chance,” she explained the reality to her husband. He wanted to fight, he wanted to argue but then he remembered that winter night he had frightened her off with his terrible temper and she could have died from a wolf attack. She could have left him there to die from his injuries when he fought the wild animals away, it was her chance to not only escape but live a free life as he wouldn’t have been able to force her back and make good on her deal if he were dead. Though over twenty years ago, the memory and guilt of what could have happened still haunted him.

“Ben,” she turned to her son. “You are the Crown Prince and one day will have the throne to all eighteen kingdoms of Auradon. You are not a tyrant nor a foolish child. We did not raise you that way. You cannot just make decrees on the spot and expect them to happen without question. I think it’s noble what you want, I truly do. But you have to be smart about this.”

“I’m not being rash, I have been thinking about this…”

“I’m sure, since that damned documentary,” Adam flippantly interjected. He immediately silenced from the ice cold look his wife sent his way.

“Then you know you can’t just bring in a hundred or more children to Auradon. Where would we house them? What school would they all attend? Isn’t Auradon Prep at capacity? I know the lower schools don’t have room. I don’t think any of the public schools could handle such an influx even if we could find them all accommodations.”

His mother had a point, he hadn’t thought fully of the finer points of his plan.

“Your coronation as Crown Prince of Auradon City is a week away. If you truly want to pursue this,
I suggest you gather your council to think over the fine details. No king makes any decision without the help of councilors much less a prince.”

Ben nodded, accepting his mother’s wisdom. Adam agreed to let Ben make the choices he thought he needed to make. He had to trust in his heir. If the worst happened and the villains’ children were just as rotten to the core as their parents, then as King he still had the power to reverse Ben’s proclamation. It would be a poor start to his son’s reign, but the UKA was more important than his son’s pride.

The Eighteen Kingdoms all celebrated and tuned into his coronation.

It all went off without a hitch. Nadine FéeMarraine, more famously known as The Fairy Godmother, brought out her wand and blessed his reign. She wore Cinderella blue to honor her original citizenry of Cinderellaberg; a dress stitched with starlight diamonds and intricate lace from the premier fashion dwarves of Snow White’s Kingdom and sparkled with light from the stained glass. Her honorary cream sash noting her as a member of the Royal Order of Benevolent Fae.

It felt like the entire court was squeezed into St. Paige Cathedral, Patron Saint of books and writing. There were also cameras everywhere, trying to get the best angle to cover the momentous occasion.

The choir sang their hymns in the background and when he walked towards the dais, everyone bowed and curtseyed.

His best friend Chad Charming smiled, happy for him while his girlfriend, Audrey Dornröschen looked to about burst or pass out from excitement. He tried to ignore them both, keeping a solemn face to give the appropriate gravity to the ceremony.

Once he reached the platform, he kneeled on the silk pillow and waited.

It was rare Nadine ever held her wand those days; it was usually kept in the Museum of Auradon Cultural History. That day, it was enshrined in a crystal cover and it was just as beautiful as she remembered it. Although she had agreed to relinquish her wand and not practice magic, there were days when she missed being able to wave her wand and help people or to do simple deeds that her mother had painstakingly taught her when she was younger. But that day she would wave her wand again and bless the new royal to his new office.

Taking the wand in her hand, she felt a joyous energy she had not in a long time. Feeling complete, something she knew she was missing but ignored. She squashed down the feeling, knowing it would go away after a few weeks when she surrendered her wand again.

“Do you solemnly swear to govern the peoples of Auradon City with justice and mercy, as long as you shall reign?” she asked, somberly; the ceremony a serious event and the princeship not to be taken lightly.

“I do solemnly swear.”

It was then his father presented the Royal Princely crown of Auradon City. His crown was solid gold with yellow diamonds and rubies accenting fleur de lis with the rose badge of King Adam at the peak. It was a mirror crown of his fathers, which had white diamonds and sapphires for accents without the rose and crosses rather than fleur de lis; to signify he was King of all the Eighteen Kingdoms and not just House Bourbon.

Nadine had taken it from its dark blue velvet cushion, and placed it atop Ben’s head.

“It is my honor and my joy to bless our new Crown Prince,” Nadine said proudly as she laid her
wand on his right shoulder, lifted it above his head, and laid it on his left. “Please rise your Highness, Crown Prince of Auradon City.”

The cathedral had burst into applause and every household in the Eighteen Kingdoms shouted for joy.

But Ben couldn’t hear the praise, the crown was not just heavy from its weight in gold and jewels, but the weight of all those who were counting on him.

He wore the crown proudly and his livery had changed from the colors of Auradon, robin blue and daisy white, to the personal colors of the ruling house of Auradon City, cobalt and gold. The banners had unfolded to show his personal badge, a mix of both his parents to show where he came from.

A red rose on top of a hickory leather book, his colors royal blue and gold chevron counterchanged. He gave a speech the next day as his first duty as Crown Prince of Auradon City; saying farewell to the graduating class of Auradon Prep and welcoming his classmates as new seniors the following fall.

He sat at the head of an ornate table that looked like it was so heavy it could have only gotten there by magic a month into his reign. He would embark on his tour of the Eighteen Kingdoms, having feasts with all the wardens - all still given the courtesy title of King, Queen, or Sultana - of each kingdom territory within the fortnight. It not only showed respect, but to formally debut the next heir to the throne to the people.

Ben had been raised to rule, but he didn’t think social politics would be such a big part of it. But he was determined to have the proclamation he promised his parents at the beginning of the summer come to fruition.

His council consisted of veteran politicians who already knew how to run a kingdom, as he was there to learn the ins and outs of kingship. Unless he planned to flip the governance completely on its back and try to reinvent the spinning wheel, then governing Auradon City would not be that daunting.

Although he was certain that some on the council would think he had lost his mind, just as his father had. Before King Adam and Queen Belle went on their progress through Auradon, his father came to him and reassured him that he trusted in him and would support his idea.

“I’m not saying it’s a bad idea, I supposed the children are innocent,” admitting Ben’s words from before were true, having listened when he sat down and thought the plan through. “I just think it’ll be a lot harder than you could ever imagine. But all things are possible, and I believe in you son.”

Queen Belle looked over her son, bursting with pride and doing her best to keep tears out of her eyes. She straightened his jacket, ran her hand over an imagined stray hair, and smiled. She couldn’t believe her baby, a baby she thought she had held in her arms just yesterday, was having his first official councilors meeting.

“Well done,” she whispered to him, meaning for everything and she hoped he knew how proud she was to have him as her son. He smiled back, happy he was someone she could be proud of and never wanted to disappoint her.

“Shall we?” Belle asked Adam and offered her arm, they then walked away to leave Crown Prince
of Auradon City to his duties.

When he brought the idea up with his councilors, it surprised him how neutral they were about it. It seemed none of them had been directly involved in the events that lead to the villains’ arrests and had no feelings one way or another. He also suspected his father might have warned them of his plan, but in the end he was grateful as they were attempting to bring his plan to life as best as they could give the circumstances.

“Of course, we cannot allow for all children on the island to come; particularly not in time for the new school year. The taxes we’d have to raise in order to support them all, it would cause a riot,” an ancient accountant drolled on. “Not only taxes, but the time it would take to recruit volunteers for foster homes and process that paperwork alone would take more than the summer.”

It was frustrating to grow up in such wealth to now be restrained in what he wanted to get done but he was wise enough to know that was a privilege to be so irritated.

“Professor FéeMarraine, how many students could Auradon Prep accommodate for this coming school year?”

Although he was the Crown Prince, he still respected his Headmistress and would never think to call her by her first name. He doubted he would do so even when he was King.

She smiled sadly at him, so proud of the man he was becoming. No one ever thought of those who resided on the Isle of the Lost. But she thought it spoke volumes as to not only the type of man Ben was becoming but the type of King, a compassionate and kind ruler who had the best intentions of his people in mind, all of his people.

“I’m sorry your Highness, but we’re practically at capacity. We only have two dorms available, so only four students would be able to attend.”

He kept his shoulders from dropping and a sigh from his lips; they would not be kingly reactions no matter how disappointed he may be. There were well over a hundred children on the island, and he could only help four? That was less than five percent of the child population. How could he choose just four and ignore the rest? But he also couldn’t displace those who already had a place at Auradon Prep. He couldn’t ask anyone of noble blood to step aside, nor any of the scholarship students to give up the place they had worked so hard to procure. He bemoaned that his plan was already failing.

He banished the negative thoughts from his head. Four was more than none, and he would just have to make sure the experiment was a success. The four he chose would show the kingdoms that all the children needed was a chance. He would get the support to build a school or put additions to Auradon Prep to house the rest. He had every intention of using his councilors to devise the most efficient and cost effective method. His short term of ruling Auradon City showed him that nothing went quickly in governance so it wouldn’t happen in the next year or even several years.

But it would happen; he could feel the hope for the future build in his chest and threatened to burst out. Other ideas such as providing proper health care and reproductive services also filtered through his head. Perhaps separating out the female and male villains, what point was there to constantly having innocent children born in such circumstances?

This was the first step of a thousand mile journey, but he would see it through to the end.

“Fine, the pilot program will have four children from the island come to Auradon Prep and they will have a chance at a normal life; a life away from villainy.”
“Do you have the four in mind?” Professor FéeMarraine asked, mentally thinking of what paperwork she would have to do once she got back to the school but excited to be part of such a progressive and compassionate program.

“I do.”
Mal sat in the decrepit room that passed for an apartment on the Isle of the Lost, waiting patiently for her mother to tell her why she was summoned. She had errands to run, on Maleficent’s behalf to boot, on the Isle and its citizens were not known for their patience. An entire island slum originally filled with over five hundred people, who were exiled, deemed “villains” in the eyes of the newly created United Kingdoms of Auradon. In twenty years, those five hundred had more than doubled the population. Not only with having children, but the UKA would add exiled citizens they deemed unfit for their Kingdoms over the years.

Not the type of people she, or anyone in their right mind, wanted to deal with being late.

So while Maleficent was deemed the “worst” villain of them all, she and her daughter did not enjoy better living quarters than the rest. Twenty years of decaying infrastructure meant that there was no such thing as a “hot” property on the island. It didn’t help that most villains were not social engineers, architects, or anything that could help maintain a well working society. Maniacal villains and thugs didn’t convey to useful occupations.

Wonder if King Adam had that in mind all along. Create a cesspool with no way to make things better and forget all about us. Perfect revenge. We’ll suffer for decades more.

The Isle did, however, have a working postal system. Even with the little technology they had from donations from the mainland, landline telephones were one thing no one had as no one was ever trained to or figured out how to maintain such lines. So the post office worked as their main messaging system although it was slow, even for regular post as it took about eleven days to traverse the island from tip to tip by foot.

It was a rare event that they’d get something from the mainland, rare in the sense that it hadn’t ever happened before in living memory. Auradon citizens who had family members exiled to the island
had no problem forgetting about their blood connection and went on with their lives as if the banished had never existed.

Maleficent had a special delivery from Auradon Prep, a royal proclamation from His Royal Highness, Crown Prince Ben of House Bourbon, son of King Adam and Queen Belle of the same. The gilded stationary with perfectly flowy pitch black calligraphy and even sealed with wax with the Royal Seal of Auradon and presented on a velvet cushion; the letter and pillow probably cost more than the entire Bargain Castle consignment shop they ran. Her mother had read over the royal invitation, seethed in hatred at the audacity of the offer. It took Maleficent days to finally calm down enough to speak with her.

The missive was a joke. Not in the sense they thought it was a prank, done in mischief or otherwise. It was a joke in the cosmic sense of malevolent irony. How could the Crown Prince of Auradon think she interested in “turning away” from her mother to go on a different path? What did that even mean? She was stuck on the island, what exactly did they she was doing? Who did he think he was? How could he even begin to imagine what she did and did not want? For most of her life she assumed the royal family wasn’t even aware of her existence. Why would he think she would automatically follow her mother at all? The sheer presumption of it all riled her more than anything else.

To further rub salt into the wound, why would he send the invitation to her mother with the intent to turn her daughter against her? Did they think the years in banishment had robbed Maleficent of her senses?

Mal sneered at the letter, rolling her eyes at the idiot. She didn’t know if it was utter naivety or hubris that compelled Crown Prince Ben to invite her to the Academy. Perhaps his intentions were benevolent, but they were several years too late. King Adam ordered a magical barrier around the island, filled it with the magic kingdoms’ worst villains and their allies or subordinates, and then left them to their own devices for two decades. Most of the main villains had come from nobility or money, they were then reduced to poverty on the island. Most of them let their bitterness fester and grow as they toiled away to survive, forgotten by the golden royals of Auradon. She was certain that was by design: Let them rot there until they died, then the gods could sort them out.

After so much time of neglect, the Isle was barely habitable. What was one year in Auradon versus seventeen in hell?

The villains were not who they used to be.

The “Evil Queen” Ravenna, who once conquered kingdoms and brought armies to its knees was now the Madame of the island’s most notorious brothel.

Jafar, once Grand Royal Vizier to the Sultan of Agrabah and dark sorcerer, now bartered for whatever junk he could scrape up or his son could steal. He was constantly on the hunt for another lamp, to have a chance at wishing for the power he always wanted.

Maleficent, who once could shapeshift into a monstrous dragon and terrified a kingdom to the point of sending their only princess to live as a commoner, now lived above a consignment shop. She also moonlighted as the resident midwife, reduced to being a hedge witch who sold potions, poisons, and natural remedies.

Then there was Cruella de Vil, former heiress to the de Vils of London; one of the country’s wealthiest families. She grew up in luxury that rivaled the royalty of Auradon, only the finest furs ever touched her skin and the world’s delicacies could ever tempt her appetite. She went from a life of absolute comfort and every whim and desire fulfilled to abject poverty. She never quite accepted
her exile, trying to recreate the extravagance she had been raised in; even naming her residence “Hell Hall” after her townhouse in the heart of London. She had raged the most out of all the so-called villains. Deeming it a great injustice that she was exiled to the island, she believed her family name alone should have granted her clemency.

But her pathetic attempts to make the Isle a mirror of what she had lost had caused her to lose her mind. She merely ghosted around town and the shack she called Hell Hall, muttering, sometimes screaming at empty air, about puppies and fur coats; sometimes she would talk to the stuffed dog her husband had managed to procure and sew onto her coat. Her halfwit spouse the only person keeping her alive, feeding her the few times she would accept food.

Each villain was an echo of who they used to be, their fury or apathy growing over the years.

Mal grew up in the shadow of Aurora, otherwise known as Sleeping Beauty, and Maleficent’s defeat; her mother forced magic lessons onto her, determined to get revenge. She expected Mal to help finish what she could not over twenty years ago. While magic would not work on the Isle, that didn’t stop Maleficent from coercing her daughter from reading magic books for hours on end. Other days, she forced her to recite incantations that left with the wind and nothing would come of them, but everyday experimenting with trying to compel Mal’s magic forward. Maleficent’s theory that pain would break through the magic binding their powers, as if it were a mental block rather than outside magic restricting them. Mal’s back and arms crisscrossed and littered with scars, proof of her mother’s experiments, madness, and cruelty.

Sometimes Mal could still feel the blade slicing into her back, her mother convinced that wings lay dormant under her skin, and her voice going horse from the screams. There was one week where her voice so horse she didn’t speak at all, for if she did she would cough up blood.

When she was eight, she had spent the entire year bald in Maleficent’s hopes that horns would grow.

There was also the looming threat that she had no magic at all. Mal might be the daughter of the most reviled dark fae ever seen in any kingdom, Maleficent’s fury and might unmatched by any villain before or after her, her unknown father had been of human origin. That meant that there was the small chance that Mal had not inherited magic and was essentially fully human. The only thing that kept her alive when she showed no signs of magic was her plum hair, a sign of faekind blood.

*If not for your hair, so like your grandmother’s, I would have drowned you at birth.*

A harsh thing to hear at thirteen, when still no magic had come from her.

Her magic didn’t come at seven, twelve, thirteen when she reached menarche, or sixteen: all typical magical milestones where fae or otherwise would come into their powers if they weren’t full blooded.

There wasn’t a day that went by where Maleficent didn’t sneer at her inability to do magic and blaming it on her weak human heritage. Mal had started to fear that once she turned eighteen, she would run out of chances to manifest her powers and her mother would kill her. Maleficent abhorred weakness of any kind and humans were only ever weak in her eyes. Maleficent would have no hesitation to kill the legacy of her father.

The human father she had never met, nor does she even know his name. If there was anyone Maleficent hated more than King Stefan, Queen Leila, and their daughter Aurora, it was the man who sired her.

Mal knew her mother’s spell books by heart, every motion needed for every spell, the encyclopedia
of magic herbs, poisons, and cures. All in the vain hope the barrier would ever fall and she would be ready to help raze Auradon to the ground. If she had been raised anywhere else, she’d probably be a full-fledged witch at only seventeen.

But she wasn’t anywhere else. She was on the Isle of the Lost, where magic was bound and the residents unable to escape. All her magic and power was in theory, if it existed at all. She sometimes helped her mother with potions and poisons – natural magic that even humans could do and the only thing that worked on the island - selling them to whatever dupe was willing to barter for a few hours of enhanced beauty, or poison a way-ward lover. It was about as impressive as balancing a spoon on her nose outside of the Isle. But it was what kept them fed, at least most of the time.

There have been several winters where she had thought she would die from starvation. The crops not coming in or a plague had wiped out most of their customer base. There were times where it didn’t matter how much or what they had to sell, if there was no food to buy or people to sell to; they were at the mercy of fate.

Perhaps Crown Prince Ben had a sadistic streak and some villain ancestry somewhere. Knowing the invitation would never be accepted but to rub it in the villains’ faces, to remind them they were powerless and imprisoned.

But even Maleficent could surprise her daughter when she decreed that Mal would attend Auradon Prep at the beginning of the semester.

She remained silent, unsure if she had heard correctly and waited for further instruction.

“You shall attend this school. Those fools thinking you could ever be anything other than my daughter, a dark fae of the Moors by blood,” in her frustration, Maleficent struck her staff to the floor. Mal knew if her mother had any magic, there would have been much more damage. “You will find Nadine FéeMarraine’s wand and bring it to me.”

It turned out after the rage had burned out, her mother started plotting.

If Maleficent had ever loved anybody, which Mal highly doubted, that loved burned out of her during the years of exile and certainly before she was born. All the former protector of the Moors knew was spite and vengeance.

So instead of seeing the invitation as a way for a better life for her only child, all she saw was an opportunity to punish those who put her in her island prison.

“You will take the Maledictae Grimoira with you. Your magic should finally manifest itself. We will gain our revenge. They left us here like dogs, imprisoning us because they feared our power. But no more. We will have justice. We will be freed, and my daughter you will taste the power that should have been yours all along. Everything I have done, I have done to make you stronger.”

The wild look in her mother’s eyes and the retribution in her tone made her almost believe her. That perhaps all the pain and scars would be worth it once she was outside their island prison and she could wreak havoc and hellfire on Auradon, which Mal was raised to think that’s what the citizens and royalty richly deserved. Mal could admit that it sounded most tempting, even if her mother deserved the island, she certainly didn’t and shouldn’t those who wrongfully condemned her to such a life pay?

But would life outside the Isle but still under her mother’s power be worth it?

Maleficent had to be ardent, because the Maledictae Grimoira was the one book Mal was never
allowed to touch. The tome too dangerous and too precious to be handled by anyone other than her mother; the book so steeped in dark magic that no apprentice should dare try to wield its secrets. A book so magical it has somehow made its way to the Isle despite the barrier. The villains were dumped with nothing, King Ben worried of contraband. The fact that technically Mal wasn’t even her mother’s apprentice as she literally had no practical magical training was beside the point. She would be outside the barrier; whatever she had learned would have to be enough. But as she ghosted her hands over the pristine and symmetrical scars that lined her arms and knew there were matching ones on her back, they were nothing more than the product of Maleficent’s own malice. Mal might be a lot of things, but she was no fool. She was nothing but a means to an end to her mother. If she turned out to be fully human, then she was worth nothing. She would never be convinced that her mother ever had her best intentions at heart. Her mother had ordered her to go against a full grown fairy, one who was powerful enough to enact a barrier that kept the worst of them locked up and powerless. It felt like a suicide mission and she wondered if her mother cared at all.

Her doubt must have shown on her face as a searing pain shot down her spine, her senses feeling as if they were set aflame.

Maleficent didn’t like how her daughter didn’t immediately acquiesce to the plan and punished her without hesitation, her eyes glowed an unholy green as she wielded power over their connection; something all familial fairies shared. Mal’s own eyes glowing a matching chartreuse, trying to fight the mental onslaught but could never throw off her mother’s control over her. She could never defeat her mother who was so much more powerful, her body crumbling to the ground in agony.

Once Maleficent felt her point had been made, she let up on her attack and smirked, all but saying “I win.”

“You will find Nadine FéeMarraine and bring her wand to me.” She repeated. “I will then have power over both the dark and light magics that course through our world. If you do not, then you are as useless as I have always feared you would be and I’ll do what I should have done seventeen years ago.”

The promise hung in the air as Mal breathed heavily, regaining her wits and knew her mother never gave idle threats.

“Of course mother, my apologies. I was just thinking how idiotic these royals are. What exactly are they expecting? It’ll be pitifully easy to dupe them all, typical White Hats,” Mal sneered, ignoring the pain that rippled through her body and acted as if her own mother didn’t just torture her.

“Good,” Mal’s obedience much more to Maleficent’s liking, “you leave in a week. The corsets are finished and each is laced with a lust potion. There are also more virility potions to spike the apple wine. Deliver it all to Fleur de Pomme.” Maleficent referring to Mal’s duties and ordered, dismissing her and ending the conversation.

Mal picked up the packages, immediately departing for the island’s notorious brothel. There was no such thing as a luxurious building on the island, but Fleur de Pomme would be the closest. It was one of the few businesses that were basically recession proof. While the magical boundary kept all the villains on the island, it didn’t stop the citizens of Auradon from coming and going. So there was always a steady stream of clients, the Auradon citizens bringing with them silks and velvets to decorate the reception hall and rooms to pay with instead of coin, as Auradon currency was useless. The saloon next door also served that clientele, easy targets for pick pocketing.

Something Mal took full advantage of when she “ran into” what looked to be an Auradon royal guard; she gave a contrite apology and looked humble as she looked down, not wanting to meet his eyes.
“Watch where you’re going!” the unknown soldier grumpily scoffed at her, making his way out of the establishment. Looking down at another street rat that littered the Isle of the Lost, wondering why they didn’t take more care to not breed so many bastards.

*I thought fucking was supposed to make you less stressed.*

Mal thought to herself. Out of his eyesight, she tossed the coin purse she freed from his person in her hand and felt that it was probably his monthly pay. Mainland coin was useless there, so clients normally brought items to barter for a few rounds with one of Ravenna’s “blossoms.” Not only was the gold currency proof Auradon citizens visited the Isle so no soldier wanted to leave it, gold and silver (sometimes gems) held no real value on the island. What would any of them do with a horde of shiny metal or gleaming rocks? Fleur’s was rich in fabrics, food, and creature comforts; the whores were the best fed citizens on the island.

*Not bad for so early in the night.*

She thought it would be prudent to start saving up the money as it would be useful where she was going.

The sounds of moaning, high pitched screams of the whores faking pleasure, and skin slapping permeated the air; the scent of incense overpowered her senses. Something needed in a brothel; otherwise the stink of stale sex and sweat would drive off the more refined customers. She climbed the mountain of stairs, no modern conveniences such as elevators, until she reached the attic; it was where her best friend Evie, the daughter of the Madame, resided.

The so called Evil Queen was nowhere to be found, Evie sat alone amongst a mountain of clothes that she was dutifully stitching and mending.

“Hey Eves, what are you working on?” Mal greeted her friend.

“It’s a new costume; autumn is almost upon us so mother thought to have new outfits for Apple, Pear, Cranberry, and Fig. ‘Parade the blossoms of the season.’” Evie mimicked her mother.

“I thought Pear had to quit, the customer had cut her face, and my mother couldn’t heal them.”

“The new…Pear. She’s already been replaced,” she blue hair friend said quietly, not wanting to discuss it further and Mal was sorry she asked.

Mal took comfort in the memory giving the offender matching cuts, as well a few more, before he died and then dumping his body in a shallow grave. Evie was not the type to do the same.

Mal took comfort in the memory giving the offender matching cuts, as well a few more, before he died and then dumping his body in a shallow grave. Evie was not the type to do the same.

“Are those the new corsets?” she asked, noticing the package Mal was carrying, both were glad to talk about anything else.

“Yeah, all made to be super tight and laced with lust potions.”

“Mother will be glad, she says the Auradon clients are getting stingy lately. Your mother’s potions help loosen their purses.”

“I’m sure they loosen all sorts of things.”

Mal smirked at the innuendo while Evie raised her hand to cover her mouth, hiding as she had been trained never to smile

*No laughing, wrinkles!*
Ravenna scolding echoed through her head every time she even thought of something funny or wanted to make any real facial expression.

While Evie had to hide her mirth, Mal knew her friend well enough to know she found the joke funny. Their laughter, silent or otherwise, was cut short at the entrance of Madam Ravenna. None of the villains banished to the island would ever be considered to be pleasant company, but right after Maleficent, Ravenna was probably the most feared one there. The witch had at one point been powerful enough to take over several kingdoms before her defeat. Her own undoing was listening to a magical mirror that didn’t proclaim she was the fairest of them all.

Mal didn’t understand why she didn’t just break that mirror and create another with more desirable answers.

“Evie, darling. Go to Cherry’s room and redo her make up. Her last client seems to be half vampire.”

Evie immediately dropped her sewing project and went to pick up her make up bag. Mal politely greeted the Evil Queen, knowing her mother probably would beat her blue if she disrespected her closest ally and business partner. She accepted the bag of coins for the new corsets, potions, and a percentage of the profits. The brothel was the only establishment that dealt in coins, minted in house as credits for time with the whores. Maleficent used them to pay for produce and goods, the farmers and tradesmen more than happy to accept payment in the form of fucking the local talent.

“Mal, I’ll also need more tansy tea. The latest batch of clients seem to be particularly virile, some of the girls are in trouble.”

Mal never understood why Ravenna never made her own tea, or relied on Maleficent for potions at all. The Madame was an accomplished enough witch in her own right, but she suspected potions were too close to cooking and the former queen thought it beneath her. Ravenna was no longer in the shadows and didn’t have to do such tedious work such as growing herbs and brewing potions in secret herself when Maleficent was more than happy to make Mal do all the grunt work.

“How far along are they?”

“Does it matter?”

“If they’re too far, it could kill them.”

“So it doesn’t matter. If one of my girls pushes out any of their brats, it’ll ruin them from working. Men don’t like it when their petals are stretched. So either way, they need the tea.”

Either way, they had a potential death sentence. Either they die in childbirth or survive long enough to starve, or they die from the tea.

“Of course. I’ll brew some tonight and deliver it in the morning,” Mal replied, unfeeling. The working girls chose their fate, she merely provided an option.

“Thank you darling,” the endearment said with no real affection. “And congratulations on getting into Auradon Prep. It seems you an Evie are moving up in the world.”

Mal’s eyes widened at the implication, not having the time yet to talk to her best friend about the new development.

“Thank you,” she quickly said and walked with Evie down the corridors, making their way to the private room of one of the more popular girls.
“You got an invitation to Auradon too?” Evie whispered as she clutched her make up bag, using it as a shield as she walked through the brothel.

“Not here,” Mal replied and looked around to make sure no one overheard them.

Evie understood that it wasn’t safe to talk. There were too many ears in the establishment, even if there was supposed to be a thieves code. She wouldn’t be surprised if even one of her mother’s girl’s would rat them out to an Auradon soldier with hopes of getting off the island herself.

“I’ll text Jay and Carlos, we’ll meet at the Warehouse at midnight.”

Evie nodded and went into a room to do as her mother bid. Mal made her way out but had run into one of the older girls.

“Well if it isn’t little Mal, all grown up I see. When are we going to see you grace one of these rooms? I think Plum’s is free.”

Within a second, she had the woman pinned to the wall with a bejeweled blade millimeters from her face.

“I think all the fucking has knocked what little brain you had out of your head,” Mal snarled, never one to let such disrespect to go unanswered.

“I’m not afraid of you,” she sneered. Mal couldn’t even remember what stupid fruit code name she had, so she figured the woman had nothing to lose and didn’t care who she pissed off. Normally just being Maleficent’s daughter was enough for all the citizens to give her wide berth.

“Your mother is just another helpless villain, banished to this hell like the rest of us.”

But maybe after twenty years of being a villain imprisoned with no hope of escaping had dulled that fear. Smelling the sour apple wine on her breath, she figured the whore was simply drunk and stupid.

“Perhaps, but I still have a very sharp knife I’m not afraid to dig into what is left of your pretty face. I’m sure Madam Ravenna would have no trouble replacing you, if she doesn’t have one lined up already. And perhaps you need a lesson on exactly how ‘helpless’ my mother is. Would you like to take a walk through Death’s Vineyard?”

While the courtesan was skilled in many areas, fighting wasn’t one of them and Mal was stronger than she looked. She thought of the final resting place of Maleficent’s victims, named so because grapes had grown wild there. The one patch of fruit on the Isle no one would touch, thinking the berries were cursed. Although Mal had the thin and lean frame most on the island had, she was probably leaving bruises on her throat. She knew her days at the brothel were numbered; she wasn’t ready to be kicked out into the street just yet and she certainly didn’t want to be a victim of Maleficent’s thuggish daughter. The threat was enough for her submission.

The prostitute had looked away, silently admitting defeat. Mal let her go roughly and made her way home. She forgot about the incident as soon as she turned away, life on the island was rough and it was kill or be killed.

She settled in her room, her mother was never one to bother her that late at night and she suspected she was abusing sleep potions that stained her lips purple. She un-lodged a loose floorboard and pulled out treasures she feared her mother would find. There were sketches of her friends and a few nick knack’s she was sentimental about and didn’t want to give up to her mother to destroy in a fit of anger; deeming keepsakes as soppy weakness. One item was a jailbroken device that Carlos de Vil had managed to make able to text. All other internet and Wi-Fi capabilities were non-existent on the
island, but Carlos was a genius with technology, able to create items from the scraps from Auradon. He was one of the main reasons there was any working technology on the island at all.

*Meet @ warehouse @ midnite* Mal blasted to all her friends. They all replied in the affirmative and she waited to sneak out to their secret hiding place. She opted to sketch to pass the time, wondering if Auradon had more art supplies than homemade charcoal and natural paints she was able to make from the local flora or pigments.

Mal made her way through town; most of the island was asleep by then. When everyone was a villain, there was no point to doing business in the shadows so most worked during daylight hours. There were a few night owls out, those who had no purpose and just wondered. No one paid her any mind as she made her way to her and her friends’ secret hideout. It was an abandoned building on the outskirts of town, too far for most to bother. It was also one abandoned building among many.

Mal looked around to make sure no one was watching, picked up a rock from a pile kept handy and hidden by bushes. With practiced aim, she hit a “Danger Flying Rocks” sign she had made herself. The yellow sign swung back with force and a hidden door that led to stairs revealed itself. One of Carlos’ many ingenious contraptions.

They had no idea what building was used for before it was abandoned but they had rigged it into apartment. They furnished it with stolen beds, tables, chairs, an ancient TV held together with hope and Carlos’ help, and the walls donned Mal’s artwork. In the main area, she painted the four of them, the other walls were forest scenes and flowers, places she wished she could see. Places she imagined from stories her mother used to tell her of the Moors and fantasizing about escaping. They had the place all to themselves and they all took advantage of it when things at home got to be too much. It was their own personal escape.

When she walked in, she saw that Jay and Evie wasted no time and were making out on red worn but serviceable couch.

Carlos stood by a window with multi-color checkered stained glass, ignoring the two on the couch and fiddling with something in his hands. He was always tinkering with something, probably another layer of security for either their apartment or for one of the many businesses that paid him for his devices. He had top notch security equipment; it’s what kept their hideout so well guarded. He had always worried about being found. It was the only place on the island they ever got a real sense of privacy and it’d be devastating to lose it.

While she was never one to be as open with her affections like Jay and Evie, she made her way across the room and hugged her boyfriend.

It was rare they ever got to spend time together, basically only when they were in the Warehouse. So she reveled in their closeness, hugging him close and he placed his chin on her head, the perfect height to do so. She loved him no matter what but she couldn’t help but appreciate his growth spurt in the last year. She breathed in deep, memorizing the feeling of being in his arms; the smell of leather and ozone that was uniquely Carlos imprinted in her mind. She took comfort in his warmth and his steady heartbeat.

In the hell that was the Isle of the Lost, the only time Mal ever really felt happy was with her friends.
“So I’m guessing we all got invitations to Auradon Prep?” Carlos asked, figuring out why they were called to the midnight meeting.

The tension in Mal’s shoulders lifted, worried she would be separated from them and relived that it wasn’t just her and Evie being sent away.

“You got one too?” she asked to make sure, looking into his deep eyes and worried it was too good to be true.

“Yeah, it was sitting on Cruella’s boudoir. Glad she had a fit and told me to clean her room today otherwise I doubt I would have ever seen it in time,” he rolled his eyes at the former debutant. No doubt in his mind she had no intention of letting him know of the invitation.

“Is she going to let you go?” Worried the mad woman would try to keep him there, and contemplating she ought to get rid of her once and for all. No matter how much she loved Carlos, she wouldn’t let the mad woman squander this chance for him.

“I’m not giving her the opportunity to say no. She doesn’t know I know, and by the time we’re gone there won’t be anything she can do about it. Even if she found out before hand, I’m too strong now for her to stop me. She can set her own bear traps and brush her own coats. Or she’ll make Fisher do it, I don’t care anymore.”

Fisher de Vil was the meek husband of Cruella, he was getting frail and could no longer do a majority of the cleaning and other de facto slave labor she demanded on a regular basis. A Sisyphean task as nothing on the Isle was ever truly clean and it was a hovel. No amount of cleaning could ever make it a mansion. Since she had lost everything when she was banished, she was still intent on living as close to the lifestyle as she could. That meant Carlos had to meticulously maintain what furs she managed to obtain on the island and Hell Hall. Mr. de Vil was still a skilled furrier and kept her happy by slavishly creating coats for her, even if they weren’t the quality minks and other exotic animals she was used to. She had to have some type of fur, not caring what it cost to those around her. Carlos had grown up sleeping in her coat room, the limited spaced used for her things and not a proper bedroom for him. He was not even allowed to use them for warmth on particularly cold nights; he had to protect them from Cruella’s imagined enemies who wanted to steal them. He bore scars from the traps he had to set in the wild to catch animals for Fisher to skin, and the traps in her coat closet.

Thinking of all she had put him through and knowing how shellfish she was to try to prevent him from leaving and having a better life finally drove Carlos to his limit; his eyes started to change, turning from a beautiful deep chocolate to a hellish crimson in his rising fury, his anger deepening at the thought of losing that chance with Mal.

“Shhhh, it’s alright. We’re almost out of here,” she said trying to soothe him. She ran her fingers through his newly cut hair, longer than he usually had it, and straight as well. He must have done a favor for one of the lesser brothels, the only establishments that catered to grooming and had the ability to straighten hair. It was a change she was first seeing and she had to keep herself from being annoyed because it was evident how long since Maleficent had let her have a break and been able to see him.

He closed his eyes and took deep breaths to keep his temper under control, enjoying the feeling of Mal scratching his scalp. She always knew how to calm him down.

“So wait, we’re actually going Kingdom side?” Jay asked, finally taking a break from sucking face with Evie.
“Did you want to stay?” Mal asked incredulous, not sure why any of them would say no.

“Well, no. But this is a trap…right?”

She actually hadn’t thought of that, too preoccupied with her mother’s machinations to really think the roles could be reversed; a slight burgeoning respect developed for Crown Prince Ben if he were to be that devious. It wasn’t often she could be caught unawares and she had accepted going with no hesitation, so desperate to get off the island.

“I mean, why else would they want us there? Don’t tell me you believe this bullshit about giving us a chance and proving we’re not villains. Second chance? What was the first chance we squandered? Being born?”

Jay had a point, it sounded suspicious and it was. Normally the thief was not so mindful of such things; she felt a little embarrassed how easily the prince could have fooled her.

He also had a point about second chances, further irritating her about Crown Prince Ben’s invitation.

Yeah, second chance? What did we ever do to the UKA?

“We’re going to turn eighteen this year, what’s the point of sending us to Auradon Prep for one year? Where was this altruism say, seventeen years ago? Why start caring now? This plan sounds a few dips short of a poisoned apple,” Evie questioned and voiced her own skepticism.

“Prince Ben has been given his principality which includes where Auradon Prep is located, I think this is his first decree,” Mal thought out loud, feeling the need to defend the edict even if she were uncertain as well. She certainly didn’t want them to decide to stay. A trap they could prepare for, escaping the Isle had proved impossible so far.

“What would they even be setting a trap for? The adults are still on the island and no one in twenty years has been able even make a dent. Even with Auradon citizens coming and going, no one’s been able to steal whatever they’re using to get through the barrier or even figure out what it is. If they think they can use us against any of them, which again would be pointless, the royals are barking up the wrong tree if they think any of them would care,” Carlos interjected bitterly.

They all agreed to that, Crown Prince Ben must have actual compassionate intentions, no matter how futile they may ultimately be. If he wanted them dead or harmed, there were easier and less risky plans.

“What did Maleficent have to say?” the white and black haired boy asked his girlfriend, still holding onto her, taking advantage of the time he had with her.

“She wasted no time in coming up with a plan for her escape. She wants me to find the Fairy Godmother and steal her wand. That would allow her to destroy the barrier and let them all out.”

“Are you going to do it?”

“Hells no. I was for a second when I thought I was the only one going, but since all of you are too I figure what the hell? I think we can try this ‘good’ thing. How hard can it be?”

“Mal, have you met those assholes who visit Fleur de Pomme?” Evie asked sardonically.

“Can’t be that hard to act like we have a flying broom up our ass and better than everyone else.”

Her friend rolled her eyes, not looking forward to Auradon Prep if the students were anything like
the Isle’s regular visitors.

“Well I’m going anyway, mother wants me to nab a ‘perfect prince with a castle that has an in-law wing and lots of mirrors,’” Evie said, rolling her eyes at her mother’s plan, resentful that her mother’s plan for her only daughter was to sell herself to any prince that would have her and let them live comfortably.

She was given an ultimatum. Snag a prince and lose her virginity that way or have it be sold to the highest bidder and join the working girls. It was an easy decision, especially when she found out Mal and her closest friends were going.

Jay laughed, it was a ridiculous plan but it wasn’t as if it didn’t have its own merits.

“Hey, maybe I can get a princess and we’ll be neighbors,” he joked while his hand wandered scandalously up her leg and beneath her skirt. Evie turned her head, loving the idea of both of them marrying some hapless Auradon royal and cuckholding them. Only after years of knowing her and her slight head movements could they know what she was thinking, her face never giving anything away. They felt they had all talked enough and got back to passionately kissing, both eager use the privacy of the Warehouse to its fullest.

***

Carlos rolled his eyes at his friends, both he and Mal walked to a separate room in the apartment. A place just for the two of them, a worn mattress sat in a corner, the walls decorated with her more of her paintings. The bed had some comfortable simple cotton sheets, rejected from the brothel for not being silk or Agrabahian 1000 thread count cotton.

Their time together was always slower and more romantic in Mal’s opinion than Jay and Evie. Their two best friends weren’t in love like they were, the thief and enchantress were more about having fun and they trusted each other. Both Jay and Evie had raging hormones, more than they knew what to do with but weren’t willing to endanger themselves by fulling giving themselves to each other.

Pregnancy could kill on the island. If not in childbirth, then certainly Maleficent and Ravenna would slaughter them.

Mal and Carlos, however, loved each other. Their refrain from making love was all the more frustrating.

That didn’t mean they were totally abstinent. There was a boon to working around a brothel. Not every working girl there was resentful of Mal and Evie. The latter was kept from working there with clients because Ravenna wanted to keep her daughter a virgin to be able to hook a prince. Maleficent would poison the entire island before she had a daughter of hers resort to prostitution.

Mal’s mother more often than not stressed abstinence as she saw sexual desire as a weak human trait. And if she absolutely couldn’t refrain herself, there was always tansy tea. Mal was tempted to use it but it had the unfortunate side effect of killing the mother along with the fetus if it was taken too late. Since there were no reliable pregnancy tests on the island, by the time a woman figured out she was pregnant she flirted dangerously close the fatal time period of taking the tea too late.

There was also the possibility of permanent infertility since the tea was technically a poison. While Carlos and Mal hated both Maleficent and Cruella, both had hoped that maybe in the future, the far, far future, they would be able to escape the island and start a family. Mal was confident that if they couldn’t find a magical way to break the barrier, then Carlos would come up with a way via technology, he had been working on it for years. While Cruella was content to waste his talents
being her servant, he was a prodigy with gadgets.

Mal kissed him deeper and removed his shirt, straddling him, her attentions becoming more fervent with the hope of their escape. She let her hair out of the twin French braids she always kept them in, only ever feeling comfortable around him to let her hair down.

The working girls taught her all the ways they could enjoy each other’s body without the threat of pregnancy.

They both smiled through their kisses, happier than they had ever been. They were getting off the island, they would be free. That night felt like a celebration. They wouldn’t have to sneak around or hide at the Warehouse. Their time together wouldn’t be tainted with the fear of getting caught. They would be on the mainland, where they could show and tell everyone of their love.

They were both touch starved, their hands roaming over every inch exposed; eager to claw at each other’s clothes, lifting their tops off and throwing them to the side, desperate for more exposed skin. With skilled practice, he had undone the cloth band she wore to bind her chest while their mouths still danced with each other. Carlos pulled her closer, cupping her bottom to push her against his hardness. His hands moved to the small of her back, careful not to touch her scars as she hated acknowledging they existed, moving them to her front and cupped her breast. He smiled wider at the sounds she made, gently rolling a rosy nipple between his fingers, loving how sensitive they were.

She desperately started to rub against him, wishing the large hardness she felt could be inside her. Pausing to look into his eyes, she smirked at how dilated they became. Feeling of pride swelled in her as she noticed a thin red ring, knowing she could rile him up so. She continued to ride him, the friction causing shocks of pleasure to bloom inside her.

Carlos started to kiss to her neck, lightly sucking at her pulse points and a growl rumbled in his chest as her moans grew louder as he knew all her favorite spots. He wished he could leave a bite; his teeth ached to bite down gently. A primal instinct inside him wanted to mark her, leave proof that she was taken and his. But it was too dangerous, flirting with courting Maleficent’s wrath.

Mal started to get impatient, wanting to do more than kiss and touch him. She dragged her nails down his back, his body lighting with sensation. She suddenly found herself flipped onto her back; a wolfish smile donning his face with his hair falling over his eyes. Perhaps her vision was hazy with lust but she could have sworn she saw his teeth gleam and sharper in the dim light of a dying lamp.

He started to kiss his way down her body, laving at her breast with his tongue; one of his favorite areas to give attention to.

“Carlos, please,” Mal whined, wanting him to satisfy the fire he started inside her.

He could never deny her anything, and he hooked her bottoms with his thumbs and pulled them down. His hand then gently pushed her legs open, magenta curls glistening with her arousal. He slowly opened her up, careful not to be rough with her delicate folds, teasing the bundle of nerves that caused her to whimper out. He did a long lick, loving her taste. She was unearthly and ethereal, reduced to a quivering live wire under his attention. The whores at Gemma’s, the rival brothel of Fleur’s, had given him advice in exchange for maintaining their security system and other appliances. They advised him to trace his tongue to the alphabet but he preferred the periodic table. With their instruction and his experience with Mal, he knew exactly what she liked, long strokes with his tongue and alternating direct attention to her clit. On average he could have her a quaking mess by krypton. She must have been particularly keen that night as she had stilled and pulled his hair at magnesium. He started short kitten licks to extend her peak until she became oversensitive and pushed him away gently. Breathing heavily, she had relaxed into the bed. He smiled at how he could
get her so limp from bliss. He wiped his mouth of her wetness and crawled up to her. She didn’t hesitate to kiss him, her hands snaking down and into his pants.

“My turn,” she whispered wickedly. She took her place above him, giving him the same attention. He may not mark her as it would raise too many questions. But he did not have the same issue, she dragged her nails down his chest and nipped at his neck; sucking to leave a mark he would see every time he looked in the mirror or changed.

He growled impatiently but kept his hands where they were, he would never rush her.

“Good boy,” she praised his restraint. Hearing her approval almost had him cumming into his pants but he was able to abstain. She kissed and licked down his chest, her lips and tongue going everywhere except where he wanted her. The instant his pants were gone, she pumped his cock, admiring his length, veiny and thick. She used the pre-come the pearled at his tip to lubricate her motions. She knew it’d probably hurt to have him in her, but she ached for that day. She had enough practice with him to swallow him whole. She bobbed up and down, looking him at him with hooded eyes, glowing effervescent green. He loved seeing his cock disappear between her plump lips as her head dipped up and down. She flattened her tongue and undulated, paying special attention to the crown; her hand constantly pumping him where her lips left him bare.

“Mal, I’m going to cum,” he warned her, his breathing got heavier, panting from the pleasure.

She sped up, his spunk had been an acquired taste but she learned to love it.

Her quickening attention was enough to send him over the edge, his cock pulsating as she swallowed quickly; making sure to not leave a drop. Seeing her not wasting any of his seed only inflamed his passions and he seemed to be cumming for an eternity. It was only until he made distressed sounds did she know to stop, her actions overstimulating him. It was his turn to go limp and relaxed. She smiled shyly at how happy he was, a dopy smile plastered on his face. She crawled back up to, they kissed; they didn’t mind their taste on each other’s tongue.

***

The looked at each other, reacquainting themselves as they came down from their orgasmic high; content in the silence and to simply look and hold each other. Both hoping once they were in Auradon, they would never have to go as long between seeing one another.

The light from an old and failing lamp gave the room a yellow tone but Carlos loved how it shined in her purple hair and green eyes, thinking she was the most beautiful girl on the island. He couldn’t believe how lucky he was, of all the men on the island she could choose from, Maleficent’s daughter, the undisputed heiress to the leadership of the Isle, had chosen him.

He was aware there was a celestial body known as the moon, but they’ve never really seen such a thing since the constant cloud cover on the island had always obscured the sky.

He bet Mal would be lovely under moonlight.

Mal had felt the same way as she lost herself in his burnt umber eyes, she counted his freckles to make sure there were as many as she remembered. He was too good for the island, probably the only one there that didn’t belong. She, Jay, and even Evie had earned their places long ago, adapting too well and too much of their villain parents’ blood in them.

Carlos was an aberration, if not for his dual colored hair and some similar facial features she would have thought he had been brought there by mistake. That he could not be the son of a villain, much
less Cruella de Vil.

Carlos deserved Auradon, that much she knew.

Mal loved to rest her head against Carlos’ chest, his heart a steady comforting beat that was lulling her to sleep. He played with her hair as it splayed across him.

“So what have you been up to since I saw you last?” he asked, enjoying their intimate time before the sun rose and they’d both have to go back to their lives.

She started to talk about the jobs she did around the island, and the time she spent with Evie and Jay; stealing or just being Isle teenagers. A pang of jealousy at the time the others were allowed to spend with Mal. Even if he didn’t hate Cruella, he thought leaving the island would be worth it to just spend time with his girlfriend openly. There wouldn’t be anyone to stop them or forbid them from seeing each other.

They spoke for hours, never getting tired of hearing each other talk or being with each other.

A week couldn’t come fast enough.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again for reading everyone! Please kudos, if you can, and review! Also, please feel free to ask me any questions. I love to talk all this disney/descendant's nerd shit.

LOL ;-D
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Thank you to:

warlockinatardis - For another lovely review. I so look forward to them. I love world building, it's tons of fun and I hope to keep expanding.

IvyNyx - I hope this fic inspires other to write Carmal because I do think the world needs more of them. I'm so glad you like them together, I also think they're a good balance to each other and can't wait to write more about their relationship.

Puppyrules - So glad you like it and I hope to keep the muse motivated enough to update regularly.

echomoon - I'm so happy for your response! I hope everyone feels the same way you do.

StormWarning - That's exactly what I'm going for. It's kind of my raison d’être. Take a Disney plot, make it darker! lol >.<

Thanks to everyone else that kudos and subscribes. You all are the best!

Maleficent stood with her daughter at the entrance of the ruined bridge. At some point, the island had been connected to the mainland via a colossal bridge that spanned from the island to Belle Harbor, but King Adam had it destroyed once the villains were rounded up and dumped. Now all that stood was one arching tower, some jagged iron bars, and about a quarter mile of road that led out to the water; the only thing that kept people from jumping off was the magical wall.

Mal had one trunk but all it had were clothes and all her treasures secretly wrapped up and hidden away. The Maledictae Grimoira was also buried amongst her things, and she worried that her mother’s insistence that she take it would get her expelled before she even attended one class. It was a massive monstrous thing that felt like it weighed more than all her clothes and the trunk combined. She would prefer not to have to carry it ever again. It also didn’t help that the book was bound in a questionable leather she was afraid to ask what animal it came from, desperately hoping it was animal in origin, and an onyx wrought dragon sigil on the front. It basically screamed “Evil Magic Book” and she was pretty sure Crown Prince Ben didn’t have it in mind as part of the school curriculum. She hoped she could chuck it once she was Kingdom side but doubted it. If magic could be wielded on the mainland, then the book probably had spells upon it to protect itself. That was part of “Magic Objects Safety 101.” So trying to get rid of it could potentially attract more attention than she wanted and harm to her person, so her main plan was to hide it away and never think of it again.

It sat in her mother’s room collecting dust for twenty years, it could do so for another twenty in the comfort of an Auradon Prep closet.

Evie and Ravenna were there too, the cerulean haired girl packing much more stuff for her stay, surrounded by bags and two trunks; her mother willing to pay as much as it took to properly prepare her daughter to seduce and marry a prince.
Maleficent and Ravenna had a professional respect for one another but they weren’t friends. No discussion took place and they all stood in a stony silence while they waited for a ride to Auradon.

It wasn’t until Carlos and Jay showed up Maleficent that consented to speak.

“I can’t believe they invited that mongrel to the school. I guess they have no standards to whom they want to ‘rehabilitate,’” disgust clear in her voice as she talked about the dual toned teen and the Crown Prince’s nonsense quest, not caring to keep her voice low.

It was the years of keeping her emotions under control lest she collect more scars that kept Mal silent. She didn’t know why her mother hated Carlos, but he was never allowed near her shop and Mal was forbidden from even speaking to him. She knew her mother hated weakness above all else, which is how she viewed pretty much every human but Cruella in particular was low in her opinion.

Maleficent tolerated Ravenna because she was a witch, and had some fairkind blood somewhere in her line given Evie’s blue hair. Her friend’s father was some minor royal, an archduke from the Summerlands if Mal remembered correctly, that Ravenna had tried to ensnare but he had no intention of marrying her; even after he had found out she was pregnant, he had stopped coming to the island completely after that. Even if he were crazy enough to marry her, there was no guarantee King Adam would grant her clemency. It was just as likely the archduke would have been disentitled and banished, then Ravenna would have been in the same place as she always had been but with a useless infatuated noble. Mal was certain desperation and all the time on the Isle had caused the witch’s mind to go soft.

Both Maleficent and the Madam liked to get together and have a drink over how much they hated human men. It was the closest either got to something resembling friendship.

Male’s mother had never considered Cruella a true villain. de Vil had always just been a spoiled idiot who threw her life away, over something as stupid as a fur coat, to her. If she was able to purchase eighty-something puppies legally, why not find some other litter of puppies to skin? Maleficent felt of the reasons to be banished, Cruella’s was the dumbest. Cruella wasn’t one of them, period.

Maleficent, Ravenna, and Jafar had all tried to take over kingdoms; some with more success than others. Cruella was there because at worst, animal cruelty. The fact the woman went insane after being imprisoned put her even lower in her mother’s esteem.

There was an acceptable amount of sociopathy and psychopathy in villainy; it was expected and in most cases encouraged. But being traumatized and hysterical was beyond the pale for most and certainly no one had the patience for it.

There was also the mystery of Carlos’ father. It was no secret that he wasn’t Fisher de Vil’s child, the man too meek, timid, and Carlos looked nothing like him nor did he take after any other traits. Fisher was a short, squat man who was fat at some point but the harsh life of the island had his once stretched rotund skin now flabby and hanging off him like one of his coats. He always followed Cruella around like a pathetic lapdog, always begging for treats and attention, keeping her out of danger.

Carlos was tall, lean, lithe, agile, athletic, and far more handsome. All traits Fisher lacked. With Cruella’s upper-class upbringing, she may have been graceful at some point, but her years of being on the island and declining health had her staggering in ill fitted high heeled boots.

Then there were Carlos’ supernatural traits. He was as underfed as any child on the island but he was nimble and quick, stronger than most as well. Mal tried not to blush at remembering his burgeoning six pack and lean muscles and how they felt under her hands. He wasn’t as bulked up as Jay, but she was certain it was due to the latter’s more concentrated djinn heritage. Mal was confident the only
reason any of them didn’t look completely malnourished or had died was due to magical inheritance that made them heartier than humans. Carlos also had an enhanced sense of smell and other acute senses, it helped him trap and kill the few game animals they had on the island.

Skills that had saved the four of them from starvation more than once.

Whenever he was agitated, scared, or any heightened emotion, his eyes turned blood red; **definitely not** a human trait and Cruella and Fisher were as human as they came. He also had a deep inhuman growl that would reverberate through her and she shivered at what she did to elicit that response in their private time.

Carlos’ nosed twitched at the scent he caught in the air, trying not to allow his primal side preen at Mal’s arousal, knowing she was thinking of him when they caught each other’s eyes for a second.

There was some incident that happened with Cruella but no one ever talked about it. It was too scandalous for even villains to gossip about. All Mal could ever glean was that Cruella was attacked one day, it put the already fragile socialite over the edge, and Carlos was born nine months later.

Thankfully her mother’s business had not started yet, although it was doubtful Maleficent would have helped Cruella anyway. So while the circumstances of his birth were abhorrent, Mal couldn’t help but be thankful he was born.

Rape wasn’t uncommon on the island, so she didn’t understand the silence. Plenty of her classmates at Dragon Hall were products of coercion. She had gleefully helped her mother create poisons in vengeance of these occurrences when she was younger. She continued to do so for her current classmates. But whatever happened, no one spoke of it and it completely disgusted her mother. Mal suspected it was some dark fae, one that Maleficent knew personally and found repugnant. Her mother was notorious for holding grudges. There were three tiny pixies from the Moor that her mother considered traitors for not only making peace with King Stefan knowing what he did to her, but they hid away Aurora and altered her curse where “true love’s kiss” would break it. Mal wondered if the suspected fae was someone who was neutral in the battle and Maleficent was never one to forgive. Who knew how the tides may have turned if she had more allies loyal to the Moor. There were a few others that got banished to the island, mostly vindictive nature sprites and brownies the King and Fairy Godmother had managed to scrounge up. They lived in the woods, glens, and streams on the Isle; mostly staying away from humans and more powerful and larger fae, but every so often they would attack humans that stumbled into their territory. Given Cruella’s penchant for wandering around aimlessly, she probably crossed a fairy ring or broke an inhabited tree and courted their wrath. Mal didn’t have the resources to research the different kind of fairies in the world, or at least the ones that inhabited the Isle. Certainly ones that had red eyes and acute senses would narrow it down, she only hoped that Auradon’s libraries were as vast and renowned as rumored.

Jay was not on Maleficent’s radar and never acknowledged his existence. She had no use for a thief as she always got what she wanted through fear and intimidation. She never dealt with Jafar, that was grunt work for Mal.

Ravenna had nothing against Jafar, they traded goods and Jay never stole from the Fleur de Pomme or anyone that worked there. The whore he was born from was not one of hers. But she was weary that the handsome teenager would ruin her beautiful daughter’s chances at finding a prince, so he was never welcomed at the brothel other than to do business. And when he was there, Evie was always sent to another room.

Carlos was not worth courting Maleficent’s fury. She also didn’t know what the horned fairy had against the boy as he was harmless and basically a nobody, even by Isle standards, but she followed
her fellow villain’s example and barred Evie from befriending the boy and ignored his existence.

The two women kept their distance from the boys, their daughters close to them.

Neither Jay nor Carlos had an adult with them. The latter had a large duffle bag with clothes and a smaller back pack with his tools as well as a stowaway. He didn’t want to risk anyone in Auradon knowing he could jailbreak their technology and confiscate it from the brothels, so most of his electronics he left at Hell Hall. He just hoped he would be able to study and work with the more advanced stuff Auradon had and that his secret passenger would keep quiet until they were firmly within Auradon Prep’s dorms.

“Are you not bringing anything?” Carlos asked, wondering why the long hair teen didn’t even have a bag with him.

“Nah, they’re going to be providing uniforms and I figure I’ll just steal what I need,” Jay said confidently, “So not into the whole ‘packing thing’.”

It wasn’t without merit as he was the best thief on the island; it was why his father was still in business. There were probably rules against stealing at Auradon Prep but he knew he would never be caught.

“Where’s your dad?”

“Psst. Like he cares or notices. Pretty sure he’s still searching for a lamp. I worked overtime last night to keep him busy shifting through things to try to sell and I implied I may have found one in the pile.”

He was also positive that his father wouldn’t notice he was truly gone until his inventory ran short which should be at least a week, by then it would be too late and he would be unreachable. While he didn’t truly trust the whole “chance at being good” experiment, he trusted Mal and he would follow her.

He was as eager as any of them for a chance at something better. His father wasn’t abusive and he was fed better than most because of his talents. But his father also wasn’t great, he never seemed to notice or care what Jay did or went. It wasn’t uncommon for him to be absent for weeks at a time, Jafar never seeming the wiser.

Jay didn’t know what to expect or what he wanted from Auradon, but there had to be more to life than a cycle of stealing, selling, stealing what they sold to later sell again. He never told the others, but sometimes he would climb to the highest building on the Isle, the only one brave enough since it was not structurally sound. He risked it because it had the best view of a castle, a view of a better life that was out there. He didn’t even know which castle it was, but it was beautiful and stately. He even got peaks of a blue sky, something he never saw on the Isle. Why couldn’t something better be for him too? He didn’t even want a castle, just something that was his and didn’t have to always watch his back, afraid it would be stolen. He didn’t want to have to worry where his next meal would come from or live only day to day, meal to meal. He wanted to be someplace where he could just hang out with his friends, somewhere an overprotective adult didn’t constantly watch him, afraid he was going to do something bad.

He didn’t want a kingdom, he wanted security.

He didn’t think that was too much to ask for.

Jay didn’t bother asking Carlos about Cruella, knowing it was a sore subject and that the woman
would have tried to keep his best friend there. He knew Carlos was never in danger of being kept on
the island, Mal or himself would have seen to the woman’s demise if she had truly managed to
imprison their friend.

Carlos wanted to go to Mal but he wouldn’t dare with her mother so close. He had to pretend they
were nothing more than strangers, Mal too above his station to even condescend to look at. It always
hurt when she had to act like that, but knowing how vicious Maleficent could be, he wouldn’t put it
past the ultimate villain to kill her own daughter if she disobeyed. He remembered the year Mal was
shaved bald and he had seen her scars first hand. He didn’t know why Maleficent hated him, he had
met her maybe once in person when he was seven and she had immediately forbidden Mal from
even talking to him.

He had dealt with Cruella’s indifference, only deigning to look at him when she wanted something.
Meeting Maleficent, it was the first time he had experience distain at his mere existence and felt true
fear his life could be in danger. He was used to being ignored, but Maleficent went out of her way to
keep him away from her and Mal. At seven he didn’t understand why an adult would hate him so; he
was just a little boy. At seventeen, he still didn’t understand why she hated him, but he knew she
viewed him as filth and unworthy of being in her or Mal’s presence.

Magic or no magic, no one crossed Maleficent. Even without her powers, potions and poisons still
worked. There had been plenty of people who tried to take down the dark fae and she was the one
still standing after twenty years. In an island full of the world’s worst, she was at the top of the food
chain. There were literal graveyards filled with those who had displeased or defied her, all dying
painful and horrific public passings, poisons that stretched death out of their reach for days.
Something he wouldn’t wish on his worst enemy, even Cruella. He stayed far away from the darkest
family on the Isle for years, to the point Maleficent probably forgot he had existed. It wasn’t until
they became teenagers did he run into Mal again, and then the rest was history.

A limo pulled up, something they had never seen other than on the ancient television he was able to
get working and nothing nearly as nice; vehicles were rare on the island and most were non-
functioning as petroleum or an alternative fuel was never mass produced despite the high number of
mad scientists on the island. This one was sleek, black, shiny (rare was anything clean enough on the
island to shine), and had the royal standard flittering in the wind. The royal crown as the hood
ornament finished off the regal look, which would have glittered if the sun had been out.

The sun was never out on the Isle.

A skeletal woman in a patched together white and black fur coat had come running down the street,
yelling him.

“Carlos! No, you can’t leave! I’d miss you! Who else is going to touch up my roots, fluff and protect
my furs, and clean the manse?!”

He rolled his eyes and made his way quickly to the car, wondering how Cruella was cognizant
efficient enough to realize he knew about Auradon Prep and figured out where he was. He chucked his duffle
bag into the trunk as the driver struggled with Evie’s trunks, and hopped into the limo without even
acknowledging Cruella, gently cradling his backpack. When she tried to physically stop him, he
turned and growled at her, eyes glowing scarlet and she took her hand back just as quickly, shaken at
his reaction. There was the briefest of staring contests, each defiant and angry. Once she got the point
that he wasn’t staying and she had no way of keeping him there, he went into the car and he hoped
that was the last time he would ever have to see her.

When he was out of her sight but still within hearing distance, she just sneered,
“Ungrateful brat,” and then started to mutter to a stuffed dog head on her coat, saying that he wasn’t worth it and that she had a social gathering to get ready for.

“Is there another car coming? I’m not sure if I want my daughter riding in a car with…that thing,” Maleficent asked the Auradon driver in a rare moment of politeness.

“Mom, it’s fine…” but all Mal got for her trouble was a dismissive hand and her mother not even bothering to turn around to look at her.

“No, mam. This is the only car going to the mainland. We don’t like to risk opening the barrier unnecessarily,” the peon droned on, keeping his sunglasses on and acted as if looking at them was beneath him.

Evie and Mal locked eyes, wondering if he knew about the guards’ taste for Isle whores and that they had no problem taking “unnecessary risks.”

If Maleficent had any power, he would have been set on fire for the disrespect. Mal had to control herself from laughing, loving that her mother was getting a taste of her own medicine.

“Now Evie, remember. No prince wants a flower that has already been plucked,” Ravenna told her daughter while eying Jay as he stole the bonnet ornament then dashed into the car to evade being caught.

“Of course mother, I’ll nab a prince and we’ll get our happily ever after,” Evie replied, keeping a cold icy stare, never risking wrinkles, and hoping that convinced her mother that she was a totally innocent 100% virgin and didn’t ride Jay’s face last night in their secret apartment.

“Psssh, there is no happily ever after. There is only living comfortably in a castle ever after.”

How Ravenna’s standards had lowered since being entrapped on the Isle. She had once conquered kingdoms and now all she wanted was a castle.

Mal didn’t understand how the woman didn’t know Evie was worth so much more than any prince, as she eavesdropped on the conversation.

Evie was talented, smart, and beautiful; she didn’t need a prince.

Evie just kept her face impassive, wanting to get away from her mother and having no idea what to say. She got into the car and mentally hurried Mal to get in so they could get going.

“Remember Mal, the fate of the free world rests on your shoulders. Don’t blow it,” her mother said and by her look, the lingering threat that Mal would regret the day she was born if she had failed.

All Mal could do was nod and slid into the limo, keeping her eyes anywhere but to Carlos; an air of indifference as her mother watched her until the door closed.

“The jackals have landed,” they heard muffled through the divider, not sure what that meant. The car jerked forward and they were off to Auradon.

Once she felt she was out of her mother’s sight, she started to explore her new surroundings. It was nothing like she had ever seen before, there were jars of brightly colored objects; tiny round and other shapes of what might be food but nothing that naturally grew anywhere or least not that she had seen on the island. Perhaps there was magic on the mainland and it affected their fare to look to colorful and perfectly uniform.
The seats were a soft and supple black leather, far finer than anything that could be produced on the island. There was even a television, almost paper thin and far more advanced. It was clear that Auradon had more money than they knew what to do with, if they outfitted non-essentials with such finery.

Normally curiosity would have gotten to Carlos and he would have immediately tried whatever food they had provided but with his intense stare, it was clear he wasn’t seeing any of it.

Now that they were away from Cruella and Maleficent, she threaded her fingers with his and scooted right next to him. She was happier than she thought she ever could be by simply holding hands and getting to sit as close to him as she wanted.

“She didn’t even care I was going and would probably never see me again. All she cared about was losing her servant.”

Although he hated her, something he could admit to himself after years of desperately trying to get her to love him back and nothing coming from his efforts, it still hurt how little Cruella cared for him and never had. He rebuked himself for the moment of hope that she would miss him as she said she would, but for all the wrong reasons.

Mal didn’t think she would ever despise anyone more than Cruella de Vil. Seeing how upset Carlos was, and even close to tears but straining to keep them at bay; trying to be strong and not let it get to him, she couldn’t help but think,

One day I’m going to kill her.

She was just waiting for the day Carlos said the words. She knew the exact knife she’d plunge into her heart. She’d figure out the details of getting back to the island for a visit later.

“We’re free of them and we’re never going back,” she comforted him, kissing his cheek and bringing him in close, nuzzling into his neck. He let her pull him in and his anger was replaced with relief. They were finally getting away from the island and he would do whatever it took to never return.

He would let go of Cruella and all that was wrong with the Isle, he refused to be weighed down by its evil legacy.

Jay had already pocketed several items from the limo, his urge to steal in overdrive amongst all the riches before him. He had found a remote, unsure of what it was to and started to randomly push buttons. It caused the divider to roll down and the kids got their first look of where they were going. They were barreling towards the end of the ruined bridge and it looked like they were about to plummet to their death.

Each teen had started to scream their fear and held onto each other, each cursing their own stupidity for trusting that Prince Ben would truly give them a chance.

That asshole King Adam probably set this whole thing up to get rid of the next generation of villains.

But instead of falling into Belle Bay, a gold shroud of magic surrounded the car and spiraled from the Isle of the Lost to Belle Harbor, creating a dreamlike passage.

Once they realized they were safe, they all felt a little foolish for reacting in such an undignified way but when they calmed down there was a silent agreement to never mention it and pretend it never happened.

But their eyes widened when Mal’s, Jay’s, and Evie’s hands each emitted a smokey green, gold, and
blue light respectfully; first proof that they were no longer on the island and their magic bound. The light was gone before they knew it and weak, Mal doubted it would’ve helped them if they did fall to their deaths but it was a start.

Mal looked to Carlos, wondering if any of his suspected fae heritage would have also manifested but only his eyes had turned red and his hair and eyebrows looked to grow slightly feral but she wasn’t sure if it was just a few days since he’s groomed himself or mussed in the moment of terror when they held each other. Once he calmed down, the crimson receded from his eyes and they turned back to the gentle brown she had grown to love.

“Did this remote open up the magic barrier?” Jay asked, curious to know if it was that simple and perhaps why they never figured out how the soldiers crossed the barrier. He had always looked for something bejeweled or “magic” looking. The prostitutes that catered to them probably had a similar mindset.

“No, this opens up the magic barrier,” he held up a dark burnished gold but otherwise identical remote. “That one opens up my garage. And this button...” he said sarcastically and let the divider raise up to finish his sentence for him.

They were all used to snark, rudeness rather rampant on the island. They all laughed and thought that perhaps the mainland wouldn’t be so different and lame after all.


It was rare Mal ever felt such fear, but she used it as an excuse to snuggle into Carlos and stay close. She was surprised when she saw his bag move on its own, then more so when a fluffy slate grey cat made itself known.

“Beezy!” Mal exclaimed, happy to see the feline. The cat in question pounced out of the bag, no longer satisfied with hiding and went to his mistress’ lap and with an intense peridot stare that demanded he be cuddled and petted. He too had been frightened but mostly because he could feel the fear of his master and mistress and heard their screaming.

She was more than happy to oblige, scratching under his chin and giving him long loving strokes across his silky fur.

Besides with Carlos and the others, Mal was never what one would call gentle but she made the exception for the feline. Carlos’ cat Beelzebub, Beezy for short, was one of the few pets on the island. In general, no one kept pets as it was one more mouth to feed. But Lady Tremaine’s cat Lucifer kept siring litters so they were everywhere, but at least cats were good for rodent control. Because of Cruella, dogs weren’t allowed on the island at all.

Aside from Evie, Beezy was the first thing to show Carlos any kind of affection and Mal loved the mouser for it, slightly guilty that it took her so long to do the same. The tomcat at first distrusted the magenta haired fae, but warmed up to her once she started to date his master. Now he had four teens wrapped around his claws; they fed him scraps, had wide laps for his comfort, and scratched him just right.

Once their hearts stop threatening to beat out of their chests, they explored more of the limo. Jay and Carlos being rather fearless around food, started to pop random things into their mouths and hoped for the best.

It wouldn’t be the first time they ate questionable items when hungry.
Evie and Mal waited for their respective boyfriends to let them know how it was. From their disgusted looks, it was rather appalling. Although it was clear neither liked what was in their mouths, wasting food was about as close to sacrilege as anyone on the island could get. They swallowed down what was in their mouths and grabbed what they hoped was water in swing top Codd-neck bottles that were chilling in an ice bucket to wash the taste out.

“What is it?” Evie asked.

“I have no idea. It’s sweet, like honey but without honey flavor and twenty million times more intense. This food has no taste, just sweet,” Jay struggled to explain.

Mal and Evie frowned, wondering what Crown Prince Ben was trying to feed them. A thought occurred to Evie and she took a blue colored item and experimentally dragged her tongue across it, just wanting a taste but not wanting it in her mouth.

“Sugar,” her suspicions confirmed.

“Sugar?” Jay asked, not familiar with the word as it was practically non-existent on the Isle.

“It’s what makes things sweet, like salt makes things salty. It’s part of fermentation of the apples to make apple wine.”

Evie and Carlos were the only ones interested in the actual process and chemistry of alcohol production, so they were more familiar with the ingredients and the reactions. Sugar in its processed form was unheard of as the Isle didn’t grow sugar cane, beets, or anything they could refine. If they wanted anything sweetened they would have to hunt for honey; most didn’t bother as they didn’t think getting stung was worth it.

“Sometimes the soldiers bring it as payment. They refine it down to its crystalline form and it’s used as a sweetener…but this is like they used nothing but sugar. The most I’ve ever seen used is a cup for a cake. For this to be pure sugar…” Evie had no more to say as she couldn’t explain why they’d use so much.

“So Auradon citizens eat straight sugar?” Mal asked, wondering if this was what their diet mainly consisted of, not believing it but what else could it be since it seemed to be the only thing the limo offered.

“That’s what it tastes and looks like.”

They all looked to the confections, disappointed and wondering if they were going to starve. Carlos bravely picked a few other items, wanting to see if he could find something he liked. There was an array of the little foods; it couldn’t all be bad could it?

There were multi-colored and stringy looking pieces, it reminded him of worms and wondered why they would serve it to them. He popped it into his mouth and for the first time in years, he spit food right out.

“Whatever that is, it’s not ripe. It’s completely sour.” Still not wanting to waste food as he had felt the pain of hunger too many times to take any food that he came across for granted; he threw the piece into his mouth and chugged water right after it to chase it down as quickly as it could.

He mostly wished the texture wasn’t so odd.

Soft but firm. Bouncy?
He couldn’t put it into words. It was all so strange to him.

There was one last thing he wanted to try, a dark brown disk that looked like the most natural thing there but still, nothing he had ever seen before. His smelled it carefully and it still had that abundant sweetness to it but not as harsh as everything else. There was an underlying milky and nutty scent and made it much more appetizing than the brightly colored bits.

He timidly bit into it and there were divergent flavors that danced on his tongue, so much better than anything he had so far and in his life.

“It’s sweet, like I don’t know what but not as bad as the other stuff. It’s a bit salty too, like some kind of nut.”

Finally finding something palatable, Evie and Jay took samples too and wholeheartedly agreed the dark brown pieces were far superior. Not all of them were the mix of sweet and salty, but there was a feeling of enjoyment that they’ve never experienced before just by eating.

Carlos was about to hand Mal a disk, thinking she’d enjoy it but he grew worried when she was looking green and not just her eyes.

“What’s the matter?” all thoughts pushed aside to make sure his girlfriend was alright, the other two also dropping the food and wanting to help.

“I don’t know…I just feel very sick,” her face scrunched in nausea, trying her best not to vomit but she was certain it was going to be a losing battle. She had been feeling queasy for a while but at first she wrote it off as nerves.

“Hey!” Jay banged on the divider, trying to get the driver’s attention. “Mal is sick, we need help!”

The car immediately pulled to the side of the road and Mal rushed out, not wanting to get sick inside the car or vomit on Carlos. They were in some rural area as there were no buildings they could see and much more vivid green grass and trees than they have ever seen in their life. Mal emptied the contents of her stomach as soon as she got outside, her body rejecting everything and despite not having had much to eat that morning, she still felt as sick as she had moments ago. Her stomach empty and she was dry heaving. Carlos rubbed her back and thankfully her hair was up and out of her face already. He tried to comfort her and worried about what was wrong with her.

All four teens winced at how bright it was, the sun feeling like it was right above them. Since when was the sky as blue as sapphires? Evie and Jay covered their eyes, the brightness painful to bear.

Their driver came around,

“What’s the matter?”

“We don’t know, your food is poisonous or something,” Carlos growled out, certain something inside the limo had made her ill. He was having a hard time keeping his eyes open in the light, so the driver didn’t see his eyes turn red in anger and didn’t have the sense to be scared.

“No, I didn’t have any of the food,” Mal said between heaves. “I just started to feel sick, I don’t know what it is.”

“Have you ever been in a car?” the driver asked, having an idea of what was wrong with her.

She shook her head “no” and just tried to keep breathing through the nausea.
“It’s probably motion sickness,” the kids looked blankly at him as if he just made it up. “It’s when you can see but not sense motion or vice versa. It can cause nausea and vertigo. Are you dizzy?”

Mal nodded “yes” but thankfully her nausea started to subside. She gratefully took the water from Carlos, she didn’t think she could stomach drinking but she at least wanted to get the sick taste from her mouth. She wished she could appreciate nature but everything was just so much brighter than on the island. She swished and spit out the water a couple times, then felt she was ready to get back into the limo.

“Why don’t we have it?” Evie asked.

“It doesn’t affect everyone. It’s genetic or something.”

The driver noticed all four teens seemed to be struggling to see,

“What’s wrong with your eyes?”

“Nothing is wrong with our eyes, it’s just that Auradon is apparently right next to the sun,” Jay answered defensively, frowning at the general direction of the driver as he wasn’t totally sure where he was and didn’t want to open his eyes further.

It took the driver a moment to remember that the Isle of the Lost was under a perpetual overcast of clouds and pollution. So the kids were used to a much dimmer world and it was a clear mid-August day so it was probably the brightest day the kids have ever experienced. He also noticed just how pale they were as well. Evie and Mal being porcelain fair and could even see some blue veining under their skin; the boys looking like they should have been naturally tanner but since they rarely saw direct sunlight were also pale.

The driver himself was also wearing sunglasses, the day was bright and he had grown up in such conditions so the teens must feel like they were going blind.

Luckily as a driver for the royal family, it was part of the mystique to always be wearing sunglasses so he had several spare pairs in the glove department. He trotted back to the limo and grabbed some and reached into the back fridge to grab a cold can.

The teens were surprised at being given the glasses, never having had seen ones that were tinted dark. There were dark googles that welders used, and Mal remembered sometimes henchmen would wear them to appear menacing. They supposed they were more popular in Auradon because they were needed given how sunny the mainland was. It was still brighter than comfortable but the glasses at least made things tolerable.

Mal shakily got up, wanting to push Carlos off of her and hating that she felt so weak. She loathed being sick, but she knew he was just trying to help and she detested even more making him feel rejected. So she let him help her into the car. The driver put a cold object in her hand, unsure of what it was and what to do with it.

“It’s ginger ale.”

That explained nothing to her. She knew ginger could ease upset stomachs; it’s what the girls from the brothel chewed on when they decided to keep the children and had pregnancy sickness. She had never heard of making it into ale, limited resources, but was glad to have something. The driver had to show her how to open the can, the Isle never making use of canning drinks as it would use up too much resources and didn’t have the ability for recycling. They had only ever used glass bottles and cups. Some families had silver chalices or goblets but those were jealously guarded. The ones Jay
The liquid was cool, crisp, and the bubbles tickled her nose. She winced that it was obviously filled with sugar and didn’t understand how anyone could drink more than a few sips but she would do anything to get rid of the nausea.

“It’s probably better if you drive in front,” the driver offered when they headed back into the limo. She was wearing sunglasses but from the twist of her head and defensive stance he knew she didn’t trust him. “You’re less likely to get motion sick if you can see better where you’re going.”

It sounded fake but she didn’t want to risk getting sick again. Not the greatest first impression to get or give.

Carlos didn’t want her to go, but he knew how she hated to be ill and he kept silent. He kissed her forehead,

“Do you have your blade?” he asked lowly as he hugged her before she left. She didn’t bother answering when she gave him a withering look, as if she’d ever go anywhere without a weapon.

He smiled, that was his girl. He leaned to give her a kiss on the lips but she turned away.

“No, I’m gross.”

“Don’t care,” and stole a kiss anyway. If he were anyone else, he would have been socked but she smiled, feeling warm knowing that he loved her no matter what.

They took care of each other, that’s what love was.

The driver apparently knew what he was talking about as she did feel better sitting in the front seat and drinking the ginger ale.

*I wonder if they would give me the recipe, I could brew it…*

But the thought stopped abruptly. She didn’t need the recipe; she was never going back to the island. She wouldn’t brew another potion or pot of tansy tea for the girls at the brothel or anyone. The Isle had no doctors, her mother being the closest thing to a midwife it had. So all the girls at Fleur and anyone who could afford it would only have her mother to go to.

It wasn’t often she felt guilt and it wasn’t one of those times. She got out and she couldn’t muster feeling sorry about it. Perhaps if she were the only one going, but the most important people in her life were in the limo with her. And even if she were alone, she would have gotten the Godmother’s wand or whatever else she needed to gain their freedom.

It would have been both annoying and terrifying to have her mother at full power and free, but the others would have been worth it. Auradon was a big place; she probably would have figured a way to escape with them. Let her mother play Dark Mistress of the Universe and they would lay low somewhere far away. It wasn’t as if Maleficent would have any use for her after she got free and was extremely unconvinced about her mother’s desire to share a throne, despite the pretty picture she’d paint with promises of what would happen once vengeance was theirs.

There could only be one Queen and Mal had no desire to fight for it.

Carlos had kept the divide down and rested his chin on the landing, wanting to be close to Mal. She reached back and ran her hands through his silken hair and just wanted to keep contact with him. She liked the longer hair but also missed his curls. She knew he wouldn’t let his hair curl when it was that
long, he felt it was too much of a hassle and never behaved but she thought it’d be the most adorable thing she would have seen in her life. But adorable wasn’t safe on the Isle. Something that wouldn’t be allowed, not even something as innocuous as a hairstyle. They could never been seen as anything other than fierce, cold, and vicious. She didn’t even know her mother’s hair color, the fae had kept it under the hennin ever since she could remember. Ravenna had followed suit. Mal’s own hair was kept up in tight twin French braids. Having long hair could potentially be a weakness if someone she was fighting decided to grab onto it and pull, she had done it plenty of times herself to her foes. Jay and Evie were allowed to keep theirs down because the former had gotten so good at evading those he was thieving from and the latter was not the fighting type. She could easily charm her way out of any confrontation and being Mal’s friend and Ravenna’s daughter, most avoided her altogether.

Perhaps in the protection of Auradon Prep he would grow his hair, it just may be alright to show a little vulnerability.

She idly wondered what it would be like to let her hair down and have the wind blow through it, feeling truly free.

They finally came to a long driveway, a wrought iron gate ornamented with the distinctive red rose sigil of King Adam. The gate column had a plaque with a royal shield and the words

Pas D’honneur Supérieur

On or and azure quarters, indicating its roots in House Bourbon, badges of the rose, a book, a stylized A and P.

Whatever all that means.

Auradon really like its flags. Crown Prince Ben had one, the school had one, the King and Queen each had one. It made Mal wonder if Maleficent had one.

Maybe I should get one.

The thought amused her, her artistic mind already coming up with designs and colors she would use; she would never seriously use it, it was more mocking than anything but fun to think about.

Double dragons intertwined and counterchanged. Definitely. Acid green and magenta, obviously.

Carlos wondered what Mal was thinking about, as she seemed particularly amused at something.

The gate opened as if it were expecting them, and it was still at least a minute of driving to get to the courtyard of the former castle turned school.

So much land being purely decorative and not used for farming seemed wasteful to the four, but showed just how rich the school and the citizens of Auradon were. A third of the Isle was wasted with ruins of a former city but no one there was able to demolish the buildings and clear them out for farming; it was one of many things that attributed to the scarcity of food. Some were able to grow things on the roofs, but the infrastructure was not kept up so it was at their own risk to go on the roofs at all. The land that was farmable, it was an arduous task as they weren’t given beasts of burden to help them, nor any farming vehicles. It was all done by human power and most couldn’t or wouldn’t put in the work.

She wondered how long the Isle could last without outside help.

I need to stop thinking about the Isle. It’s not my problem anymore.
Mal was glad to finally be able to get out of the car when they reached the courtyard. She was a bit mortified there was a marching band there to welcome them and even some students waving nondescript flags.

*This place has an obsession with flags, it’s so weird.*

The band was playing what they assumed was the school theme song, all decked out in gold and cobalt uniforms, a shield with a bold golden “A” on their breasts with the words “Knights” above it.

They parked in front of a structure that looked like a castle in miniature, turrets with crenellations, royal banners on the sides, and a small topiary garden in front with a statue of a man with a crown. Mal guessed that was King Adam. The other side of the driveway stood a massive cream building, an ornate stone staircase leading towards it. Perhaps one side was the school and the other the dorms.

“Don’t worry about your bags, the house goblins will take care of them,” the driver told them over his shoulder as he got out.

*House goblins?*

Mal didn’t argue but a part of her was worried about the contraband in her trunk. She hoped the goblins didn’t get suspicious of how heavy her trunk was and assumed she packed heavily. She saw the driver speak quietly to who she presumed was Crown Prince Ben, the teen that invited them there. There was also girl in a pink dress with an overlay of gold roses and robin blue cardigan that hung off his side. It seemed she wanted to make quite the impression, the prince was in what looked to be in a simpler outfit, sports coat and khakis. The girl was so dressed up, even had on a thick gold necklace.

*I wonder what we did to warrant such a welcome.*

Mal was suspicious of them already. The limo, the band, the whole greeting party seemed to be too much for some Isle kids.

A woman in a feminine lavender suit, simple pearl earrings, and a plum bow accompanied the Crown Prince and his date, the only adult they could see besides the driver.

Despite the driver’s warning about their bags, Carlos had a stowaway he wouldn’t trust to the goblins regardless, and still carried his backpack gently and hoped they were shown their rooms right away.

Perhaps the driver alerted the Crown Prince about their sensitivity to the sun because he motioned for all of them to come into the main entry of the school rather than greet them outside. Mal wondered how long of a procession he had planned because all the marching band members seemed to be disappointed, but given how much they were wearing and how thick their uniforms looked, she thought they ought to be grateful to have gotten out of playing in the direct sun and heat.

All four were grateful to go inside as none of them could believe the difference between the island and mainland Auradon just with the sunlight. The entry into the school was thankfully darker but it was also significantly cooler.

*It’s mid-August, how could the building feel like it’s early spring temperatures?*

The entryway was wood paneled and tastefully decorated. Regal staircases with ornate railings, a chandelier over them, and stained glass windows from floor to ceiling that thankfully did not let in as much light as they thought it would. It was dim enough in the entryway they took their shades off.
They walked upon plush slate grey carpet that was lush even the silks that decorated the Fleur de Pomme, and it was something they walked on. The room was finished off with a grand floor to ceiling fireplace that looked more decorative than useful.

Jay’s mind raced with all the things he could steal, his arms automatically reaching for a bronze vase that would fetch a good trade on the island and who knew what on the mainland, he was only stopped from taking it because Carlos whacked him gently on the arm to remind him to be civil, and that they were in polite company.

“Welcome to Auradon Prep,” the woman smiled at them, waving her hands dramatically. “I am Nadine FéeMarraine, Headmistress and Professor of Magical History. As I always say, ‘If you don’t learn from the past, you can’t know your future.’”

She did a few more elaborate hand gestures to get her point across, smiling wide and looked slightly crazy in the teens’ eyes.

So that’s the Fairy Godmother. She doesn’t look like she could wield anything to help anyone take over the world. Conjuring a gown, insensible shoes, and a coach looks like the breadth of her talents. But looks can be deceiving. This is the fae that keeps the barrier intact and kept us on that damned island for seventeen years.

Nadine slightly flinched at the apathetic stares the teens gave, not even a polite smile. She was used to a bit more celebrity awe than that. Then she did remember that they were from the Isle of the Lost, an island she helped populate and then imprison with a wave of her wand.

“It’s so good to finally meet you all, I’m Ben” Ben greeted, trying to break the awkward silence.

“Crown Prince Benjamin, heir apparent to the United Kingdoms of Auradon,” Audrey interrupted and practically sang, reminding everyone present of his proper title. Ben winced for a variety of reasons, mostly embarrassment as he wanted to come off friendly and non-imposing. He didn’t want to overwhelm them as he was certain royal protocol was never taught.

“This is Audrey,” Ben introduced her, trying to salvage the conversation.

“Princess, Audrey,” she stressed her own royal title in case the Isle kids didn’t know, again interrupting him. “His girlfriend,” she added, smiling widely at them. It always thrilled her to be able to tell people she was dating the Crown Prince of Auradon City and it went without saying she was probably going to be the First Lady of the Court and Queen in the near future.

The four wished they would get on with it, they were freezing and their eyes were still adjusting from nearly going blind.

Audrey must have seen how unimpressed they were and turned to Ben,

“Right, Bennie Boo?”

All four teens couldn’t help but snort at the nickname, never had heard something so ridiculous. The snickering was short lived as they all remembered they needed to be polite, but Crown Prince Ben was already blushing a light pink.

Before Ben could get over his embarrassment and answer, Ms. FéeMarraine chimed in,

“His Royal Highness and Audrey are going to show you all around.”

Audrey had to pout that Ms. FéeMarraine would use Ben’s honorific but not hers. Sometimes she
forgot that she was a princess as a courtesy title and nothing more, so the faculty at Auradon Prep
didn’t have to address her beyond her given name, especially since she was outside her father’s
kingdom.

“I will see you around, but remember the doors of wisdom are never shut! But the library hours
are from eight to eleven and as you may have heard I have a little thing about curfews,” Ms.
FéeMarraine added quickly, to make sure they would not break the rules.

She didn’t know if she ought to be offended that each teen cocked their head and looked to each
other as if they weren’t sure what she was talking about.

*I’m the Fairy Godmother, what do they teach kids on the Isle? Maybe I should have used my more
known moniker.*

But again, she remembered that the Isle was probably the last place to sing her praise so she made
her exit before she embarrassed herself.

Ben took her exit as his cue to try again.

“It is so, so, so good to finally meet…” he came to shake their hands but Jay had given him a rather
hard punch to the shoulder, one that knocked the wind out of him for a second. Wondering what he
did wrong but by the long haired teen’s smile, figured it was a greeting gesture. “…you all,” he
finished, trying to smile big and be as hospitable as he could.

Next was the purple haired girl, she stood in a power pose the whole time with her hands on her
hips. She gave out her hand to shake and he was glad to take it.

He placed his other hand on their held ones, holding her for longer than necessary but he couldn’t
help but take a moment to get lost in her green eyes. A unique shade he had never seen anywhere
else, fae being rare in that part of Auradon. Ms. FéeMarraine was the exception but she and Jane
FéeMarraine looked like average humans. Mal was special though, he had never seen someone as
beautiful as to rob him of his speech.

He knew those eyes and hair, a memory whispered to him but he couldn’t fully recall.

*What is he looking at?*

Mal wondered, and then wondered what was up with Carlos as he stepped forward and closer than
polite.

“This is a momentous occasion,” Ben went on, shaking himself out of his stupor and moved on to
the next teen. “And one that I hope will go down in history…”

Carlos’ eyes were a deep brown, something found in plenty of humans but they jarred Ben by their
intensity and he again took longer than customary to greet and move on from one of the Isle teens.
The black and white hair teen also had a strong grip, stronger than he had ever encountered before
and winced as he tried to escape his clutches.

Ben was so distracted by his throbbing hand he didn’t notice Audrey’s frown, not the only teen who
was unhappy about the exchange.

“…as a day our two peoples began to heal.” He finished off with Evie who was by far the friendliest
and had a normal handshake. He tried to ignore the blue haired girl’s fluttering eyes and Mona Lisa
smile, the most her mother would allow.
“Or the day you showed four peoples where the bathrooms are,” Mal quipped in a mimicking tone, and did a little twist and turn to break the tension.

Audrey was aghast at how rude the girl was being, thinking she ought to be grateful and kissing her Bennie Boo’s feet for even allowing her to step one ugly boot onto Auradon soil.

Ben, however, laughed and gave a genuine amused smile.

“A little over the top?” he guessed, he couldn’t agree more but it was the speech he and his advisors prepared.

“A little more than a little bit,” she joked with him, glad he wasn’t as uptight as she was afraid he was going to be.

“Well so much for my first impression.”

Both continued to laugh, glad it wasn’t a total disaster. Mal was glad that he wasn’t some stuck up royal who would look down on them. He seemed to be an actual nice guy who wanted to help them, something she honestly wasn’t expecting.

“Hey, you’re Maleficent’s daughter aren’t you?” Audrey asked, figuring out who was who and not liking the weird vibe she sensed between her boyfriend and the Isle girl.

Ben stared at Audrey, hoping she wasn’t about to do what he thought she was.

“Yeah,” she went on not letting her answer. “You know what? I totally do not blame you for your mother trying to kill my parents and stuff.”

Mal’s eyes widened, not believing the princess would do this on their first day and not even after an hour of getting there. She kept her cool as Audrey kept up her fake smiles.

“Oh, my mom’s Aurora,” as if they couldn’t figure that out on their own.

“Sleeping Beauty,” they both said simultaneously, Mal’s temper starting to fray.

“Yeah, I’ve heard the name. You know, I totally do not blame you for your great grandfather for trying to invade the Moor, a magical land he had no business in,” Mal replied, figuring two could play at that game.

The fake smile and arrogant look falling right off of Audrey’s face as she was reminded of her family’s part in the story.

“I further don’t blame your grandfather for cutting off my mother’s wings in order to climb the royal social ladder to become king. How did that happen again? Your great grandfather totally bypassed his own daughter for the throne and gave it to whatever guy, royal or not, could kill Maleficent? That’s what your great grandfather sold her for, right? ‘Proof of the death of the winged creature?’” Not that he actually did. Clearly.”

That bitch.

The princess was incensed, how dare this filthy Isle kid talk about her family with such disrespect. What did she know about royal marriages? She walked closer in what she thought was a menacing manner but Mal stood her ground and was ready to beat the hell out of her first royal.

The other three Isle stepped back, knowing it was about to be a blood bath and hoped that Ben had
some princess remover because Audrey was about to stain the perfectly manicured lawn and driveway.

_Not even an hour here and we’re about to be expelled,_

bemoaned Evie but it wasn’t like the princess didn’t deserve it, so she accepted her fate.

_My mother will understand. I’ll inherit the brothel; I’ll be fine._

“Well that was all a long time ago, right Audrey?” Ben interrupted before things got out of hand. He felt an animalistic anger simmer under his skin, his clothes becoming hot and almost unbearable. His fingers itched as if his nails wanted to erupt from the tips. He couldn’t believe Audrey had the audacity to behave in such a way. He kept his breathing even, keeping his anger at bay.

Sensing her boyfriend was upset, she let it go.

“Water under the bridge,” she sang, smiled as big as she could to placate Ben.

Mal rolled her eyes but said nothing, sort of disappointed she couldn’t at least get one punch in, to wipe that arrogant smirk off of Audrey’s perfect pink princess face.

“But just to give you a warning, there are several kids from noble families that go here. Cinderella’s son…”

“But we’re all normal ordinary people, nothing to be nervous about,” Ben tried to be assuring, wishing his girlfriend would just shut up.

“Who all happen to be children of Kings and Queens?” Mal asked, trying to get their easy camaraderie back before Audrey ruined it.

“That’s true!” Audrey would not stay quiet. “Our royal blood goes back hundreds of years,” she boasted as she tried to put Ben’s arm around her, to further drive home that they were together. Clearly these girls from the Isle needed reminding.

Crown Prince Ben wasn’t having it, getting impatient with Audrey’s passive aggressive behavior and took his arm back. She tried not to flinch and show the island kids her feelings were bruised.

“Oh your mother’s side, right? Unless Stefan was prince of the sheep, I don’t think he had any real royal connection other than defrauding a dying king into kingship,” Mal bit vindictively.

If Audrey had any magical blood, Mal would have hit the floor dead with her deathly look. She was further infuriated that her three brutish friends were all smirking and trying not to laugh.

Carlos loved it when Mal cut mean girls down to size. He smiled at Audrey as to say, _You fucked with the wrong fae, bitch._

“Doug!” Ben was never so happy to see a band member as he was certain another snide comment from either girl was going to start a blood war.

“Guys, this is Doug Albern. He is going to help you with your class schedules, escort you to your uniform fittings, and then to medical.”

“Medical?” Carlos asked, not liking the sound of that.

“Yes, just a routine physical. Make sure you guys are all up to date with vaccinations and all. It’s
school policy,” Ben said apologetically, knowing he hated visiting the doctor as much as the next guy.

“Doug, will also show you around campus,” Ben cut in before Audrey could make some cruel remark about visiting a doctor. He also knew there were little to no medical facilities on the Isle, so it very well may be each teen’s first doctor’s visit. In addition to vaccines, he needed to know if they were healthy and what state they are in given the harsh life of the island.

“So if you have any questions…”

“Ask Doug,” Audrey interrupted him, not wanting the Isle kids, especially the purple haired one, to be near Ben unnecessarily.

“I’ll see you later, ok?” he officially said to all of them but his eyes zoned in on Mal.

Audrey had enough and forcefully took Ben, they had student council duties and they were going to be late.

Doug looked at his clip board, not sure why the situation got awkward and he started to regret volunteering. But he had college applications to bulk up and no royal parents to donate a tourney field to get him in.

“I’m Doug,” he repeated, certain they had forgotten his name already. They always did. He finally got a good look at the four and was he surprised at how attractive all of them were. They were sizing him up, which didn’t take long as he was short of stature as a dwarf. He felt a bit like they were considering whether or not to eat him.

He wasn’t sure what he was expecting, but the beautiful girl with deep azure hair sauntering up to him wasn’t it.

Evie smirked, boys were so easy and she was certain she was going to have a great time at Auradon Prep.

“I’m Evie,” she introduced herself in a deep sultry voice, Jay grinning in the background. While most would be jealous of their girlfriend flirting, he always thought it was hilarious as she never took any of them seriously.

Poor bastard

Mal and Carlos chuckled almost evilly as well, Evie always entertaining when she strung a boy along.

“So your classes,” his voice broke and he tried to remain calm. “You all will need to take placement test for most of them, but there are a few electives you might be interested in: History of Woodsmen and Pirates, Safety Rules for the Internet, Art…” he trailed off when Mal came closer and bent down to read his list. He had never been so close to two beautiful girls and couldn’t help but stare at them, wide eyed and afraid to speak less his voice break some more.

All of them look like they could kick my ass no problem.

Doug wondered what it meant that he liked the idea more than he thought he ought to.

He immediately looked away and down when he caught Carlos’ stare and instinctively knew he had done something wrong.
“I’ll take art,” Mal said, not noticing the exchange between Doug and her boyfriend. It was the first time she felt like she just might like Auradon Prep and was excited about the prospect of a class that consisted solely of art.

“Right, awesome,” Doug noted it but backed away to keep his distance and tried to make it seem natural and casual. “Let me show you to your dorms, you’ll probably want to rest a bit and get settled before all the boring administrative stuff.”

“Lead the way Doug,” Mal commanded, the other three getting behind her.

He walked through the cavernous dorm, the four never seeing such a grand house and couldn’t believe it used to be someone’s residence.

“This used to be King Adam’s country home before he converted into a school.”

He rattled a few more facts about the school and he hadn’t heard any of them for a few minutes. He suddenly stopped and turned, wondering if they had wandered off or ditched him.

He was startled when he bumped into them, they were right behind him the whole time and they weren’t prepared for him to stop so suddenly. He mumbled an apology, wondering how they were so light footed, he didn’t hear them at all. That made the four all that more unsettling.

“So Auradon Prep pretty much houses and teaches every royal child in the UKA,” Doug started the tour again.

“And whose royal child are you?” Mal asked, curious and with no malice. She tried to think of what stories she had heard of any royal dwarves but none were coming to mind.

“No ones, I’m one of the few scholarship kids. My dad got an in with Snow White as my sponsor but I had to take all these tests and stuff to qualify.”

None of them were exactly sure what a scholarship was (Dragon Hall open to anyone on the Isle), but it sounded like Doug wasn’t the normal type to go to Auradon so maybe they could find a friend in a fellow outsider. But if his father was an associate with Snow White, and given his stature then that meant he was probably a son or nephew of one of the “Famous Seven.” If true, then they were surprised given how much the Seven helped a Queen of a territory of Auradon that Doug would need a special recommendation. The school ought to have thrown an acceptance letter at him.

“You guys came at a good time, it’s before the rush of students come during move-in week.”

“Not all the students are already here?” Evie asked, wondering how there were so many to welcome them if school hadn’t started.

“No, only the student council, marching band, and athletes get early access to the school. Try outs for sports and the band get early practice for tourney games. Student council meets to vote on stuff. School officially starts in two weeks.”

“What’s tourney?” Jay cut in, liking the sound of sports.

“It’s Auradon’s most popular sport. I’m not super familiar with it as I don’t play, but there’s a ball you move around with sticks, the players have to get it into a goal while holding a shield and racing past the ‘kill zone’ where they can be pelted with air cannon balls. There’s a bunch of rules of when you can throw the ball to get into the goal and how many steps you can take when you have the ball. Once it’s time for dinner, I can introduce you to some of the other band members, they know more than me. There’s soccer if you prefer. There’s also cross-country, rowing, and dressage for fall
sports. Basketball and swords and shields for winter. Baseball and track in the spring. So here is your room, ladies. This is an en-suite, so you get your own bathroom.”

“Where’s our room?” Carlos asked, assuming he’d be sharing with Jay and hoping it was close by.

“The boy’s dorm is one floor up. You guys can visit each other’s rooms, but if there is co-ed occupation you have to keep the doors open and no visitations after curfew.”

Each of the four wore matching confused faces, wondering why they had such weird rules.

“It’s to make sure no one’s tempted to have sex,” he volunteered the answer to their unasked question, shrugging his shoulders as it was a stupid rule as if they weren’t tempted to have sex regardless. At least, he spoke for himself.

“Why?”

Doug wasn’t sure what he didn’t understand and didn’t know how to answer. Didn’t every adult ever not want teenagers to be tempted into sex?

“This is great, we’ll see you guys in an hour?” Mal avoided the conversation since Doug clearly was not going to explain things.

“Yes, in an hour I’ll come and get you guys for your uniform fitting and show you more around campus. I’ll then take you guys to administration to work out placement test schedules and then there is medical to finish,” he rambled out, wondering if maybe it was too much to do in one day. But it was the schedule Crown Prince Ben had set, so he was going to follow it.

The girls waved the boys goodbye, taking in their spacious dorm and wondering if all the other kids got something so nice. Besides fitting two people comfortably, there was enough room for each to have their own desks and a large screen tv donned the wall. There was a perfect view of the gardens and it was well lit with natural light. They wondered if they would get used to the amount of light but both girls quickly pulled the curtains so they wouldn’t have to put their sunglasses back on.

The four poster beds with rose print canopies were cloud soft, finer than even the beds at Fleur de Pomme. There was a welcome basket of goodies for them, waiting on their bed. It looked like shower supplies and the school handbook.

There was also a basket of food, thankfully not what was in the limo. It looked to be real food, a cheese spread, bread, and even dried meats.

“They are pulling out all the stops if they’re serving meat,” Evie cooed as she helped herself.

Meat only being eaten on special occasions on the Isle and to only those who could either afford it or knew how to hunt.

“Go, take a shower,” Mal dismissed Evie while they finished their food, who had looked like she would just die if she didn’t get to shower first. Running water was a rarity on the Isle, most having to get their water from a well. Bathing was a chore in itself when they had to haul the water to their tub and wait for it to warm. They had heard about showers and always wondered what it would be like to have constant hot water they could get with just the turn of a tap.

Evie squealed in excitement, gathering her shower things and running to the shower before Mal changed her mind.

Mal decided to kick off her boots and plopped onto the bed. She idly took the book and started to
read and nibbled on crackers, wondering how many rules could there be for it to be so thick.

It wasn’t until she got to the “Moral Standards” section did she understand why Doug was so confused.

“What?!”
Chapter 4

Ben kept the genial smile on his lips until he was out of sight of the Isle Four, he rounded them to a vacant room and pulled Audrey in.

“What was that?” he asked, smile gone and patience clearly run out once they had privacy.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Audrey tried to play dumb. It wasn’t often Ben was angry at her, but when he was it was slightly terrifying, he always seemed to grow bigger and his voice took on a deeper resonance.

“Bringing up her mother, was that really necessary?”

“What? I just realized who she was and wanted to let her know there was no ill will.”

“Spare me, I’m not one of your insipid sycophants on the cheerleading squad. What you did was vindictive and mean.”

Audrey huffed, offended on her friends’ behalf and annoyed that Ben wouldn’t just let it go.

What is the big deal? They’re just a bunch of Isle trash. Not worth getting all worked up over.

“Audrey, this is my first royal proclamation and I want this to go well. This isn’t some half assed scheme where I woke one day and thought ‘maybe I’ll invite Four Isle kids to the school and just hope it all works out.’ This is months of planning and work. And it’ll be years of more work to reach my ultimate goal. If you can’t be gracious as a lady of the court ought to be, then I don’t need you there with me.”
The threat of cutting her out raised the alarms and made her flinch. She almost ruffled at the insinuation she was less than the perfect picture of a courtly princess. Sure he was mad about how it went today, and it was clear he wasn’t going to give up on his weird little project anytime soon, but to shut her out because of an Isle brat was particularly insulting. If she wasn’t around, then who knew what wiles those Isle girls would try on her Bennie Boo. She had heard of how easy those kind of girls were, and given how he had looked at Maleficent’s daughter, she wasn’t about to leave him alone with them and be tempted by what she as a princess could not offer.

She had designs on being Queen, and she wasn’t going to let some island upstart ruin that. She especially was not about to play stepmother to blue or purple haired bastards.

“I’m sorry,” she finally plead out, hating she had to eat crow to get back on his good side. “Old family grudges die hard,” she used to excuse her behavior. It wasn’t as if she were jealous of those Isle girls, especially not the amethyst haired fae, but they couldn’t be trusted regardless; the boys included. They all had villain blood. Until this weird phase ran its course and Ben came back to his senses, she would have to look after him.

“It’s hard when you grow up hearing how awful things were for my parents,” she tried to sound demure and contrite. She ran her fingers up and down his lapel; hoping touching him would be distracting.

Ben sighed and accepted her reasoning. It had to be hard for her too, it couldn’t be easy knowing what her parents went through, not to mention half the country, and then the daughter of who caused all that pain and heartache waltzed into school. He should have considered Audrey’s feelings before pulling her into the project at all.

He also braced for when the public at large found out exactly whom he chose, he knew it would not be a universally popular decision.

“I’m sorry too,” he said, but he truly meant it and his voice softened back to its normal gentle tone. “I know it can’t be easy. But it’s not easy for them either. They aren’t their parents and they shouldn’t be faulted for the sins of their mothers or father. They came here for a better life, and I want to make sure they get that chance.”

“And I’ll be here to help you every step of the way,” Audrey smiled warmly, putting on the façade of the dutiful and supportive girlfriend.

Right between you and those tramps.

Ben smiled back, so glad she was on board despite the rough start and they both went to the student council meeting arm in arm. They had homecoming and all sorts of events to help plan for the upcoming school year.

Evie was just as disappointed by the strict rules of Auradon Prep, but she supposed she should have expected it. With how bad the pregnancy and infant mortality rate on the Isle was, surely the school wanted to avoid that at all costs.

Plus with all her mother taught her about how import succession was for royal houses, casting any legitimacy of children into doubt would doom a princess’ prospects. Furthermore, no prince or future king would want to raise someone else’s bastard. Ravenna’s insistence that Evie remain a virgin was not just a play to nab a prince; it was something drilled into every royal since puberty.
Mal took a long hot shower but even that luxury was not enough to temper her anger.

Out of habit, she brushed her hair and put into tight twin French braids, so there would be no hair for anyone to grab in case of a confrontation. Besides Audrey, there wasn’t anyone for Mal to fight but she was too distracted to consider leaving it down. She was, however, mumbling angrily to herself about how they had no real privacy or freedom as she did her hair.

Evie was slightly amused at what exactly Mal was angry at.

*She wants to have sex with Carlos so bad. I almost feel bad for him because she is going to be so aggressive when it finally happens.*

She had to suppress a smirk and laugh at the thought of poor innocent Carlos being at the mercy of Mal’s sex drive, and it had nothing to do with what her mother taught her. She was pretty certain if Mal caught her sniggering, hellfire would burst through their gorgeous dorm suite. She wasn’t worried about Carlos, however, because her little brother by choice would happily go along with whatever Mal wanted. And from the marks she had seen her fae friend leave on him and that he loved to show off, he was more than willing and eager as well.

Thankfully Mal had calmed down by the time they got to their fittings, although the glower didn’t leave her face until she saw Carlos. Her mood lightened considerably in his presence and she immediately reached for his hand, both happy to openly do simple couple-y stuff in the open.

She felt particularly bold that afternoon, and pulled him close for a quick kiss. Something she definitely read was against the school handbook.

*To hell with the rules, school hasn’t started yet.*

His wide smile made it all worth it.

Mal was intent on taking advantage of what freedom they did have before classes became in session.

Both girls had laughed that all Jay was wearing was the fluffy cotton robe the school provided when they walked to the fittings together. He hadn’t brought a change of clothes and hadn’t had time to steal anything.

Doug’s scandalized face when they met up with him so he could escort them through the maze like dorm was priceless.

Jay being Jay, walked through the halls as if he owned the place; he was only upset there were no other girls to flirt with while he showed off his arms and legs. From Evie’s heated stare, she had no problem with his fashion choice.

The tailoring was being held in a study hall that in the coming weeks would usually be filled with students. All the windows had coverings to protect their modesty. In the students’ place, there was a seamstress comparing cloth swatches with her under-tailors and mannequins wearing the different uniforms Auradon had for different seasons and occasions.

Jay and Carlos were a couple rooms down; the school seemed to want to keep the sexes as separate as they could.

“Gee, do you think short sleeves are going to be a problem?” Mal asked Evie flatly and rhetorically as she saw the “summer/spring” uniform.

It was a simple royal blue polo with the school insignia embroidered in gold on the left breast. The
skirt was a plain khaki and there was a choice of either blue or yellow knee highs. It looked perfect for the fading days of summer as they would probably all perish from heat if they had to wear the wool winter version.

The winter uniform consisted of a navy blazer, a wool tartan skirt with the mix of school colors, and black leggings. While Mal thought a skirt in winter at all was stupid and pants a better option, she probably would have been grateful for the wool back on the island as it was thicker than anything the Isle could produce.

Evie grimaced, knowing Mal preferred to never show her arms. She wasn’t exactly shy, but it was a part of her life she’d rather keep private and never talk about. Both girls were certain they were going to get grilled during medical about the scars and every other thing that made it obvious they came from a harsh life. All things they had no interest in talking about as it ought to be self-explanatory.

“Why are we getting bespoke uniforms?” Mal asked the woman who asked them to remove their bulky leather attire and put on samples to be pinned and fitted to their exact measurement. What was on the mannequins should be good enough.

“This is a premier school for the highest echelon of the Eighteen Kingdoms. We don’t just wear anything off the rack,” the seamstress replied condescendingly and acted as if suggesting wearing something non-tailored was blasphemy.

“The students are in the public eye, they can’t be seen in anything ill fitting. And with tailoring, we can show off everyone’s best assets and will flatter their body shape,” her apprentice said a bit more gently, she also didn’t come from money and thought it was an unneeded expense but it helped pay her rent.

“I don’t suppose I could skip the summer uniform? Or get a long sleeved version?” Mal asked, trying to work with them. She was certain her scars were not part of the image the school wanted to project.

“Young Lady, this school has a proud tradition of turning out the most refined ladies and exceptional gentlemen. There is an expectation of excellence and that includes appearance. Uniformity and conformity are paramount. We do not bend the rules for…newcomers.”

Mal and Evie were sure she wanted to use some more derogatory word and all Mal could do was roll her eyes.

Oh well, I tried.

She unceremoniously shrugged off her top, bottoms, and the undershirt she had on; she was only in her linen binding for her chest and simple underwear. The Isle didn’t really provide bras and she wasn’t busty enough to really warrant one. There were some that Evie had created but she knew the school certainly wouldn’t allow the type of underwear meant for whores.

Evie followed her example and stripped down to her underthings, bracing herself for the tension. Seeing the deep scars that ran down Mal’s arms and stopped at her elbows had rendered the Auradon tailors speechless.

“We’ll see…we’ll see…what we can do…” the tailor stuttered out, whispering something to her apprentice and the younger woman scuttled out the room to some errand.

“Thanks!” Mal stressed sarcastically, smiling as big as she could, mocking the older woman.

The older woman seemed to have been shaken out of her previous stupor and hyper focused on what
they were wearing. Apparently even their underthings, things no one would see, were found wanting.

With a snap of her fingers, another underling appeared from nowhere with a notepad.

“Make sure we find more appropriate under garments for them both. We can’t have these…rags poking through and ruining the silhouette.”

Mal itched for her knife, the one that lay hidden in a sleeve pocket in her top.

I’d be able to end her in five seconds, no problem.

Evie recognized the look on her friend’s face, she wondered if the seamstress could tell Mal was fantasizing about her murder.

They were told to hold still and that’s what they did for over an hour.

The fitting took longer than either of them could imagine. They didn’t understand why the school had so many pieces to their uniforms and had several for different occasions. The seamstress went over the dress code, it all sounded so much worse coming from her than reading it in the manual.

Summer/spring and winter casual uniform
Summer/spring and winter dress uniform
Separate dress uniforms for ceremonies
Second tier dress uniforms for ceremonies

The seamstress went over the sets, the mannequins perfectly showcasing the crisp lines and clean profiles. Then there was a dress code for how to wear the uniforms and exactly when they could wear what.

Nothing an inch shorter than fingertips when kneeling. No shoe heel may be more than one inch. No ornamental hair accessories: only scrunchies, hair ties, and headbands in the approved colors and patterns may be worn. No excess or extravagant jewelry unless attending a formal function. Shirts and blouses cannot be unbuttoned beyond the first and must always be tucked in and ironed. No undergarments may be seen at any time, nor may they be of a bright color as to be seen through. If wearing an undershirt, it must be white.

Gods, they even dictate what kind of underwear we’re allowed to have.

Summer and Spring uniforms are to be worn September 28 – December 9 and March 27 – June 2. Winter uniforms from January 3 – March 10. Unless there are weather extremes that extend or shorten any season. Casual uniforms are for every day. Dress uniforms are for when a member of the reigning royal family visit, not counting His Royal Highness, Crown Prince Ben of course. There is a special dress uniform for special school ceremonies and a second one that involves ceremonies that include the royal family.

She rattled on about the different royal regalia and exact placements. Mal and Evie tuned that out as they weren’t royal and didn’t need to worry about that.

Boys may not have hair length below the collar, ears and eyebrows.

That’s going to piss Jay off.

Hair must always be neat and out of one’s face. “Fad” haircuts are not allowed. No “unnatural hair colors.” Ties are to be tied appropriately at all times; the only acceptable knots are the Windsor, half
Windsor, Pratt, and Balthus.

*Are we supposed to know what those mean?*

Bow ties are not allowed.

*Oh gee, that’s the one thing I was looking forward too. What am I to do?*

Evie had to bite her lip, watching Mal’s face shift in funny contortions, she could basically read her friend’s mind. She was careful not to move too much lest she want to be pricked but she thought she might pass out from not trying to laugh.

No headgear is allowed in the buildings. Only hats may be worn outdoors on school grounds.

*Jay is going to be doubly pissed.*

“We’ll have to book you an appointment to change your hair color. I think blonde would suit you nicely. A rich raven for you,” she said to Mal and Evie respectively, trying to think of what would go best with their skin tone and eyes, never understanding why the youth of the era would do such damage to their hair for silly colors.

“This is our natural hair color,” Mal told her, not wanting to change.

“You can’t be serious,” eying the deep purple, never have seeing it on a person other than celebrities or students from the public schools.

Clearly the woman had never met any fae before.

“I could pull up my skirt and prove it to you,” Mal offered, acting as if butter wouldn’t melt in her mouth.

Evie and the apprentice both coughed, trying not to giggle at Mal’s audacity. It took a moment for the seamstress to understand what Mal was offering, she then looked completely offended and scandalized as her face kept opening and closing like a fish.

“No, I’m sure that’s alright.”

And that conversation and all other talk ended there.

Mal was happy they were able to find a compromise and she was given three-quarter sleeves. It was enough to hide the scars and apparently they had used them in the past when there were “modest” students whose religion or parents insisted they could not wear the arm bearing shirts. Her happiness was short lived when she realized the tailor was being difficult when she didn’t need to be,

*Why didn’t she give me the option in the first place?!*

Not that Evie would ever say so out loud, but she thought Mal was going to get pre-mature wrinkles if she kept scowling the whole time they were in Auradon.

They were finally done and reunited with the boys. Jay was dressed in the sample uniform, not allowed to parade through the rest of the school practically naked. Normally he would have been smirking at being mischievous but he had a rare glower.

“What’s the matter?” Evie asked her boyfriend.

“He has to cut his hair,” Carlos sang lightly, mocking his friend. Jay punched his arm but that just
made him laugh harder.

“Oh no,” Evie said, slightly sad his gorgeous locks would be chopped off. She ran her hands through them, trying to get as much time with them before they were gone.

“Did they try to make you dye your hair?” Mal asked her boyfriend, thinking he’d have the same issue.

“Yeah, they made me an appointment with a stylist for the weekend.”

“Why are you dying your hair? It’s your natural hair color, they can’t make you change it. The rules specifically say no ‘unnatural’ hair colors.”

“I tried to tell him it mine but he wouldn’t believe me. I didn’t know how to convince him.”

“Just do what Mal did,” Evie suggested.

“Which is what?”

“Offer to show your pubes.”

That cheered Jay up immediately and he cackled for a good five minutes. Carlos was a little less amused as he didn’t want anyone who wasn’t him to see his girlfriend’s intimate parts, but had to admit it was rather ingenious and laughed at the thought of how offended the Auradon tailor must have been.

“Hey, it’s definitive proof our hair color is our natural one, for all three of us,” Mal insisted.

“Gross,” Evie and Jay said simultaneously, not wanting to know that about Carlos.

He looked at them incredulously as if they didn’t have pubic hair and why was his weirder.

“Well that saves me from the stylists, looks like you’re still going for the big chop big guy,” Carlos rubbed salt into the wound as only best friends could.

Jay flipped him off, not wanting to talk about it.

“Aww, want me to come and hold your hand? Bring tissues? Say a few words in condolences?”

Jay had enough and put Carlos in a headlock, neither seriously fighting and just shoving each other until they got to the administrative building.

Doug remained silent, feeling like a fifth wheel in their circle of friends but he had a good laugh, liking the new kids.

The scheduling for their placements tests took all of ten minutes, thankfully. They would take the next three days to assess where they were academically and see what classes they should take.

Medical was an ordeal.

Each teen was rather reticent to talk their doctor. They had gone seventeen years without seeing one, nothing hurt at the moment, and they weren’t bleeding. What exactly did they need a doctor for?
“Lets just start with the basics,” the ancient doctor who looked like she delivered God. “Name?”

“Maleficent Bertha LeFay the Second. Call me Mal.”

“Age?”

“17”

“Height?”

“5’2’”

“Date of last menses?”

“What?”

“Your period…moon blood?”

“Oh that. I don’t know.”

“Sexually active?”

“Sex is against the rules.”

“And of course teenagers always follow the rules.”

Mal rolled her eyes, not in the mood for sarcasm.

“Listen ‘Mal’, this is patient doctor privilege. Anything you tell me will remain between us. I don’t care if you’re sexually active or not, I just need to know for medical purposes. There are STIs, you could be pregnant if you don’t know when your last period was.”

“I’m not pregnant. I’m not sexually active. My period just doesn’t come regularly so I never track.”

She had no idea what an STI was, didn’t sound like something she’d have.

The doctor made some notes, thinking it was might be due to being underweight as there were few things someone as young as she would have such irregular periods. Still, the teen was from the island, which if reports were accurate had no oversight, no birth control, and teens would be teens.

“I would like you to take a pregnancy test anyway, just to make me feel better.”

Mal’s eyes rolled so hard she felt they would fall out of her head and scowled. She knew when she was being bullshitted and that doctor didn’t believe her. Her first instinct was to fight, the woman didn’t know her and shouldn’t make assumptions. But in the end, she went with it because it wasn’t worth arguing, she knew the test would come back negative.

Gross, I have to pee on this?

Mal had never seen a pregnancy test before, an innocuous pink stick she was told she had to urinate on. At least she was given enough privacy to go to the bathroom by herself and since she was in there anyway, she also had to fill a cup.

Going to the doctors was disgusting.

“Alright, dearie. It’s negative. That’s good. Just know that I’m not here regularly, a nurse is. So she
won’t have those tests in stock. Just as they don’t have any condoms or birth control. You would have to go off campus for those.”

Mal gritted her teeth, off campus was probably well out of her reach as she had no car or carriage and she doubted the school would give her a ride to the local chemist to get condoms or birth control. She knew what condoms were as some of the guards that visited the brothel insisted on wearing them, not trusting the whores to keep themselves clean or risk illegitimate children. Other clients preferred not to have them at all and thought any disease or children were the whore’s issue. The working girls preferring the former as sexual diseases and unwanted pregnancies were rampant. Birth control she was a little fuzzier on, as the guards had no real working knowledge of it and since it was medicinal, hard to procure. From what she did know about it, it would have been a godsend to the brothel and the Isle as a whole, as it was safer than tansy tea.

“Could you give me birth control now?” Mal asked hopeful, figuring the doctor would fill her in on what it was and how to use it.

“Sorry, I’m not equipped to give a gynecological exam today and even if I were, you’re underage. I can’t prescribe those kinds of medications without consent of your guardian.”

The doctor didn’t agree with the school’s policy to teach abstinence only or Auradon’s at large prohibition of birth control to minors but she respected their rules and law of the land.

Well there went that hope, Maleficent would never and she’d never ask her.

The doctor then proceeded to ask her questions about her from head to toe, she had never met anyone who asked so many questions. It would probably be faster and less embarrassing to write a memoir and hand it to the doctor.

The doctor seemed to sense that she was holding something back, so she asked intimate questions about her sex life; asking specifics that she couldn’t evade with half answers.

“Even if it’s not penetrative sex, you could still be infected.”

“I trust my boyfriend,” Mal snarled, angry she would even hint that Carlos was less than honorable.

“I’m sure you do, dearie. But I’ve treated too many young ladies who utterly trusted their own prince charming. Open up,” she ignored Mal’s temper, not the first surly teen she’s ever encountered. She stabbed a cotton swab in the girl’s mouth, needing the samples for the various tests she could run. Mal sputtered and choked at the invasion. If she were on the Isle, the doctor would have lost that hand but she refrained.

“OK, we’ll need blood samples. We’ll do a full panel in addition to STI testing. What’s your domination arm?”

Again, she had no idea what she was talking about.

Giving blood samples was not fun and she was amazed at how arduous a doctor’s visit was. On the Isle, it was only: Are you bleeding? What hurts? If the answer was no then they didn’t come visit. What exactly where they checking for? And how could they tell by blood? Mal hesitated, not wanting to give her blood away. Several of Maleficent’s lessons included safeguarding her blood and hair; the items could be used against her with spells.

“Dearie, either give me your arm and give me a blood sample, or you don’t get to stay here. Auradon Prep has a ‘no exceptions policy’ when it comes to a clean bill of health. And you might as well put this examination gown on. I can leave for you to change if you’re shy.”
Still Mal hesitated, blood was sacred and not meant to be just given away. And why did a bunch of stuff in Auradon require little clothing? But in the end, she wanted to stay and give Auradon Prep a chance. A little blood and risk outweighed having to go back to her mother; if she were expelled, it very well may be a death sentence as her mother didn’t tolerate failure. She gave in and undressed to change into the gown. Not for the first time that day, an adult had gasped at the scars that ran her arms.

“Dearie, what is this?” the doctor asked as she examined her arms, seeing what the damage was; making mental notes.

“I would have thought a doctor would know what scars were,” Mal answered deadpan.

“This is not the time to be sarcastic,” the doctor admonished. “Where did you get these?”

“Gee, I grew up in a prison filled with murders and thieves…where could they have come from?” Mal acted as if she were truly thinking of it. She didn’t want to admit the scars were of her own mother’s hand. “I think we can move on, I’m not on the island anymore and we’ll make sure I don’t go back. Isn’t that right doctor?”

She wanted to ask more, demand the teen tell her everything but she saw the stubborn look she was giving. Mal wasn’t going to tell her, on that she wouldn’t move but she’d have to make a report. She didn’t know what good it would do, Mal was right; she was no longer on the island and it wasn’t like they would bother charging Maleficent with child endangerment.

“Are there any others?”

“What does it matter?”

“I need to note their depth, length, and age. Make sure they didn’t do any permanent damage other than superficial. I also need to document any instances of abuse.”

“You’re the boss, lady,” Mal didn’t have it in her to fight. It wasn’t like they were going to confront Maleficent about them, it wasn’t as if they could punish her any further.

The doctor saw the scars on her back, angry raised red ribbons that went from shoulder blades to just above her lower back. Whoever had done it, they were precise and at least Mal had treatment as there didn’t seem to be any damage from infection.

She took pictures that protected Mal’s modesty but still showed the damage. She had no idea how the Crown was going to deal with it.

There were more questions and more tests, Mal was not impressed with the little hammer to her knees or what the doctor was feeling for on her stomach and other places, but they were finally done.

“Alright dearie, given your weight and the environment of the Isle, I’m going to recommend a bland diet and nutritional supplements until you get acclimated to the richer food the mess hall provides and to help with your weight. Otherwise you’re healthy,” the doctor seemed slightly surprised by her diagnosis.

That sounded even less appetizing than the limo food if possible. But at least they were going to be fed, she was grateful for that at least. The lunch spread had unsettled her stomach but she wasn’t as sick as before.

Mal was just pleased it was finally over with.
The Four were again reunited and none of them had a good time of it.

“Ugh, I feel so exposed and violated,” Carlos made a face. “Why would anyone want to go to the doctor?”

They all agreed, not liking how personal the questions got and why they were touched in random places.

It was dinner time and they were all led to the mess, a massive dining hall where goblin waiters took orders and served them food. Only a few tables were in use as school hadn’t started. Doug introduced them to his band friends.

“Everyone shut the hell up and listen!” Doug shouted at the table.

The Four were a little shocked at how he talked to them, but further surprised when they all gave him the finger.

Doug flipped them off right back.

“Love you guys too. Anyway, this is Mal, Jay, Evie, and Carlos. They’re new, please at least act like you’re civilized and not totally awkward.”

“In your dreams asshole,” someone from the end responded. The table laughed and Doug continued his introductions.

“Guys, this is Addy, Danny, Deven, J.P., and Shane: brass section, the only ones worth knowing.”

“Whoop whoop!”

“Booooooo.”

“Hisssssssss”

There were so many reactions happening at once, the Four Isle kids were amused.

“This is Tyler, Tony, Algae, Kayla, Jeff, and Kirara: percussion, otherwise known as the useless members.”

“You’re just mad because the trumpet’s importance is made up and the tuba’s tempo doesn’t matter.”

“Tony seems to think his random flailing is a substitute for a beat, don’t listen to him. Next are Louis, Megan, Mark, Jennifer, Dwayne, and Jesse: woodwind, also don’t matter because no one can hear them over my awesome trumpet solos. Thank you Joey Tempest.”

They answered with food being thrown at Doug.

“And finally, we have Marylse and Ralph who randomly play electric bass and guitar, not sure why or how they’re in a marching band. Guess we felt sorry for them.”

“Pretty sure it’s because we slept with your mom and she called in a favor.”

“Well I made sure your mom swallowed so you won’t be getting any siblings.”

The utter disrespect they all showed to each other was surprising but it seemed to make up most of their friendship as they all laughed and acted as if it were normal.
Each of the Isle kids sat down, then were bombarded with questions.

They were simple and safe questions like how their day was, what dorm were they in, what curricular were they in to be in school early, but it was all at once and overwhelming.

“Guys, I told you not to be weird and awkward. They just got here, lay off,” warned Doug.

The goblins seemed to be aware that they were under strict diets as they didn’t even ask what they wanted, they just poured them water and went about their duties.

“Hey, they’re new and interesting. If they wanted to be left alone they should look more boring,” Mal thought was Marylse but wasn’t 100% sure.

“That doesn’t even make any sense.”

“You don’t make any sense.”

“I’m so sorry for these heathens,” Doug directed at Mal. She only smiled,

“You guys remind me of the gang activity on the Isle.”

She meant it as a compliment but by their stunned silence, she thought she had said something wrong.

That silenced the table, all of them at once realizing who the Four were. They had heard rumors that four villain kids would be attending, but it just dawned on them that’s who they were talking about. The Four seemed innocuous and they thought they would all be instantly poisoned or bespelled but so far the new teens where quiet, polite, and taking their enthusiasm in stride.

“Soooo…how about them Cavs?” a band member asked about the local professional tourney team, the Cavaliers, to break the awkward silence.

“Speaking of tourney,” Doug interjected, “Jesse, why don’t you explain the game. Jay was interested in it earlier.”

Jesse was more than happy to talk ad nauseam about the sport. It was rather simple but only Carlos and Jay were interested.

“You could probably get a try out, they’re always looking for strong and fast players,” eying Jay’s muscles and Carlos looked quick. “A majority of last year’s varsity team left because they graduated.”

“So I know this is probably rude,” Addy, Mal was definitely sure her name was Addy, began.

“Don’t,” Doug warned but he was ignored.

“But I heard you ripped Audrey a new one. Please tell us all about it and in great detail,” she completely ignored Doug.

Mal quirked an eyebrow, not sure exactly what she was talking about and how they would know so quickly as it happened just that morning.

“Britney from student council, which you never want to say anything in front of because she’s a terrible gossip – clearly – but anyway, she said she overheard the you and the Princess talking and Princess Bitch was doing what she does best and you shut her down with her less than 100% royal pedigree,” Addy expounded.
“Oh I wish I was there,” another member said, Mal couldn’t remember so many names.

“I wouldn’t say I tore her a new one,” Mal began, thinking of when she would literally beat down those who would disrespect her on the Isle and that Audrey got off lightly. “But yeah, I reminded her of Stefan’s more humble origins.”

“About time someone did, that bitch…”

The table all nodded their agreement.

“What’s her deal anyway?” Mal asked, wanting to know why the girl had it out for her. While their parents had issues, that didn’t mean they automatically had to. She had been fully prepared to let bygones be bygones and start anew. Audrey ruined that not an hour after them getting there.

“OK, so you know how Stefan only got the kingship because he said he killed Maleficent, right?” Addy paused, wondering if she had done a faux pas by mentioning the girl’s mother by name and even bringing up the story but Mal didn’t seem phased. She was well aware of her mother’s role in the war.

“Yeah.”

“Well, before Auroria had merged with Corona and Redempton to become South Riding, Auroria was a strict primogeniture absolute monarchy.” Addy went on. “Like hardcore Salic Law tradition. So what the reigning king says goes. No council, no parliament, just whatever the king wants. No female, even if she’s the only legitimate progeny left of the reigning King is allowed to inherit the throne. Barbaric, I know. So King Henry decrees that whoever kills Maleficent, gets the crown and his daughter. He totally bypassed his brother and his brother’s sons, cutting the cadet branch of House Dornröschens off completely. Because of absolute divine right to rule, they just have to deal. **But** when the War of the Fae happens, it proved that Stefan lied. So this makes him hella unpopular. He barely won the war and it was because of a prince from the neighboring Corona, Prince Phillip, and the help from King Adam that Maleficent was finally captured and banished. So the war is over, dust settles. That’s when Prince Edmund, prince du sang, Henry’s brother, makes a challenge to now King Phillip and Queen Aurora’s reign. They say the crown belongs to Edmund because Stefan never actually killed Maleficent and therefore had no right to the throne under Henry’s edict. It also didn’t help that Stefan had gone a little crazy because of his daughter’s banishment and probable paranoia at being found out. Queen Leah got super sick as well but pulled through. So there’s accusations flying everywhere how they’re unfit on top of everything and there’s this whole succession crisis to the Aurorian throne.”

“I still don’t get what her problem with me is. If anything, she needs to be mad at her grandfather for lying,” Mal wondered, again all those things were not her fault.

“Princess Audrey think ill of her own family? Never. She talks about them like they’re these saints who never did anything wrong. Not even after all the evidence came forward to Stefan’s crimes.”

“She’s called Princess still, not sure why she’s such a bitch,” Carlos said.

“It’s really just a courtesy title. Something King Adam let all the former ruling families keep, rather than call them Lord or Lady Paramounts. And the only reason Audrey’s family gets to keep those titles is because they made a deal with King Adam to join in unification. The cadet Dornröschens didn’t want to, they were for independence. So basically, miss Princess Audrey owes everything her family **still** has to someone else, namely House Bourbon.”

“Oh god, we just have to hope that Ben meets someone else at university. If we have to call her
Queen one day, I’m moving to Agrabah,” someone from percussion bemoaned.

“Yeah we have no idea what he sees in her. He’s like the nicest guy ever and she’s…”

“A harpy?” Jay added helpfully.

“Bingo.”

Hearing the Auradon Prep marching band talk, it put some puzzle pieces together for Mal. Audrey clearly had a hang up with her own royal blood and didn’t like that Mal was a reminder of her family’s legitimately questionable inheritance. She couldn’t help but roll her eyes that Audrey clearly was too worried over a made up and honorary title. The so called princess was still rich and led a privileged life, what did it matter?

*I almost feel really sorry for Audrey. I feel like if she were talented and smart like Evie, if she knew how to sew, knew beauty tips, and was good at math and science; she wouldn’t need a prince or to be Queen to feel better about herself.*

She was glad to see her blue haired friend fitting in so easily, talking easily with the others. The doubt of whether or not they made the right choice diminishing. Jay made a few jokes and also fit in. He was already charming the female band members, and some of the males as well if their sighing looks were anything to go by. She kept mostly quiet, not sure what to say without seeming harsh or like some island thug. Carlos reached under the table to hold her hand, smiling at her.

It was good, despite the bumpy start; Auradon Prep was going to be good. She had her friends, and potentially new ones like Doug and the rest of the band. Kids that were truly trying to have them fit in.

She didn’t really open up until art was brought up, a few of the band members were also in the creative class. They were more than happy to give her tips on which classes to take and who to avoid.

They didn’t even question how the Four’s food was different from theirs, the nutritionist adamant that they follow the doctor’s orders. Most of them recognized the nutritional supplements, thick saccharine shakes that were only prescribed when a student was having weight issues. The others also enjoyed a variety of food, from pizza to spaghetti while the Isle kids were all given boiled chicken, vegetables, and other bland but highly nutritious foods. All kept quiet about how they noticed how almost stick thin the girls were, the boys all but wolfing down their food as if they were afraid it would be taken away from them.

The band was a family and they had all silently promised themselves they would help the Isle kids. They knew what it was like to not be accepted by the royals of Auradon and how lucky they were to find comradery with such an awesome group.

The food wasn’t great – when the doctors said bland food they meant it – but it was plentiful, something the islanders had rarely seen. They were each curious as to what the others ate, everything had an appetizing smell and they had never seen a lot of the foods before. They were still a little culture shocked that meat was not only again presented to them but everyone had some sort of animal protein with their wide variety of meals offered. They felt awkward in the presence of such riches, they even doubted at first the food was meant for them. Perhaps the waiters meant it for one of the royals. The others, however, seemed to think it was a normal everyday occurrence.

Mal wondered if she would ever get used to being among such abundance.
The company of good people made it even better.

Mal eyed a couples tables down, where Audrey was sitting. She saw a glare on the princesses’ face as she talked to her friends; she decided right then that Audrey deserved her pity. She wasn’t going to risk her stay on someone so insecure and petty.

The tourney team and cheerleaders all sat together, all speaking quieter than normal since they were gossiping about the new kids and not wanting to be overheard.

“They were all so rude and just…dirty looking. Like they don’t shower every day,” Audrey said callously.

“They look fine now,” a fellow cheerleader commented.

“Yeah, because they probably had their first shower in a week.”

“I don’t know, they look pretty hot to me,” some mindless tourney goon commented, leering at the new girls. Thinking how great it was to get some new blood, he was so tired of the frigid princesses he had to deal with. His brother was a royal guard and had visited the island, he wondered if either of them worked at the brothel. He couldn’t wait until he turned eighteen, his brother promising to buy his first whore for him for his birthday.

“The long haired one is sooo dreamy. Look at those arms!” a cheerleader cooed.

“I love freckles,” another sighed.

“Their hair is so cool,” one commented on the Isle girls and that was too much for the princess.

“Guys!” Audrey admonished. “These are villain kids. You can’t trust them. That purple haired freak was flirting with Ben. She’s probably a whore like all Isle girls are.”

That got the cheerleaders attention. All worried the gorgeous and exotic new girls would seduce their boyfriends.

“Plus they’re probably witches. They’re undoubtedly taking advantage of Ben’s benevolence and have plans to free their evil parents.”

All their eyes widened, not having thought of that. Crown Prince Ben had made his declaration and they all assumed he knew what he was doing. Plus King Adam had publically supported his son, they wouldn’t be so careless, would they?

“And you all saw that documentary. The Isle is full of rapists. I wouldn’t put it past those two thugs to be the same way. Bad blood will out.”

That had hit a cord with them, growing up fearing boys and their intentions, particularly ones from undesirable backgrounds. Their virginity, they were taught, was the most important thing to bring to their future husbands. No one of means or noble blood would ever wed someone who had been ruined.

The other jocks just rolled their eyes, never having to worry about such a thing; thinking Audrey and the other girls were being over dramatic. Some of the other cheerleaders did as well, not caring about remain “pure” as they were not as nobly born and didn’t have to care as much. They also knew most
of their peers did not adhere to abstaining and it was all a huge ruse.

Still the seeds of doubt where sewn. More doubt was raised when Britney, a daughter of a baron in Auroria and student council member, came in and whispered to them,

“You won’t believe what one of the under apprentices to the seamstress told me.”

Ben sat down with the lead physician he had asked to make a special visit for the Isle kids, along with Professor FéeMarraine. Normally each student had their own personal care physician that they saw before school and got signed off to attend Auradon Prep. But he wanted to make everything as easy for the teens as he could and had the doctors come to the school.

There was also the issue of the press, once they got wind which villain children he had chosen he was certain to hear uproar from the public. He wanted to cloister them in the safety of the campus before exposing them to Auradon at large.

His father had tried to talk him out of it but he wouldn’t be moved. The Four, he thought, were in most need as children of the worst villains. Certainly whom they deemed to be the worst, needed their children taken away from them immediately.

He would find out how right he was.

“Now Ben, this is a peculiar situation that needs to be treated with the utmost respect and discretion. As Crown Prince, you are technically their guardian as they are now wards of the Crown. But you are also their peer and fellow student. I don’t think I need to remind Your Royal Highness that what I’m about to reveal to you is not for anyone else’s ears or for idle gossip?” Dr. Sweets addressed Ben respectfully but the teen needed to know how serious this meeting was.

“Of course not Dr. Sweets. Their medical file is and will remain private and I will not ask personal details outside if they are healthy and their needs,” Ben assured the doctor that he wasn’t going to use the information in the medical chart for anything other than for the teens’ welfare.

The doctor didn’t even question Professor FéeMarraine, knowing she would never do such a thing and as Headmistress the welfare of the students was her responsibility as well.

Dr. Sweets nodded, satisfied with the answer. “They are all underweight with the exception of Jay; he seems rather robust given the situation. They are all on nutritional supplements and a controlled diet. I would like a follow up in a few weeks to check their progress.”

Ben nodded, making mental notes and wanting to do the best he could. He owed it to the teens.

“They have no records of vaccinations, or any medical record of any kind, so we have started them on a primary schedule. We’ll come back in a month for second doses, and the third in a year. Initial tests have come back negative, so overall they are healthy and can attend school and do all activities. If anything comes up in the blood panel, I’ll let you know immediately.”

“That’s good,” Ben sighed in relief.

“There is a…delicate issue we should discuss as well.”

Ben braced himself as he was expecting some sort of bad news. It would be too naive to hope for everything to be fine.
“Two of them, Carlos and Mal, have scars that cause me great concern.”

Ben swallowed hard, eyeing Professor FéeMarraine’s happy mood at the teens’ clean bill of health faltered, motioning for the doctor to continue.

“Carlos has some along his right leg, more and more worse than what I could write off as something he could have gotten being clumsy or a rambunctious little boy.”

“What do you think caused them?”

“Living in a rural area and being a hunter myself, I know exactly what cause them. Bear trap.”

“Bear trap?”

“Yes, the scars are equal distance apart and the indentation shape is typical of bear traps. When I asked him about them, he confirmed he had accidently stepped on one and set it off.”

He offered them photographs that the teen allowed him to take. It was standard procedure to document all cases of abuse, although Carlos was not to be too happy about being pictured, the threat of not being allowed to class without them forced their hands. Mal was the exact same way, according to reports.

“There aren’t bears on the Isle, why would there be bear traps?” Nadine asked, she was a member of the tribunal that banished the villains. They specifically chose that island for its lack of predators.

Seeing the photographs, however, was stark reality of how awful things had been.

“That’s one question, but another is why would a little boy have to get himself out of those traps alone? Those scars are at least eight to ten years old.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean it looks like from the jagged edges and length that someone who wasn’t strong enough to fully open it and engage the lock tried to get him out. So I suspect that they or himself tried to open it as far as they could, and he had to force his leg out the rest of the way and that caused elongated cuts. It’s a miracle he didn’t get sepsis, gangrene, or permanent muscle damage given how there are no doctors on the island.”

Those were tough questions Ben didn’t have any answer to, and it added to the guilt he carried. Nadine looked like she was on the verge of tears.

*Those poor children, what have I done?*

“And Mal?” Ben asked.

“Hers is even more troubling.”

“How?”

“Her cuts are all perfectly symmetrical, almost surgical,” he produced her photos, the red lines on her otherwise pristine skin could not be denied.

“What does that mean?” he couldn’t even begin to imagine.

“It means someone put those cuts on her on purpose.”
Ben was glad he met with Dr. Sweets before dinner because he was certain he would have vomited it. Nadine’s hands shook in horror as she held the photo.

“How could anyone…why would…?” so many questions Ben had and none where closed to being answered. He knew the Isle had been bad, but this bad? How could his father let his go on for twenty years? Why would anyone torture a teenage girl?

“What do we do?”

“I recommend they see a counselor, all four of them. Just because Evilette and Jay don’t have scars doesn’t mean they made it out unscathed,” speaking from experience, recalling his time as a Rough Rider and field doctor. Some of them were lucky enough to make it home bodily whole, but that’s where it stopped. Some part of him died in the war, something that made him not the same ever since.

These kids were part of a war they had no control over but suffered all the same.

Children of war were always the ones to suffer the most.

“Okay, there is Dr. Li…” Professor FéeMarraine started to think, wanting to get the children the help they needed.

“No, not the school counselor. As much as I respect Dr. Li, she is not trained to deal with these kinds of cases. An adolescent trauma specialist. I’ll do some research to get you a list.”

Ben nodded, wondering if the teens would even entertain the idea of seeing a therapist. Everything was so much worse than he thought.

Dr. Sweets instructed them to contact him if they experienced any adverse reactions to the vaccinations or anything else.

“Given their magical heritage, I expect them to be rather heartier than most but that doesn’t mean they don’t have the normal allergies of their kind. Unfortunately, there are no tests to determine exactly how much fae or other they have each inherited. All Four of them have indicated they do not know who their other parents are, so we are left with an even larger gap in their health history. Iron, silver, lamb’s blood, limes, and lemons could be deadly or just irritating, so I suggest we alert the chefs and staff of the possibility. Carlos is possibly the most human out of the four of them, but even he is not sure what his father is but knows he isn’t human. I would have to do further research on the abilities he says he has, but we should be mindful of his environment. Please call me, at any time, if they show signs of anaphylactic shock or vulnerability to certain items. The more complete health assessment we can get, the better.”

“Thank you, Dr. Sweets. I really appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule for this.”

“For what it’s worth, I admire what you’re doing here, Your Royal Highness. I only wish we thought of it long before now.”

He wasn’t the only one.

Once the doctor had left, Nadine had let out the flood of emotion she had kept inside of her.

“It was Maleficent, I know it was,” anger bleeding through her voice as tears gently rolled down her face.

Ben took his kerchief from his breast pocket and offered it to his professor. She gratefully took it,
dabbing her eyes.

“I always knew Maleficent was a monster, but this? How could she do this to her own daughter? Why…?”

“Professor…” Ben struggled with the questions he had held onto for a long time, wondering how to phrase them without being accusatory but struggled with the anger that grew inside of him. “Why was there never any oversight on the Isle? Why did we just banish them and leave them to their own devices?”

Nadine thought long and hard, they were fair questions and she could admit to herself that part of the deplorable conditions and what happened to the children were partly her fault.

Being fae meant that she would live a long life, longer than any human and while she was a couple centuries years old, she only looked to be in her mid-forties. Having the Crown Prince look at her with weary eyes, saddened by the reality that not all was good and golden in their world made her feel her real age.

“It was after the War of the Fae. So many had died, and news was few and far between. Before we knew exactly what happened between King Stefan and Maleficent…we were all ready for peace, no matter the cost and we had already lost so much backing King Stefan. It wasn’t just the Fae War but also Queen Ravenna’s ravaging of Charmington, and her sister Freya’s war in the North, Agrabah’s war with the djinn, Northern Wei’s war with the Huns…we had just lost so many: human, fae, dwarf, and the like on both sides. The population was decimated. When King Adam came to power, he rounded up all the villains to banish them. The other kingdoms agreed to unification because he helped create a villainless society. We thought…we thought banishing them to the Isle was the more merciful alternative than mass execution. No one wanted to see more death. So we decided on Castaway Cay, it used to be a fishing island with several canneries and it processed all the traded goods. We thought it’d have enough land for them to live a simple life without magic. So many villains had advanced degrees or were formally royal. We thought whatever society they could carve out would at least be a functioning one. Castaway Cay became the Isle of the Lost and we let them be.”

“You wanted to forget,” Ben accused, angry that they thought they could just forget their prisoners, not accepting her flimsy excuse. Their indifference to the welfare of their prisoners led to such atrocities as shown by Mal and Carlos. How could they be so callous as to just assume the villains would work everything out for themselves? “You and my father wanted to wipe your hands of them and never think of them again.”

“You will watch your tone, Prince Ben,” the fae warned. She would not tolerate disrespect no matter what her culpability was; her normally happy façade completely gone as she tried to hold herself together.

“Look at these pictures! We did this! We let this happen! These are just children, how could we do this to them?!” He knew there were so many more on the Isle, how many of them were suffering at the hands of their villainous parents. “People have died, don’t any of you care? You might as well have just executed them because all you did was sentence them to a slow, agonizing death. There is nothing merciful about what you did,” he went on, recalling the documentary.

“There was blood in the breeze!” It was the first time Ben had ever heard Professor FéeMarraine raise her voice, the dam breaking. “Ash fell like snow, and when I close my eyes I can still see the night burning! You have no idea the desolation Maleficent caused! Not just her, but Freya annihilated entire villages, they’re still there in their eternal winter! Women running and holding their
children, frozen where they died! Ravenna drained the youth of women across the country, she stole the lives of an entire generation…you cannot imagine what we went through to make it all stop…” Nadine broke down, overwhelmed by the memory of the wars she fought as it all came rushing back to her.

Although he wore a crown and had the responsibility of Auradon City, he felt how young he truly was. All that happened more than twenty years ago, before he was born, had been cleaned and wiped away. Only told from history books and he grew up in a peaceful time. What did he know of war? What did he know of the devastation that made Auradon bleed?

The normally happy and loquacious history professor was reduced to tears and almost hysterics by the ghosts of her past.

“I’m so sorry…I never meant for this to happen…they were never supposed to have children…we just wanted the death to stop…” the professor sobbed into her Prince’s arms, hoping for some penance; barely able to breath with her regret.

“I’m…I’m sorry …” Ben tried to comfort her, knowing his lost temper caused this.

Professor FééMarraine only cried harder, overcome with sadness that such a sweet boy was exposed to the evils of the past.

But the past was there in the form of four teenagers, all products of the decisions she had or helped make.

“We’ll make this right,” he repeated over and over to her, trying to comfort her as best he could, not sure if he was telling her or himself.

It was past curfew but the Isle Four were in the boys’ dorm room. It was a simple enough climb from their windows to the boys’ balcony if the girls wanted to or vice versa. It was also almost comically easy to evade the floor chaperones who roamed the halls. Their schedule was no problem to decipher and their clunky shoes loud enough to alert the Four immediately of their presence. The girls snuck through the darkened halls, almost melting into the shadows when they made their way to their boyfriends’ suite.

The four of them had been surprised when they came to their dorms to find several sets of clothing and under garments. Apparently the tailors caught wind of what little they had, and all of it similar to what they had shown up in. They wanted the teens to be more Auradon appropriate and they all accepted the items with no fuss. Free clothes were good in their book.

“I’m not too thrilled with the style though,” Mal admitted, not wanting to seem ungrateful. Jay agreed, he preferred his leathers.

“No worries, I’ll make these plain clothes into something spectacular,” Evie promised.

None of them were ready to let the other go, wanting to take the time to relax in their new home. They took advantage of the large television and movie selection, the girls wrapped in the arms of their respective beaus, lying on the floor against the beds. Beezy was lying comfortably on Carlos’ bed, claiming the foot as his own.

Auradon television was confusing and terribly overwhelming. There were so many channels to choose from, some indecipherable as to what they were for. The Isle only had one channel and it was
the Royal Broadcast Channel. For whatever reason, King Adam thought the prisoners would enjoy an entire channel dedicated to the ceremonies of the royal family.

There was a reason very few people bothered with a television on the island. The Four only ever watched in their apartment because Evie liked to see the royal regalia and dresses, getting ideas for her own fashion designs.

Auradon seemed to have an odd obsession with talking animals, their movie selection was 90% of some sentient animal in dire trouble but friendship saved the day.

Carlos eyed his cat, wondering what the feline would say if he could talk and what kind of adventures he got up to in his new home.

There also seemed to be an entire universe in which everyone would break out into song and dance during key plot points which the rest of their movies took place.

“I’m confused, are they aware they’re singing?” Mal asked, trying to understand the movie of the basketball jock and beautiful smart girl trying to be together.

“Is everyone naturally rhythmic and good dancers? Those dance numbers several times a day seem exhausting,” Carlos wondered as well.

“How do they decide when they’re going to sing? Like, would we be singing right now if we were in the musical universe?”

“We’re watching a movie, we’re so confused. The angst and the drama are so overused,” Jay sang out, joining in the fun.

They had more fun making commentary and little ditties than the actual movie itself. They watched it the whole way through and still didn’t understand the problem.

“It’s not like their parents or classmates are villains and threatening them…just be together,” Mal thought they wasted too much time. She would have loved it if Carlos and her ‘s biggest problem was that they were from different cliques. Still, she wouldn’t have let any of that get in the way of being with someone she wanted to be with.

Carlos wholehearted agreed, then kissed his girlfriend on the cheek to bring the point home.

“It’s past midnight, we should probably try to get some sleep. We have tests all day tomorrow… today really,” he suggested even though he was as awake as the rest and didn’t want Mal to leave. Their sleep schedule used to later hours, it would be something they’d have to adjust to.

Mal got up and looked out the window, observing the grounds and surrounding woods. Something out there called to her, the greenery foreign to her as all the Isle woods and knolls where always dark and gloomy, even in the middle of the day. The grassy plains always held a permanent rolling fog.

She wanted to see what a forest in Auradon was like.

“I want to go for a run,” she told them. Carlos and Jay smiled, remembering the last time they had gone running. Evie bounced up and down on the balls of her feet, excited to get out.

The all made their way to the edge of campus, where the woods started to thicken, just past the tourney field. It was a cloudy night but that was something they were familiar with. They all stood next to each other, equal distance from each other.
“How far?” Jay asked.

“How far?” Mal replied, amused knowing that they did not tire easily. The boys smirked, energy buzzing through their skin. Evie trying to smile as wide but years of habit made it hard, her fist automatically going to cover her mouth. They were all ready to burn off all the excitement from the day.

“Go,” Mal commanded and off they went into the heart of the forest.

The forest felt familiar and comforting, the woods their natural home. They all had supernatural speed, but Carlos led the pack as the fastest, Jay second, with Evie and Mal evenly paced. The air was crisp and almost sweet, how clean it was. They could all run faster than they ever could on the island, the freedom making their feet fly. They didn’t have to worry about hidden traps or urban wreckage to trip them up or for them to injure themselves with.

Although they were out past curfew and probably would have hell to pay if caught, Carlos let out a triumphant howl,

“Owwoooaaaaaaa!!!!”

Jay and Mal followed suit with their own hoots and laughter.

“Aaaahh-ooooooohh!!!!”

“Yeahhhhhh!!!!”

They all gracefully dodged the trees and jumped over forest debris, their muscles starting to burn pleasantly.

They were running away from the Isle, their parents, jealous princesses, and everything bad they left behind.

Carlos wasn’t sure how far they had run, but he had come to an open meadow filled with wild indigo and sea thistle; he stopped dead in his tracks.

“Hey, don’t tell me you’re tired already…” Mal started to tease when she caught up but then saw what grabbed his attention. Jay and Evie had joined them, looked up to see what their friends were enthralled with.

All Four of them were speechless, their breath caught in their throat, the night had cleared and with the absence of clouds they saw the stars. They stood in awe of what they had been missing all their lives.

The sky was not something most talked about on the Isle. It was one thing among many they had lost. There was an entire generation on the island that had never known a clear night’s sky.

“It’s beautiful,” Evie whispered in wonder.

They had never seen anything as black, with blazing stars scattered throughout; a haze of blues, purples, turquoise, and white swathing the heavenly canvas. They had to be miles from the school or anything that resembled civilization. They felt for the first time, truly free from anything and in their own new and undiscovered universe.

It was the first time any of them felt the true magic of the world, they were surrounded by vivid color and the scents of nature; reviving their senses that had known nothing but the pollution and stale air
of the island.

Where they were, it was how the world was supposed to be.

They were moved and humbled by how vast the world was, now that they were somewhere other than the small little domain of the Isle. A sweet ache pulsed in their chest at seeing something so pure and untainted.

The sheer beauty of it had tears rolling down all their eyes.

“We’re free,” Evie said, truly believing it for the first time. She wasn’t on the island. She wasn’t under the thumb of her mother. They were away from the school with its thick book of rules and disappointed princesses and adults. She knew they would have to go back, but in that blissful moment, they were free. She felt the itch of her hand wanting to cover her mouth, but with her other she had held it strongly. Willing herself not to cover the smile that emerged and threatened to split her face with its force.

A smile that wasn’t beguiling, flirting with some random boy because that’s what growing up with Ravenna and whores taught her to do. A smile that wasn’t sarcastic, vindictive, or hiding some other emotion she wasn’t allowed to have because the Isle of the Lost demanded only the strong and vicious survived.

She smiled because she was happy, and that was all.

Laughter bubbled from deep inside her as it seemed so ridiculous that at seventeen she was genuinely smiling from happiness for the first time.

Mal joined in her laughter, feeling that seeing her friend truly smile without worrying about repercussions was worth whatever they would face in Auradon. She pulled in her best friend, feeling the need to hug her.

Jay and Carlos, also joined in the group hug, not wanting to be left out. They too knew the significance of Evie’s smile.

They were four free teens, happy to be with their friends and enjoying a starlit sky.
Evie and Mal were awakened by some ungodly device they later found out was known as an “alarm clock.” Someone at Auradon Prep had set it for them before they got there to go off at six a.m., an hour neither girl was even aware existed.

Unfamiliar with the technology, Mal was 1/78th awake when she tried to stop the incessant shrill noise by pushing random things and shaking it, and when she was about to smash it to the ground they heard a knock and an irritating cheerful voice.

“Morning, Ladies!” Professor FéeMarraine burst into their room when she felt she had given sufficient enough warning, a ball of sunshine there to make sure they started their day on time. “Breakfast starts at seven and you have a full day of tests. The morning meal is the most important of the day and brain fuel is key to…” she was stopped short by the incoherent looks the girls gave her. Their hair sticking in all directions and sleep still heavy in their eyes, Nadine wasn’t even sure they fully realized she was in the room with them. She glided to Mal’s bed and gently took the alarm, switching off the offending noise.

Both teens were too tired to notice how she flinched and nearly stumbled when she caught sight of Mal’s scars. The draining night before coming to her mind but she pushed those thoughts away and put an even bigger smile on her face.

It was a new day and she was committed to making it a brighter future for her new charges.

“Mal, Evie,” she recalled Crown Prince Ben saying that was their preferred names, “It’s best to get ready and down to the mess in an hour. Breakfast is best when served warm.”

With that, she left the girls for their morning ablutions.

They somehow made it to the mess hall, washed and presentable although neither girl was 100% sure how they managed it. Jay was already there, head on his arm sleeping on the table wearing some of the clothes the tailors ordered for them. Both girls sat next to him and followed his example, snoozing within seconds.

Carlos was the only one who was fully awake and had grabbed a tray of food for his friends,
knowing they were not “morning” people. He smiled and shook his head, the three could fall asleep anywhere. He gently placed down the platter and took a bowl of steaming oatmeal and wafted the scent towards them.

The three’s noses twitched and the promise of food pierced through their sleep fogged brains; they slowly raised their heads and grabbed the bowls their friend offered.

“Thanks Carlos,” the three mumbled, slowly but surely joining the land of the living.

It was plain oatmeal, something they were familiar with on the island. They were surprised at the other bowls Carlos had gathered.

“What’s all this?” Evie asked, curious as she ate.

“They call them ‘toppings’, it’s a bunch of stuff they like to add to their oats. These were approved for us. Bananas, blueberries, raspberries, strawberries, walnuts, raisins, and honey.”

They each took a sample of each, seeing what they would like. The only things they recognized were honey and blueberries, the fruit grew wild on the island. Thankfully, nothing was overly sweet and Evie and Jay took to the fruit they called bananas.

Mal’s eyes widened at the slightly tart but flavorful burst of the larger bright red fruit, and she was suddenly alert and awake with surprised delight. Seeing how much his girlfriend liked the new food, he pushed the entire bowl towards her. She eyed her other friends and they nodded that they didn’t mind if she had the whole thing. She dug into the bowl with gusto, happily eating with her friends. Even the additional supplement shake they had to force down wasn’t as difficult as before.

Perhaps this whole “breakfast” thing wasn’t so bad.

Ben didn’t realize how every minute of his day would be taken up with his princely duties, at least that’s what it felt like. Some days he wished he had waited a bit longer before being coroneted and taken the mantle of Crown Prince. He probably should have waited until he had at least graduated Auradon Prep. Maybe not even until after university, after he had gotten all the fun teen years out of his system before he burdened himself with all the responsibilities of governing Auradon’s biggest kingdom.

But then there were days that made it all worth it. Such as that day he found out the Isle Four were incredibly intelligent and did better than any of them could have hoped for.

“Their tests are remarkable,” Professor Deley, chemistry, reported to Crown Prince Ben, surprised as any of them. “All four are more than capable of taking on a senior course load. Carlos and Evilette’s math and science scores are perfect; I would suggest them both for advanced placement chemistry and calculus. Jay I would say is academically the weakest, but still could place in honors classes. Although Mal might need some additional encouragement.”

“Why?”

“Well it seems she got bored mid test and then proceeded to doodle all over her papers. She had to redo her math portion but those scores were above average regardless. I do have to say what she did draw was extraordinary. The art teacher was duly impressed.”

Ben smiled, glad the four were fitting in and doing so well. Perhaps all the mad scientists they banished were good for something on the Isle, he was ashamed to admit to himself that he assumed they would all be woefully behind. He feared he would have to have them start from elementary school at the worst and that they’d probably have needed private tutors; alienating them from their
peers and isolating them.

Having them be on par or above their age cohort proved that they were more than capable of fitting in academically. Looking at Carlos and Evie’s scores, they were better than his own.

He would not underestimate them again.

The Four found themselves back in the administration office three days later, collected in a conference room to go over which classes they wanted to take. None of them were surprised they had done so well, Dragon Hall had excellent teachers, the faculty made up of former mad scientists and other villains with doctoral degrees. While most children, usually those of henchmen or field workers, dropped out of school once they hit secondary school; the time when most felt they had learned enough for the Isle and had to help with whatever family business they had carved out for themselves.

Maleficent and Ravenna had both insisted their girls get as much education as they could. The dark fae not wanting it to be said that any daughter of hers was less intelligent than a human; Ravenna thinking no prince wanted a complete idiot for a wife, Evie would need to know how to run a household and be well versed in many subjects in order to keep up with a future princely husband.

Carlos enjoyed school, it gave him someplace to go other than Hell Hall and learn all about science and technology. The villain scientists loved nothing more than talking about whatever death invention – ray, gun, drill, etc…– they had invented when they were free. Or any invention they had come up with, although he could have done without the bitter rants about how Auradon had taken their designs and used them. The scientist was exiled, but their inventions were used to that day with no royalties or payment of any kind. He was surprised at how well he knew the technology already just from his schooling, several items already taken apart and put back together in his room. He had even improved upon a design of a 3D printer Jay managed to swipe for him, the inventor had been their general science teacher when they were thirteen.

Jay probably could have been happy dropping out while living at the Isle but he wanted to be with his friends – there was only so much he could steal in a day – and Mal insisted he attend so as to not be seen as just a common street rat with no brain. He also wanted to be able to stand proudly next to Mal who had told him more than once she expected him to be her second once she took over leadership of the Isle.

Mal had been slightly annoyed at Ben’s presence, not sure what he was doing there. He kept praising them for their test scores, and while he may have thought he was giving them compliments, she couldn’t help but feel he was a little too surprised by them.

Just because they were from the Isle, it didn’t mean they were brain dead brutes. She didn’t want to sound like the royal pricks from Auradon but she, Evie, and Jay were the descendants of three villains who had nearly taken over the world. Their parents didn’t almost conquer kingdoms by dumb luck. Before Cruella was exiled, she had been the lead designer and CEO of a fashion house; none of them were progeny of idiots.

There was another adult with them, she had introduced herself as Dr. Mulan Li. The name was familiar to the Four but none of them could recall offhand who she was or where they heard of her.

Evie wanted to say she was on RBC when they were younger, being honored by the royal family for the anniversary of some war, probably the North Wei and Hun War given the woman’s ethnicity, but
history was probably all four’s weakest subject.

It wasn’t as if they had an unbiased teacher of what transpired twenty or more years ago.

Like most everyone else in Auradon, the adult was nothing but smiles but at least hers didn’t look so manic or forced. It was simple smile as if she were happy to see them and be there.

“Your test scores came back great, and the classes you can take are basically limitless. Here is a template schedule, depending on what you actually want to take and availability, we can probably knock this out in an hour,” Dr. Li explained to them as she handed out sheets and the course catalog of the different classes Auradon Prep offered.

Mal’s eyes widened at the time table, struck with a horrible realization;

“Are classes every day?” she asked, hoping it wasn’t true what she was reading.

“Yes? I mean...you don’t have classes on weekends…” Dr. Li answered, unsure of why it was so surprising.

Carlos was the only one of the four that didn’t groan in despair.

“Eight a.m. every day?” Jay asked, just to be clear.

“Yes?” Again, Dr. Li wasn’t sure why it was so surprising. The children must have attended school, there was no way they could have gotten the scores they did if they hadn’t.

Again with the exception of Carlos, the Isle children seemed distraught and Dr. Li would almost say looked like they were starting to regret coming to Auradon.

“Okay…” Dr. Li powered through the awkward silence. “Twenty-one credits are needed to graduate. You all have tested into at least honors senior level courses for required classes, so that means you have the credits for those Freshmen through Junior year classes. So for math, science, history, and reading and writing comprehension, you all have twelve credits. Unfortunately, with no school records we can’t give you a language credit…”

“We’re fluent in German and French,” Mal told her.

“Oh, ummm…” Dr. Li tried to think of how to respond. The faculty had assumed language wouldn’t be something taught on the Isle, but they had assumed the four wouldn’t be as educated as they were either.

“Then we should probably schedule fluency tests with Drs. de Beaumont and Perrault…”

“Wir haben von unseren Müttern gelernt. Willst du wirklich mehr Tests machen?” Mal asked in German with a perfect accent.

“Nous venons de faire trois jours de tests, s’il vous plaît ne nous faites pas en faire un autre,” Evie pleaded in just as perfect French.

“Mal et Evie nous ont tous deux appris, nous avons appris à ... nous rapprocher,” Jay fibbed slightly, his accent not as flawless as the girls but he could pass if he were ever dumped in the French speaking region of Auradon Central, Haut-Rhin: location of Queen Belle’s hometown. While learning the languages of Mal and Evie’s mothers did give them something to bond over, Mal had insisted they all learn so as to have private conversations they knew most henchmen and regular citizens on the Isle would not.
The Crown Prince and Dr. Li didn’t need to know the inner works of their burgeoning organized crime syndicate.

“Ich habe nicht viel zu sagen, aber ich möchte auch nicht ausgeschlossen warden,” Carlos piped in as well, wanting to round out the quartet’s demonstration that they didn’t need to take a modern or classical language class.

Dr. Li was still at a loss at what to do, she didn’t know French or German fluently to know if they were indeed fluent or just making things up.

“Cos accents sont parfaits, je pense que nous pouvons vous donner du crédit pour les langues,” Ben replied, saving both Dr. Li and the four from further testing. Being from the House of Bourbon, he had grown up speaking French, and he was conversational in German. “I’m sure we can work something out, it leaves your schedule open for other classes; more akin to most Seniors.”

Dr. Li followed Crown Prince Ben’s direction to skip over those classes and keep the appointment moving.

“Alright, then with language you have fourteen credits. You still need PE/Health, Fine Arts, and an elective in addition to math, science, and reading and writing computation in order to graduate with this year’s Senior class. Please do not feel pressured to graduate with the Seniors, we don’t want you to be overwhelmed…”

“I think we’ll be fine,” Mal interrupted, not wanting them to think they couldn’t handle it. They would all show them they were more than capable enough to keep up with the course load. “Thank you, though,” she tacked on, realizing that Dr. Li was just trying to help and not wanting to sound ungrateful.

The counselor smiled, thinking the teens were brave to face these new challenges head on.

“Evie, Carlos: both of you scored high enough to enter into AP science and math classes. Most seniors take AP Physics, Biology, or Chemistry. There is also the option of…”

“Chemistry,” both Carlos and Evie said. Smiling at each other, knowing both enjoyed subject immensely.

“Awesome,” Dr. Li praised, glad to have such eager students that were willing to challenge themselves. She pecked at her computer tablet, it was connected to a large television on the wall so they could visually see how their schedule was shaping up. “How about math? There’s AP Calculus or Statistics.”

Neither felt particularly passionate about either but it looked like Calculus had an opening for them both to be in the same class. They would prefer to stick together,

“We’ll take Calculus,” Evie spoke for them both. Dr. Li thought maybe they ought to try to branch out more, realizing they were trying to stick together but knew it may be too much to ask them to separate more than they had to. There were plenty of other classes they had to take where they would have to be social with the other students at Auradon Prep.

“Mal, Jay, you both have the choice of Honors math and science. So your choices are the same types as Evie and Carlos.”

Jay was surprised he scored well enough for the advanced classes, he knew he wasn’t on par with Evie or Carlos, but he thought he’d be stuck with the regular students. Unsurprisingly, both he and Mal agreed to be in the classes where they could stay together.
Mal also thought it was better to mimic Evie and Carlos’ classes as the two could help them in the likely event they would need it.

“Next is reading and writing comprehension, now you guys are reversed,” Dr. Li giggled at her own joke. “Mal and Jay can do AP and Evie and Carlos can do Honors. There are several options in the course catalog for you to choose from.”

Mal caught Evie’s disappointed look, knowing she was hoping for a higher score. The fae knew part of it was Ravenna’s fault. The witch discouraging her daughter from reading as much as she wanted because

“Eye strain can cause wrinkles.”

“Maybe you can catch up by next semester and transfer,” Mal told Evie, wanting to cheer her up. If they could test out of classes, then surely they’d be able to test into them as well. All Evie needed was some time and dedication and she was certain her friend would be able to attain anything she wanted.

Since their night in the woods, Evie had started to practice smiling openly in public. There were still times where she had to catch her hand from moving to hide her mouth, but over time she was certain her friend would be able to smile without thinking about it at all.

Mal thought her friend was easily the fairest in the land, her happiness making her more beautiful than any make-up or crown ever could.

*Take that Ravenna, go die mad about it.*

And perhaps Dr. Li was right, having to go to class every day, five days a week seemed overwhelming already. Evie may prefer to slower paced class to do other things.

Mal certainly was starting to feel overwhelmed and she hadn’t even stepped foot in a classroom.

Again, both sets of teens chose classes they could take together and then help the others if need be: Advanced Placement and Honors Auradonian Literature.

“Now that leaves your PE, Fine Arts, and Electives.”

Mal and Evie immediately took Drawing and Fashion Design respectively, both having excited for these particular classes.

The boys took a bit longer to decide. Auradon Prep offered so many different classes, to give the students as wide a breadth curriculum and allow them to discover what they liked. Neither had ever really thought what they liked to do fitness wise.

Jay grew bored, tired of having to have sat around for so long. He didn’t care so he flipped to a random fine arts page, closed his eyes, and circled his finger above the book and landed on,

“I’ll take…Theatre Technology: Set, Lights, Sound, and Costumes.”

Ben had to hold back a snicker, that was essentially how he chose his own Fine Art credit but he didn’t want to set a bad example and it didn’t seem very princely.

“Dance,” Carlos chose after careful consideration. Mal looked at her boyfriend, surprised. Dancing was never something done on the Isle, they never really having a reason to celebrate.
I’ll ask him about it later.

“PE?”

Jay did the same thing for PE and he landed on,

“Dressage.”

“Do you know how to ride a horse?” Dr. Li asked, skeptical.

Instead of answering, he chose again.

“Women’s Fitness,” he said cheekily.

“No,” Dr. Li simply said, he wasn’t the first boy to try to get into that class. She refused to smile although one threatened to emerge; she was a professional and wouldn’t laugh at his behavior.

She’d do that in the privacy of the teacher’s lounge.

He randomly chose again.

“Strength and Conditioning.”

“That you can do,” Dr. Li thought if he bothered to read the description, it may be something he would have been interested in regardless. He was surprisingly buff for a teenager and would probably do well. Especially once the more nutritious diet the school provided was able to make up for the years of malnutrition from the Isle.

While Mal and Evie were fond of running, they weren’t all that interested in trying to do it competitively or for a grade.

“Women’s Fitness for us,” Mal said on behalf of them both, thinking Jay’s sarcastic choice was good enough.

“Archery and Target Games,” Carlos chose, again surprising the table. He was genuinely interested, thinking archery was a good skill to have in addition to his other hunting and trapping abilities.

Actually, that sounds better.

“Can I change my mind?” Mal asked, hoping she could switch.

“Sure, it’s not a terribly popular class,” Dr. Li switched Mal to archery.

“Me, too please,” Evie, not wanting to be left alone in a class.

Both Carlos and Mal smiled to each other, happy to get at least one class together.

Jay didn’t care either way, archery did not tempt him enough to try to change classes.

“Now you all just need to choose an Elective.”

“Ughhh…” Jay groaned impatiently, throwing his head dramatically, just wanting the appointment to be over with.

“What’s an elective?” Mal asked, none of the four were sure. Dragon Hall didn’t have nearly as many classes – reading, writing, math, and science were literally it – but they supposed there had to
be in order to fill in an almost eight hour day, five days a week.

“It’s a class where there’s no definitive requirement to take it, but you still get credit for it. We have them so students are freer to choose things they like or prefer to do.”

“Can I take another art?”

“You sure can,” Dr. Li replied, smiling widely. While Jay seemed to want nothing more to do with school than what was strictly required, she was happy to help students follow their true passions.

Mal and Evie eagerly looked over the catalog, going back over classes that caught their eye.

“Spraypaint Art,” Mal chose, thinking it sounded the most interesting.

“Fashion Merchandising,” Evie elected, it was technically a business class but it was definitely something she wanted to pursue. She couldn’t just create dresses and fashion ware and hope for the best.

Jay, thinking it was a tried and true method, opened the book at random and picked whatever fate had in store.

This time it was Photography.

Carlos chose Computer Programing.

*Interesting choice,*

Dr. Li made mental notes on the teens’ choices. Jay had no direction, but that wasn’t surprising. This is probably his first time being confronted with so many choices. There were still some Auradon Prep students who had been there all three going on four years and they were still struggling with what classes to choose, the burden of choice immobilizing some into inaction.

Others had their schooling and essentially their careers picked out since birth, unburdened by choice simply because their parents didn’t allow them to have any.

Mal, Evie, and Carlos – however – seemed to have particular talents and wanted to build upon the skills they already had. She could see the simple shirts and bottoms had been embellished, a style she had never seen before but the clothes in their original state had been from Target. She guessed that Evie had something to do with that.

She had seen Mal’s drawings as an administrator to their tests; the teen had genuine talent that she hoped flourished under the best tutelage Auradon could buy.

Carlos was still a bit of a mystery to her. He was the quietest of the group, but he tested academically the best. He seemed content to let the others talk for him, Mal the clear alpha of the group.

“Now here are your schedules:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Homeroom</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8:00-8:15</td>
<td>Com Program: RM300</td>
<td>Com Program: RM300</td>
<td>Com Program: RM300</td>
<td>Com Program: RM300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8:20-9:10</td>
<td>Study Hall: DORM 1</td>
<td>Study Hall: DORM 1</td>
<td>Study Hall: DORM 1</td>
<td>Study Hall: DORM 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>9:15-10:05</td>
<td>AP Calc: RM 103</td>
<td>AP Calc: RM 103</td>
<td>AP Calc: RM 103</td>
<td>AP Calc: RM 103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10:10-11:00</td>
<td>Dance: Arts Bld Stage</td>
<td>Dance: Arts Bld Stage</td>
<td>Dance: Arts Bld Stage</td>
<td>Dance: Arts Bld Stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>11:10-12:00</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1:15-2:05</td>
<td>Hon Auradon Lit: RM 205</td>
<td>Hon Auradon Lit: RM 205</td>
<td>Hon Auradon Lit: RM 205</td>
<td>Hon Auradon Lit: RM 205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2:15-3:05</td>
<td>Archery: Fld 10</td>
<td>Archery: Fld 10</td>
<td>Archery: Fld 10</td>
<td>Archery: Fld 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>3:10-4:00</td>
<td>Archery: Fld 10</td>
<td>Archery: Fld 10</td>
<td>Archery: Fld 10</td>
<td>Archery: Fld 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The teens looked them over, satisfied and no changes were needed. There was the pregnant pause where Ben wondered if now was the time to breach the subject of counseling. They seemed to take to Dr. Li ok, but it could be because they didn’t have a full understanding of what she was. She didn’t only help students choose classes, she was there for if they needed a trusted adult to talk to; if they needed someone to talk to about any issue they were having and didn’t want to go to their

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Auradon Preparatory</th>
<th>Pas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name: Maleficent B. Lefay II</td>
<td>Grade: Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period</td>
<td>Monday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeroon</td>
<td>8:00-8:15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8:20-9:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10:10-11:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>11:10-12:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>12:10-1:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1:15-2:05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2:15-3:05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>3:10-4:00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
parents. Dr. Li agreed that it would be better if they saw professionals specifically trained to deal with abuse, but also thought it may not be something the four were open to doing, they probably had never even heard of such a thing as a psychologist.

While Mulan Li was famous in North Wei for her part in the Hun War, she held no political power in her home country and certainly none in Auradon; before or after unification. She wholeheartedly disagreed with the banishment of villains, even more when she found out the Isle was filled with children born during their imprisonment.

She had been one of the driving forces behind funding the documentary. Never in her wildest dreams did she think the Crown Prince would not only take the report to heart, but enact actual change.

She could tell Ben was anxious, and gave him a silent look that said it was not the time for such things. While the four might be close friends, their experiences were still their own and should not have to reveal anything to each other they may feel pressured to do if confronted.

Each student was required to see her to at least get a perfunctory report if they were doing alright. She would decide on a case by case basis on how she would go about referring them to a trauma specialist.

“Excellent,” when the teens accepted their schedule and she sent it to the Auradon Prep database for filing and alert each teacher to expect one more student in their class. “Do you guys have any questions?”

Dr. Li had dealt with teenagers all her career, the question was mostly rote and she didn’t expect them to have any. Most teens usually didn’t think of things until they were actually confronted with the issue.

“What happens if this doesn’t work out?” Mal asked, surprising both Dr. Li and Crown Prince Ben.

“What do you mean?” Dr. Li asked, wondering what about the schedule wouldn’t work.

“This whole thing is an experiment, right? See if some random Isle kids can make it in Auradon?”

It was so much more than that but Mal continued,

“So what happens if the experiment fails? We can’t fit in, we can’t follow the many, many, many, many rules, we can’t…we can’t make this work…do we go back to the Isle?”

There were so many rules, rules they were already breaking and weren’t sure if they could help themselves from breaking.

No one became Auradonian overnight.

All four teens looked intensely at the counselor and Crown Prince Ben, worried about their fate and not trusting that it would just work out.

Growing up with villains, they had learned from an early age that Happily Ever After was not for people like them.

Both Dr. Li and Ben were a little ashamed to admit that neither had thought of what they would do if the teens did prove too…Isle for Auradon. It was an unprecedented proclamation, as was the punishment in the first place. No one had banished villains before and no one had ever taken in their progeny to get them away from said banished villainous parents.
The Isle Four were unfortunate casualties in the grand experiment they called society.

Ben had gotten the kids off the island, his hope was that they would become productive members of society. How they got from Point A to B was the mystery, but what to do if they couldn’t make it to B?

Looking at them, seeing their tense shoulders and hard eyes he knew he wouldn’t damn them back to the island, no matter what happened. Whatever else may be true, he knew that they didn’t deserve to be stuck in prison.

The pictures of their scars would probably haunt him for the rest of his life, he (and the Crown) owed them more than just a chance. They were owed his promise to do whatever it took to give them what they were denied growing up.

He could not change the past, but he would make sure the future held whatever the teens wanted.

“I cannot promise you that things will turn out perfectly, or that it’ll be easy. But I can promise that I will never send you back to the Isle. If Auradon Prep doesn’t work out…we’ll try public schools. If public schools don’t work out, you could probably easily get a G.E.D….General Equivalency Diploma. . .” he explained at their confused faces. “If…if Auradon Prep isn’t what you want now, then we can go over those choices.”

He just realized he never really gave them a choice of what they wanted to do outside of the island. He had just assumed the premier school in Auradon was an obvious choice. But from Audrey’s reaction, he wondered if he had rushed too quickly into his idea.

The villain children looked at him questioning, not fully understanding or accepting he would go through so much effort or even give them those kind of choices. All their life, their path had been set out for them.

Auradon dictated they were to be on the island. Maleficent groomed Mal for leadership. Ravenna taught Evie everything she would need to know to seduce a prince. Jafar taught Jay from birth that all that mattered was yourself, damn anyone that stood in the way of what you wanted.

Even Crown Prince Ben said that they were to attend Auradon Prep, no other school or option was given to them. But now they had a choice as to what they wanted to do. School did seem so much more than they could imagine. They had tested well, but this was a year at the most exclusive boarding school Auradon had to offer; they were only there out of the generosity of the Crown Prince. Generosity could only last so long. They had no idea what motivated the Crown Prince, were they willing to bet that motivation would last forever?

Auradon also had so many rules. They had never had such a strict structure laid out to them, even when they were under the rule of their parents.

They couldn’t even obey a curfew, they had been sneaking to each others’ rooms and outside every night since they got there.

“You can take a few days to decide, no pressure,” Ben offered to them, taking their silence to mean they were indecisive.

“Thank you, Your Royal Highness,” Mal respectfully replied, learning royal protocol quickly.

They had all said their goodbyes, everyone had much to think about.
The Four made their way back to the boys’ dorm.

Silently, Mal nodded to Carlos and he knew exactly what she wanted without her having to say anything.

He went to the large flat screen television that hung on the wood panel wall. On the tv stand beneath it sat the latest Game Box, a video console donated to them by some charity group that had caught wind of how impoverished the Isle had been. He had set it up to play the latest video game, connected to the system was the state of the art laptop that every student at Auradon was given at admission. With a few taps of the keyboard, the game started to play itself and through the surround sound, random bursts of Carlos or Jay’s voice would come through. If anyone had come past their room, they would think the boys were having an intense session of playing video games.

Perfectly normal and innocent.

No one would be able to eavesdrop.

While Carlos set up the distraction, Jay took out the trunk Evie had gave him and opened it. In it were various objects he was able to steal, whatever he thought looked like it might be worth something. Most technology was given to Carlos to tinker with, his best friend unable to resist the temptation of studying all Auradon had to offer and he couldn’t say no to his puppy eyes.

“Did you believe any of that?” Jay asked Mal, referring to their meeting.

“No even a little bit. Neither have any idea what to do if we can’t make this work,” Mal replied, frustrated. She could tell a lie from a mile away, living with thieves made her a quick study.

The other three agreed, they couldn’t depend on Auradon Prep being a permanent solution.

“But we need to keep preparing. We need to figure out a way to move this stuff,” Mal motioned towards the stash of stolen goods. “It’s no use to us in Auradon. They don’t barter, they have a working and backed currency. We need to research what this stuff is and get an idea of what it’s worth. Then we need to figure out where to find buyers.”
The other three agreed, Carlos and Evie rather relieved they didn’t have to run away. They knew they may not have a choice in the matter in the future, but it was nice that they would at least give the place a fighting chance. Jay nodded his head, agreeing with Mal and already trying to think of ways to accomplish her commands.

The teen fae then took out a map of Auradon, Jay had nicked it from a classroom after they were tested, it may have been for geography or some sort of world studies.

“We are here in Auradon City,” she marked the town with a coin Jay had found. “We are basically surrounded by every kingdom our parents had pissed off with the exception of Agrabah. South Riding has Auroria, East Riding has London, the Summerlands is where Evie’s father is…”

“Don’t suppose we could call on rich daddy Archduke for help?” Jay wondered, thinking Auradon was simultaneously too big and too small for them.

Mal looked to Evie, letting her answer.

“I wouldn’t count on it. If his total abandonment wasn’t a big clue of how he felt about my birth, then if Ravenna can be trusted, royals are particularly vicious in protecting their inheritance. They would not suffer a bastard who could try to claim anything. Mother warned me not to step foot in the Summerlands if I could help it. So as far as Auradon knows, I have no idea who my father is.”

While they normally wouldn’t trust Ravenna as far as they could throw her, they would trust she was an expert in royal politics and avoiding being stabbed in the heart.

“There’s Charmington,” Mal continued. “That’s ruled by Snow White, so that’s out of the question. There is Cinderellalburg, no one should hate us there, but it’s a coastal city and too close to the Isle for my comfort. That’s also where a majority of the royal guards who visit Fleur de Pomme are from, they might recognize us. I think our best bet is Camelot Heights,” Mal emphasized by jabbing her finger to the city directly north west of Auradon City.

“I don’t know, it’s adjacent to the Summerlands,” Evie worried, preferring to be as far away from any land where she may be hunted down.

“It’d be easy to get lost in. If the books I got from the library are accurate, then it’s devoid of mods. No electricity, no cameras, zip. If we’re trying to get away from both Auradon City and the Summerlands, then we’re in Westerly or way far up north. We’re talking Borderlands territory. I don’t know if we could survive in winter on whatever we can steal from here.”

Jay and Carlos were rather disappointed to hear their choices. Carlos loved his gadgets and Jay was getting used to awesome things like air conditioning and reliable light.

“We’d be able to disappear,” she tried to comfort her boyfriend, running her hands through his platinum and coal locks. She hated to see him unhappy, but she wouldn’t have suggested the technology free city if she didn’t think it was the safest.

Carlos nodded, knowing and trusting she wouldn’t chose to shirk creature comforts for the hell of it. He merely wanted it to work at Auradon Prep that much more.

“Camelot also houses the Merlin Institute of Magic, one of the few places that still openly practices and teaches magic,” learning that magic had been “retired” in Auradon at large had been a cold douse of water. She had hoped she’d be able to learn some magic, preferably from teachers who didn’t use knives as learning tools. “So if need be, we could probably raid its library and try to learn what we can.”
Mal experimentally held up her hand and willed her magic to appear. Her hand could now glow at her will. She still hid the Grimoirae Maledictae, thinking it too dark to try to learn from. But she was teaching herself and the others what she learned from the lesser magic books her mother made her memorize.

Jay and Evie mimicked her action, each hands glowing with the power of their inner magic. Only Carlos could not summon his magic in such a display, but with a flick of his hand a very gentle wind had been summoned and it moved the curtains.

He had been afraid he was totally devoid of magic when they tested out their abilities in the field where they discovered the stars. They had visited it every night since its discovery, feeling drawn to it and basking under the starlight.

They had been there almost a week straight and they were still in awe of the beauty the night’s sky provided.

While he couldn’t do what the others did, he was able to tap into some nature magic. He was comforted by not being the odd non-magic one out.

They were studying magic in small bits. Mal was a drill sergeant when it came to magical safety. Not allowing any of them to take the lessons lightly. They could each make small things move with their minds and soon Mal would have them doing simple spells.

She would have them use whatever skills or gifts they had in order to survive. While magic seemed to be frowned upon, it wasn’t illegal, they felt it prudent to keep it a secret.

They expected the school to be full of Audrey’s, not Bens or Dougs; so they were prepared to not be trusted. If the students knew they could do magic as well as being children of villains, they may as well paint a larger target on their backs.

“So if we go to Camelot, that’s about a six hour drive. We may be able to steal a car but I don’t want us to count on that. Especially if we still don’t know how to drive by the time we need to flee comes. So by foot, that’s about five days. I’ll do more research in the library to see how we could best fit in. Evie will make us clothes appropriate to blend in. Jay, keep stealing but focus on small valuables, but nothing too valuable. It’s a small school, they’re bound to notice if too much stuff goes missing. Carlos, keep researching the tech that surrounds the estate. The campus includes acres and acres of open and wooded land. The border is somewhere and we should assume it’s being watched. We’ll figure out the best way towards Camelot. Wherever the weak points are, I want to know of them.”

“And what’s your job?” Carlos stressed, expecting a specific answer.

“To not punch Audrey in the face,” she murmured and not exactly happy about it, knowing it was something she really needed to work on, and if anything was going to get them expelled it was probably her getting into fights.

Carlos, satisfied with the answer smiled and lean down to kiss her; proud that she was trying her hardest to make Auradon Prep work. Audrey was not making things easy, the girl had at every turn tried to bait and belittle them ever since they got there. She seemed to have a pack of bitchy hyenas at her beck and call which made it all the more annoying.

Mal had gone from one of the most feared people on the Isle and in Auradon she had to deal with daily disrespect from someone who she could easily shut up with physical force. It wasn’t easy and he appreciated her trying. There were even times he wanted to get Audrey out of his face physically, the only time she was civil was when Ben was around.
Mal had melted into the kiss, still so happy and content that she could not only see him every day but could basically kiss him whenever she wanted. Auradon Prep was worth fighting for, even if she did have to get up at some horrifying hour every day.

“OK you two. It’s dinner time,” Jay interrupted, rolling his eyes but secretly pleased and charmed to see his two best friends so happy. “I’m going to the mess hall before Mal eats all the strawberries.”

Mal merely stuck her tongue at him, promising herself she was going to eat them twice as fast to spite him. They all put away their secret stash and plans, neatly going into a closet and hidden away.

Ben knew he would be called in to deal with trouble with the Isle Four at some point. There was bound to be some culture clash, he thought it was inevitable.

He just didn’t think it would be before classes started, it was the weekend; no one should get in trouble over the weekend.

And he certainly didn’t expect for it to take place at a hair salon.

He found himself standing in Iliofâneia, the most exclusive salon in all of Auradon. It catered pretty much exclusively to the royals, some even came as far as from Westerly to book an appointment.

Walking in, he was immediately welcomed with a class of water supposedly from a virgin spring in Montunui, pineapple slices for a hint of sweetness. The reception desk was the first thing he saw, a massive onyx black console with glittering canary yellow and sangria purple crystal backsplash behind it. Every employee wore head to toe black as to never be confused for a client.

“His Royal Highness, Crown Prince Ben,” he was announced by the royal herald, his bodyguard an unobtrusive presence to his back.

The entire salon stopped what they were doing to give a bow or curtsy.

The windows were floor to ceiling and in addition had skylights to let in as much sun as possible, a special filter on the glass to prevent harmful rays from causing sunburn. He was escorted toward the back where the actual hairdresser stations were, swivel black chairs in front of individual mirrors that had light frames.

It was probably the unhappiest he had ever seen Jay, who was usually always playful, charming, and smiling. He didn’t seem to appreciate all the light Iliofâneia had to offer, sunglasses firmly over his eyes; he was slouched over, arms folded across his chest. The hairdresser and about five attendants surrounded the chair, all at a loss of what to do.

Professor FéeMarraine and Dr. Ector were speaking off to the side, neither seemed to be particularly happy either. The other three Isle teens were on a couch off in a separate waiting area, looking nervous as they could tell the adults were upset and not knowing why or what was going to happen to them.

“Is there an office we may use?” Crown Prince Ben asked one of the attendants.

The woman in black froze, never thinking she’d have someone from the main Royal Family speaking to her. She swept hair, she didn’t speak to the customers. Luckily for her, the hairdresser came to her rescue and told Ben,
“Yes, Your Royal Highness, of course. My office is always available to the House of Bourbon,” with a thick accent he couldn’t quite place, he thought perhaps the Lone Keep. Somewhere he didn’t visit often but was reminded of it.

“Thank you,” he motioned for Drs. FéeMarraine and Ector to follow him, he didn’t want the conversation to be public gossip later.

“What’s the matter?”

“That boy or one of them is causing mischief,” Dr. Ector said plainly.

“And I keep telling you, it’s not a conscious decision,” Dr. FéeMarraine.

“What exactly is happening?” feeling as if he just walked into an old argument.

“Jay came in for his haircut, perfect gentleman and willing to follow the school dress code.”

Dr. Ector scoffed, Dr. FéeMarraine shot him a poisonous look but kept going,

“When the hairdresser when to cut his hair…it didn’t work.”

Ben frowned, unsure what she meant.

“The scissors broke?”

“No…the hair, it couldn’t be cut.”

“The scissors were defective?”

“No, what she’s trying to avoid saying is that he used magic. The scissors go through the hair but remains uncut. He’s doing it on purpose,” Dr. Ector said snidely.

“No, he’s not. He was on that Isle all his life, he wouldn’t be able to do that kind of magic. It’s defensive magic, used to protect himself. It’s totally unconscious.”

“No, he’s a vain boy who wants to flout the dress code. He used a spell…”

“We were there the whole time, he hasn’t said a word.”

“Then he uses whatever bippity-boppity nonsense,” he mocked with grandiose hand gestures that were supposed to mimic movements that created magic.

“Dr. Ector,” Ben warned, that kind of flippant disrespect was not going to be tolerated in his presence.

The stern professor had to refrain himself from rolling his eyes, thinking the new generation was too P.C. and sensitive.

“That is not how magic works. There is no spell for every task under the sun; particularly for something as mundane as preventing a haircut, and even if there were; like I said, we were there the whole time. No one said anything. There is no possible way he could be doing magic by pure thought alone. Not only did he grow up on the Isle which negates magic, something only a master fae such as myself could do, the centuries it would take to master that kind of skill alone means it’s not him. I can’t even do that. There’s no Third Stage Supreme Fae on the planet other than Merlin and Maleficent. So unless Dr. Ector is suggesting the Great Emrys is using his heavens piercing
powers to help a boy avoid a haircut, or Maleficent has escaped and her first instinct is to save Jay’s hair…”

“You know I am not!”

They had started to bicker and Ben knew he was right to keep the meeting private. He felt a headache coming on, he couldn’t believe two administrators were squabbling like school children. They seemed to have forgotten that besides being their Crown Prince, he was still a student and it was unbecoming of an Auradon Prep faculty member behaving thus.

“Stop,” Ben’s voice thundered quietly. Both teachers immediately ceased, worried they had let their tempers get the best of them.

“Professor FéeMarraine, is it your professional and as a fae and magic user opinion that Jay is not doing this on purpose?”

“Yes,” she answered simply.

“Dr. Ector, I know as Dean of Students it’s your job to deal with discipline and progress of students. I know Jay’s hair is not dress code length, but what do you suggest we do? I defer to Dr. FéeMarraine’s opinion that he’s not doing it willingly.”

Dr. Ector’s first instinct was to say Jay couldn’t attend. It wouldn’t be fair to let him flout the dress code while others had to keep their hair at a specific length. It was bad enough the other three had hair that was more appropriate for Halloween were allowed to keep the colors and attend school. Soon he’d hear all the complaints from students and then there would be others who would try to skirt the rule and give the three as examples. To let the four of them in was setting a bad precedent. But given the decree, he doubted that would have gone over well.

“We can’t just let him have his long hippie hair. We already have the weird hair color bunch…”

“Dr. Ector, their hair color is a reflection of the fae bloodline they come from. I would not suggest referring to it as ‘weird.’ It is their natural hair color and they are within the guidelines as written.”

The Dean of Students had always thought the Headmistress to be a flighty airhead but in that moment he remembered she was a powerful fae who had deep connections to the Charming royal family. She had given up her own magic, wand, and even dyed her hair brunette to fit in; it was easy for most to forget and think she was human. But the air grew colder and he felt several inches shorter under her admonishing gaze. She dared him to say something further.

“Fine,” he admitted defeat. “But I want it up and out of his face at all time during school hours. Whether he is doing it on purpose or his innate magic is protecting it then he has to keep it in such a way that mimics the dress code. No hair below his chin.”

“Fair enough,” Professor FéeMarraine compromised. If it were up to her, she’d just have Jay tie it back and be done with it. Or even let it down, what did it matter? If girls could have long hair with no issue, she didn’t see why boys couldn’t either. But Dr. Ector, and most of the school board, were older conservative military men who had served in the Royal Guard at some point, Dr. Ector hailing from Camelot Heights; where they still practiced knighthood.

“Alright, thank you Drs. FéeMarraine and Ector. Let’s tell him the good news,” Ben hoped they understood it to be code for: smile and pretend we’re all adults who have come to a peaceful
Jay did seem relieved his hair wouldn’t have to be cut, but also surprised when the Headmistress explained what happened. Ben implicitly trusted Professor FéMarraine, but Jay’s reaction told him he was clueless as the rest of them of why his hair couldn’t be cut.

The hairdresser quickly gave Jay tips on the best way to tie up his hair, offered a variety of ribbons and ties; the teen had no interest in anything other than a simple utilitarian black hair tie.

“Sorry you guys had to come out for nothing,” Ben apologized to the four. They didn’t seem to care either way, perhaps they wanted to get out. They had all been stuck at school for a week straight.

“Did you guys need anything while we’re out? Target run?” he offered.

“Target?” Mal asked, not sure what he was talking about.

“It’s a department store chain run by the Loxley family; basically one-stop shopping for clothes, toiletries, stationary, cleaning supplies…whatever you need.”

“We don’t have any money,” Mal explained although it had piqued her interest. Department stores were non-existent on the Isle. The closest they had was Bargain Castle which was really just a recycled consignment shop of garments they could tan from the few game animals on the island and everything donated from the mainland.

One of Maleficent’s scams was that all clothing donations came through her door first and she sold it for food and goods. The island at large had no idea the clothes were free and meant for whoever needed them. But her mother still held sway over goblins and her mother’s goons, and herself, would make the runs to meet up with the donators; accepting the gifts “on behalf” of the island citizens.

“You guys have a clothing and discretionary allowance, courtesy of the Crown. As long as you guys don’t want a car or jet,” he joked. It was one of the things his councilors had suggested, the Isle had no currency and they didn’t think it viable to make them get jobs to earn things they may need outside of school. “You should be able to get everything you need, and some fun stuff like movies.”

The Four looked at each other, the boys shrugged but Evie seemed eager to go shopping.

“Oh,” Mal accepted on all their behalf.

They would see what Target was all about.

Chapter End Notes

I don't even want to say how long it took me to figure out how to insert images. LOL

Hope you guys liked it and I hope you will check out my other fic "For These Empty Tears." It's a Nightmare Before Christmas retelling with a Descendants flair. Hope everyone stays safe for the hols.
The room got dark and cold, rage ran through her blood. Mal stood tall and faced her opponent.

“I am the daughter of Maleficent, first of her name: the Unbreakable, the Unyielding, The Protector of the Moor, the Great Dragon of Auroria.

The blood of fae queens and conquerors runs through my veins.

There is magic in my eyes, thunder in my voice, and lightening in my hair.

I will gladly feast on those who wish to subdue me.
I am the Fire and Fury of the Isle of the Lost.

You may petition all you want but I will not bow,” Mal growled out, unwilling to bend or break.

Evie looked rather exasperated and just stared at her friend.

“Mal, it’s just a field trip.”

“Wrong, it is a Saturday field trip. We don’t have school on weekends. That’s the whole point of weekends. The week has ended and therefore there is no school, which is during **week days**. It’s self-explanatory, Evie. Furthermore, it’s a trip that starts at 8 A.M. A time that should not exist at all, much less a weekend. I sleep in on Saturdays and Sundays. **That’s the deal.** I go to class on time, Monday through Friday and then I get to sleep in. Field trips are not part of that plan.”

“We have to get up early because the museum is an hour away and it’s a full day trip. It’s on a Saturday because it’s an extra credit assignment. The school is being nice enough to drive us there… please?” Evie cajoled, pouting as best she could and widening her eyes and soften her eyebrows; she tried to remember how Carlos did it, he could always get her to go along with school activities.

As if reading her mind, Mal snarked,

“That only works with Carlos.”

**Damnit**

Evie dropped the faux puppy eyes and tried to think of what else to do. Thankfully said owner of puppy eyes came into their room.

“Have you asked her?” he asked though from Mal’s scowl he could tell she was not happy at the idea of having to get up early on a non-school day.

“Yes, but she’s being stubborn.”

“I’m not stubborn,” she insisted, merely proving Evie’s point. “Why do you want to do school stuff on weekends? It’s not like they don’t have us doing enough work for them.”

“It’s for extra credit.”

“Which I don’t need…and neither do you.”

“Perhaps not now, but we’re only a month into the school year and Auradon Lit is hard, harder than I thought it’d be. I want to get a nice cushion for an A,” Carlos explained why he and Evie were going above and beyond so early. “It’ll be an easy ten points. It’s basically a free letter grade up.”

“There is a wise saying I heard the band members say: ‘C’s get Degrees.’ I feel like we ought to take that to heart and not burn out trying to please these people.”

*I’m going to kill Doug.*

He didn’t like to use his “puppy eyes” to manipulate Mal often, but it was rather effective at getting what he wanted.

But before he could utilize them, she knew what he was about to do.

“No, you can’t use your eye voodoo on me,” Mal said as she strategically retreated to her bed and
pulled the covers over her head.

*He can’t give me puppy dog eyes if I can’t see them.*

Evie frowned, not about to let Mal get away with being petulant. With a flick of her wrist, she had magically removed the rose print comforter.

Mal growled in frustration,

“I regret teaching you that.”

“But you did. And now you have the opportunity to learn all about the cultural history of our new home, Auradon. Which by the way, didn’t you say something about learning all we could about said culture in case we have to escape and lay low?”

“Ughhh, don’t use my own words and plans against me.”

Carlos and Evie looked towards each other, knowing they were finding chinks in Mal’s obstinate armor. They were wearing her down.

“Come on Mal, me, Evie, and Jay are going. We’ll get to spend the whole day together. We haven’t done that in a while.”

Her boyfriend was playing dirty, reminding her that Auradon Prep had taken up much more of their free time than any of them would have thought. It wasn’t that they didn’t hang out, but given how much homework they had every week and all four had different study habits; their hang out time was not conducive to social bonding. So most of their time was restricted to lunch and late nights in the woods or sneaking into each other rooms. She had missed the time they would just have fun or cause mischief.

She never thought there would be some stuff she’d missed about the Isle.

“Or,” she counter offered. “How about we stay here and have Jay and Evie take notes? We can hang here, have our own fun.”

From her tone and smoldering eyes, he knew exactly what type of fun she was suggesting.

The museum trip didn’t seem nearly as important any longer.

“There will be other extra credit opportunities, right?” he asked Evie.

“You guys, come on. You can blow each other in the museum,” the witch’s daughter said facetiously, although now that she thought about it, perhaps that would be kind of fun. Regardless, they had the rest of their lives to mess around, there would only be so many opportunities for extra credit. “I want to see the Hall of Crowns.”

And so they got the real reason Evie wanted to go. Leave it to their fashion obsessed friend to go to any length for accessories.

Shiny bejeweled accessories, but accessories nonetheless.

*Must be her human side, they’re so obsessed with shiny rocks. I don’t even get it.*

Mal was now back to trying to get out of the field trip.

“I have to deal with these people five days a week, please don’t make me do it on my day off,” the
fae pleaded.

“Don’t give me that face,” Evie warned. “Put the pout away.”

But Mal wasn’t the only stubborn Isle child, Evie was determined that they all go. It wasn’t just the extra credit or even the crowns, although that was a driving factor for her, but she did want to hang out with them for fun. They had either been busy with school or magic lessons. She wanted to do something with her friends, and if it so happened to be educational then fine. She wanted to go somewhere other than campus or Target. She loved the retail store as much as anybody else, but there was so much more to Auradon that she wanted to see.

“It’s a self-guided tour. We don’t have to hang out with them. We’ll do our own thing,” which is exactly what they’ve been doing since they got there. Besides the band, most other Auradon Prep students steered clear of them. Perhaps their parents’ notoriety was more pervasive than they thought. There seemed to be constant whispers and eye avoidance, even when Crown Prince Ben had tried to cajole his classmates to give the Isle Four a chance and include them in things.

Evie had a suspicion Audrey had something to do with it, as it was mostly the cheer squad at the center of the hushed conversations.

Evie’s attempts at convincing Mal were met with stink faces, she also felt she was losing Carlos who liked the idea of spending more time alone with his girlfriend with a good portion of the school off campus.

Thankfully, Jay was there to save the day.

“Have you guys been able to convince her?” he asked, knowing that they probably hadn’t. He didn’t want to go either but he was much more willing to go with whatever the others wanted.

They both shook their head and Mal looked even grumpier.

Why were all her friends plotting against her?

Amateurs.

Jay thought to himself, after being friends with her so long he was surprised they didn’t know the real key to Mal’s compliance.

“The museum has a really nice cafeteria,” Jay tempted his friend.

It worked instantly, her frown gone and it was replaced with intrigue.

“What kind?”

“One that has a famous dessert called Super Stuffed Strawberry Shortcake.”

He had handed her a print out of the museum’s cafeteria menu, their prize dessert front and center. A scrumptious strawberry shortcake that looked to be as big as a plate and overflowing with Chantilly cream and strawberries between two decadent layers of shortcake.

From Mal’s “ohhhh” lips, he smiled at knowing his friend so well and mouthed “you’re welcome” to Carlos and Evie for getting their entire foursome to go to this field trip.

Carlos rolled his eyes and sarcastically mouthed “ha, ha ha” and then flipped him off while Mal was still busy planning on what she was going to eat.
“Ok, I guess I’ll go,” Mal finally decided. She thought it probably wouldn’t be that bad, especially if they could ditch the crowd and look at what they wanted. And she did promise to help them with their Auradon Lit homework, it was only fair as they helped her and Jay with Chemistry and Calculus.

She eyed the stack of books on her end table, all research about Auradon and some for fun. The library was a million times bigger than what they had on the Isle. Books being rather rare and most were outdated science texts the mad scientists had managed to smuggle onto the island. The other tomes consisted mainly of children’s literature, all biased fairy tales against the villain occupants, donated from the mainland as well as adult romance novels which she was forbidden to read, also from donations.

She and Jay had already burned through the reading list for class and each had gotten a mountain of books they thought looked interesting.

“I’m going to the library to study. Do you guys need me to proof your papers?” Mal offered as she gathered the books that were due and her own text books for studying.

Although most students were content to put off homework until Sunday evening, the Four preferred to use their free time on weekends together. None of them liked to rush and procrastinate, a luxury never given to them while on the Isle. When they had a task, it had to be done immediately and with as much care as the project warranted.

While they didn’t care for the threat of punishment, which could be rather severe given their parents, it did help them create a strong work ethic and made their stellar grades at Auradon Prep possible.

Evie, Carlos, and Jay each handed her their work they wanted checked over; Jay and Carlos had them handy because the girls’ dorm was their designated study and homework room. Mal handed over her chemistry and math homework to Carlos for reciprocation. And she gave her own paper to Jay for proofing.

With a kiss goodbye to Carlos, she waved to the others and made her way to the Auradon Prep Library which was just a quick walk down a lovely tree lined path from the dorms.

The Queen Belle Memorial Library at Auradon Prep was a sight to behold. She had thought the dorms and classrooms were luxurious, the library was stately and a loving monument to the written word. The floors were a deep green marble, the coffered ceilings accented with art deco moldings and rose designs, and grand marble columns holding French designed sconces that illuminated the room with a soft yellow glow, so as not to be harsh on the eyes or the books.

She went to her favorite spot, a large oak carved desk where she could spread out her books and against large windows that peered out into the woods. It was her own private, silent sanctuary.

She first started on her reading, as she could quickly do it and get it out of the way. Most of the homework was simple. Read the chapters, answer the questions at the end of said chapter. Most teachers plainly said that if students completed that, then they were entitled to a “C.” If they wanted a “B” then there were a few more questions they had to answer. If they wanted an “A”, then they had a short essay or some other simple project they had to complete. Auradon Prep had a tier system where the students chose what grade they wanted. If they wanted to be average and do the bare minimum, then they simply had to read the material and prove they read it by answering a few questions. If they wanted something more, then they answered a few more questions above that minimum. If they wanted to be counted as something extraordinary, which is what they considered those who got As to be, then they would have to go above and beyond what was expected of them.
Of course the Four always did “A homework”, they didn’t understand how others would pass it up as it was basically idiot proof to get a good grade in those classes.

A couple hours had passed, she was read up and had done all the projects to get an A. All she had left was whatever re-dos Carlos had marked for her math and science homework. She had written her revisions on their papers, so overall no one should have more than an hour of editing to do on Sunday. That meant they had pretty much the entire weekend to themselves.

Saturday would be spent at a museum. She still wasn’t looking forward to it but she was curious as to the dessert and it had been weeks since they went anywhere besides the school and surrounding woods.

She looked at the clock and saw that there was only an hour left for library hours, although it might as well have been closed since she was virtually the only occupant. She had only seen the middle aged librarian puttering about, the woman always gave her scathing looks as if it were her own personal library and Mal was intruding.

She didn’t have enough time to look around for other items to check out but she could always come back the next day. She needed to return the books she already had or she would be fined.

Of course when she wants the librarian to be around, the woman was nowhere to be found, probably wanting to fine Mal an exorbitant amount as to deter her from coming to the library.

Thankfully, a wonderful woman in yellow came to her rescue.

“Hi, Ms. Charisse,” Mal greeted politely.

“Oh Mal, call me Regina,” she kindly insisted, probably thinking she was a “cool” adult that had a rapport with the students.

“No, I don’t think I will,” Mal joked but also pretty sure it was impolite to call an adult, even one that gave her permission, by her first name. Ms. Charisse might have been a volunteer, Mal only ever saw her here and there – she seemed to be able to work whenever the mood struck her – that didn’t mean Mal would ever address her so informally.

Mal unloaded the stack of books she was returning, Ms. Charisse made quick work of logging them back in.

“Did you read all these already?” the adult was impressed, she was convinced most students didn’t even know Auradon Prep had a library.

“Yeah, Jay and I go through them pretty quickly. We like to read,” Mal replied simply, she didn’t understand why adults made such a big deal that they liked to read. Sometimes she thought the teachers saw them as exotic animals that belonged in a zoo.

The library had tons of free books, why wouldn’t they take advantage of that? She didn’t particularly care for the “praise” the teachers gave, it felt rather condescending to her ears but maybe it was a cultural misunderstanding.

Guess she would learn something from the museum field trip.

“Oh, Romeo and Juliet,” Ms. Charisse cooed over her favorite book. “How did you like it?”

“I didn’t.”
“Oh,” the volunteer replied, a little shocked the teen had put it so succinctly. “Why not?” she asked out of curiosity, knowing the teen had ever right not to like anything she wanted but still would love to hear her opinions.

“A lot of it seemed very…unnecessary.”

“Love is unnecessary?” Ms. Charisse asked with a smile, wondering if she was one of those surly teens who thought such love was stupid. “Or maybe they were too young for such things?”

“No, I got the love part,” thinking back to her own relationship with Carlos. While Cruella and Maleficent weren’t exactly at war with each other, her relationship with him was just as forbidden. “I didn’t get the convoluted plan to fake her death. Juliet had the choice to either marry Paris or be disowned. Why didn’t she just say ‘no’ and be disowned?”

That was a good question and it had Ms. Charisse stumped for a minute.

“Well, their love was so all encompassing they couldn’t think straight. That’s what the two star-crossed lovers were supposed to represent, love so deep, young, and consuming that it was fated to be doomed.”

“I’m not sure if I would call stupidity, fate; but ok.”

Not that most of the teens had an opinion about Romeo and Juliet beyond what was asked of them for class but it appeared Mal had some strong ones.

“You don’t think our emotions could over power us to the point of self-destruction?”

“No, I can accept that it’s a thing that happens. Not to me…but other people. But the Friar wasn’t the one in love, and he’s the one who came up with the plan. Why did he, as not only the adult but the one supposedly with a clear head, not tell her to just wait it out? From the book, it didn’t appear that anyone was going to hold her at sword point to marry Paris. She had a choice, marry or be disowned. Juliet must have thought that at some point she would have to be disowned anyway. Either by not marrying Paris or some other guy of her parents’ choice, or it would have eventually come to light she married Romeo. That truth might have been apparent in a couple months, they did consummate their marriage. So lets say Juliet was so consumed with love that she literally did not think of those things when she married Romeo. The fact she went to the Friar and asked for help meant that she was open to at least some sort of deliberative process. So when she was talking to the Friar, that would have been the time to actually try to think things through. Lets say she’s still too addled with love, the Friar’s best plan included faking her death with a potion? What does her dying then going with Romeo where he was banished do that simply being disowned wouldn’t have?”

Mal also had some opinions on using a sleeping draught on a potentially pregnant teenager. The Friar was the one to marry them, in general a man of the cloth was one to protect the unborn. Any sleeping draught worth its ingredients would have been detrimental to pregnancy. She had made enough of them for her mother and others. She wasn’t about to admit that to an Auradonian adult, no matter how friendly they were to each other, so she kept that part to herself.

Ms. Charisse could admit to herself that she had never thought of the Friar’s shortcomings being part of the pair’s doomed love story instead of fate.

“I would have to think about that, I’m not sure.”

Now Mal was surprised, an adult actually admitting they didn’t know something.
It felt nice that her opinion was at least being thoroughly considered. She assumed she would just be written off as not understanding since they were two humans and fae tended to think more linearly and logically.

“Well…thanks for checking in my books Ms. Charisse,” Mal said, gathering to leave and join the others for a late dinner.

“No problem, Mal. Do come back because I’m going to have an answer for you.”

The teen smiled, doubtful the woman would come up with a reason that would satisfy her but at least she treated her like a young adult and not some silly child.

“Will do. Night.”

Ms. Charisse went about some other administrative tasks at the librarian desk and started to do some closing duties, always happy to help Dixie Millechooses, the school librarian.

She couldn’t help but reach for her favorite novel, re-reading it and getting lost in the story of two star-crossed lovers in fair Verona. She felt she was reading it anew, trying to decipher it with Mal’s point of view.

It certainly made it an interesting reread.

So engrossed in the book with new eyes, she didn’t hear the soft footsteps coming towards her.


“Good Evening, Your Majesty,” Audrey said politely, a small curtsey as custom dictated; as Queen of the UKA, Belle was entitled to deference, no matter what she wore.

Queen Belle smiled at her son and politely acknowledged his girlfriend.

“Ben, Audrey. What brings you to the library?”

“I heard you were ‘volunteering’ again, a little birdy told me,” he joked, it was one of the domestic goblins that knows to alert the Crown Prince when his mother was on school grounds when she didn’t make it public knowledge. She had a habit of dressing casually and acting as a library volunteer. To her delight and consternation, there were never enough students in the library to ever recognize she was there and spread the word. She got some privacy in her favorite library, one she designed herself, but she did wish the students would utilize it more. “I thought we could grab a late dinner in my suite.”

“That would be lovely, dear,” she was happy to join her son and see how school was going.

“Reading Romeo and Juliet again?” although Ben wasn’t surprised, it was his mother’s favorite book.

“Yes, I had a surprising conversation about it. Made me re-think a few things. I’m rereading with a fresh perspective.”

“Oh, I love Romeo and Juliet too,” Audrey agreed right away.

There was always something Belle never quite trusted about Princess Audrey. Something about the girl seemed so self-absorbed, her smile just never reached her eyes and seemed faked.

Belle kept her opinion to herself. Her Ben was smart, either there was more to Audrey than she knew
or he would wise up and move on to someone else. She just had to hope he behaved as a gentleman and future king should and there were no surprise grandbabies.

She was at least thankful Audrey was raised a traditional princess and it was unlikely she would use her sex to entrap her son for the Queenship.

She just wished Audrey wasn’t such a kiss-up.

“I just think it’s so sad they had to die. Like if only they had cell phones back then. A quick text and so much misunderstanding would have been avoided.”

Belle smiled, knowing that was the depth of Audrey’s analysis and she felt the girl was really trying.

She guessed they couldn’t all be critical thinkers, but she had to admit she’s rather talk to someone who disliked her favorite book with well thought out reasons than someone who superficially liked it and only thought the problem was a simple miscommunication that could have been solved with modern technology.

“Is pops in town too?” Ben asked, hopeful.

Belle shook her head “no,” her lips tight in anger at her husband. King Adam had been infuriated to know exactly whom his son chose to come to Auradon Prep. The King had assumed his son would choose children of henchmen, or a villain that hadn’t caused so much grief or damage. Perhaps Dr. Facilier, a newer addition to the Isle and not even from Auradon. New Orleans was in a country east of Auradon and a completely different continent. They had banished him to the Isle of the Lost as a favor to Prince Naveen, a royal from the neighboring kingdom of Maldonia. It was rumored the villain had a daughter, someone no one in Auradon would resent coming to their soil.

King Adam had a hard time in general with his son’s project, but to have the children of the four most reviled and hated villains in his land? That had caused a family feud that persisted to that day.

It didn’t help that gossip magazines had caught wind of familial strife within the Royal Family. Ben was more than willing to try to meet his dad half way, but King Adam still sometimes had that Beastly temper and stubbornness to match.

“Oh well, we’ll catch him next time. How about I escort you two lovely ladies to dinner?” Ben smiled through the disappointment.

He then walked his girlfriend and his mother to his suite, where a private dinner waited for them.

Mal had kept her promise; she signed up to go to the museum for extra credit. Jay had to literally carry her from the dorms to the bus, as she kept falling asleep at breakfast, but it was probably for the best as she still had an issue with motion sickness. Sleeping through the trip was better than being nauseated for an hour. Carlos didn’t mind, he rather liked having her lean against him while she slept. He ignored their chaperone’s disapproving stare, knowing it was against the rules to be so close to another student. But the adult had heard of Mal’s issues with driving and they weren’t doing anything overtly inappropriate so she let it slide.

The hour went by quickly, the three of the Four that were awake the entire trip liked to watch the scenery go by. Still amazed at how quickly the land could pass them by in a bus, nothing like it on the Isle.
There were so many things Auradon had that the Isle lacked, they had lost count of them.

If Mal wasn’t annoyed enough of having to do school activities on the weekend, she was doubly annoyed she had to wear her school uniform to the museum. Since it was technically a school event, they had to still dress appropriately as if they were on campus. She didn’t understand why simple jeans and a top was so outrageous to the faculty.

But when she got off the bus and there was a cadre of reporters swarming the front of the museum, she understood that no matter where the students went, they were being watched and had to portray a certain appearance.

She still thought it was stupid, but she understood their reasons.

Mal thought it was so weird how obsessed the rest of Auradon was with the nobles and Royal Family. There were literal television shows dedicated to news and gossip about the Auradon Elite, their favorite topic seemed to be the Isle Four lately.

Crown Prince Ben had apologized for the ruckus the paparazzi forced upon them but it was all a part of the program. They had to show the rest of the country they were just normal teenagers trying to get the best education they could. At least that’s what Ben was hoping they could depict.

The four of them had consciously avoided the press at all costs, none of them had any interest in talking to reporters. They had all gotten adept at turning their heads and avoiding the flashing lights whenever they had left campus. None of them answered any questions that were pelted at them from all sides.

*What do you like best about Auradon Prep?*

*Why did you accept placement in Auradon?*

*Who is your father?*

*Who is your mother?*

*Is it true your mother has opponents on the Isle killed?*

*Is it true your mother owns a whore house?*

*Are you here to finish the work of your mother?*

*Does House Dornröschchen have to worry about your presence?*

All those questions and more were hurled at them at lightning speed, even if they had wanted to answer anything, they could hardly tell which questions were directed at whom.

The noise died down immediately when they stepped into the museum, it was another grand castle in miniature donated for educational purposes.

*How is it that these people are so rich they just give palaces away?*

Mal thought with a hint of bitterness, growing up in poverty and in an apartment that could probably fit into the museum’s entryway. The Four kept to themselves, always off to the side. All particularly aware of the stares the other students gave them, the quiet whispers of gossiping about what just happened; as if the Four had any control over what the press found interesting.
Carlos had to deal with the brunt of it all, his acute hearing not allowing him to ignore the whispers. He hated the ones that speculated about his father the most, as if he didn’t have those questions himself and wanted answers. The rumors that swirled about his and Jay’s supposed hidden cruelty were also grating. Because of the thugs and thieves on the Isle, they all assumed he and his best friend shared their brutal nature. Never mind they had never given any of the students reason to suspect them. Even when Audrey and her crew were blatantly taunting them, they each had turned the other cheek and walked away. That wasn’t enough to quell the gossip mill, they were all still seen as criminals. They always skittered away from them anytime they went into a room or sat anywhere.

Sometimes he was tempted to let Mal loose, might as well be as brutal as they think they are. The only thing holding his tongue was the fact that they could weather salacious gossip and suspicious stares. They couldn’t survive being banished back to the Isle.

Though seeing Mal’s glower, perhaps they ought to buy her two desserts for putting her through today. Neither he nor Evie really thought the press would find out about the field trip, much less that they would all attend. Perhaps he needed to stop underestimating the paparazzi’s tenacity.

Their chaperone went over the protocol. They were free to go through the museum at their own pace and look at whatever exhibits they wanted. Lunch would be at 12pm, they would have to eat at that hour otherwise the lunchroom wouldn’t give them meal credits for food.

He pulled out the extra credit assignment as the teacher droned on.

Choose one reading assignment: Romeo & Juliet, The Great Gatsby, or Les Misérables (extra 2 points).

Find the exhibit(s) that covers the time period in which the reading takes place.

How does the exhibit(s) connect to the story?

Do you think the era had greatly influenced the novel? Why or why not?

Could the story have been written today? Why or why not?

Write a short essay (approx. 300 words) explaining each answer.

Carlos and Evie wished they could take the longer novel, Les Misérables, but both weren’t even halfway through the gargantuan book. Mal and Jay had already finished it and felt they may as well make the most of the assignment and get as much credit as they could.

Evie wanted Romeo & Juliet and he took The Great Gatsby. He didn’t care either way and felt it was a way to lessen the chance of the teacher suspecting they were cheaters. It was bad enough they were watched like hawks through every test. No matter how well they did, some teachers couldn’t believe any of them would do so well and even better than their Auradon born counterparts.

Mal took the map and came up with a strategy.

“We might as well see everything we can. It’s essentially a huge spiral, so we’ll start at the top of the museum and work our way down. Luckily, the cafeteria is in the middle. So once we reach halfway, we’ll stop for lunch and then continue on. We should be able to hit everything by 5:30 when we have to board the bus. If not, then at least enough to do the assignment.”
The other three agreed and Evie was all but bouncing because the first several exhibits had to do with fashion.

“So first up is the Hall of Crowns, then the Hall of Gowns, and then the Hall of Armor,” she blue witch said excitedly, rushing to the elevator. The other three quickly followed so they wouldn’t get lost or separated.

Although Mal had her doubts, once their self-guided tour got under way, she found herself having a good time. The other students seemed to have gone straight to exhibits they thought pertained to their assignment, so they were by themselves.

But without judgmental stares and whispers, they were able to enjoy themselves.

“Oh, this is so me…and practical,” Evie said of a diadem that was mounted with fist sized sapphires and looked like it weighed ten kilos. “This would be my ‘everyday’ tiara. It even has matching earrings.”

“Yeah, that would tear through your ear,” Mal pointed out lightly.

“Fashion is pain Mal. Fashion is pain.”

Jay had his camera on him, curtesy of the Crown and the Arts Department at Auradon Prep. He had been taking pictures like crazy.

“You’d make a lot of money, selling those to the press,” Mal told him sarcastically, knowing he would never.

But she also wasn’t wrong.

“Hey, got to make money somehow. Now smile,” he ordered the pink haired fae.

Mal submitted but pulled in Carlos, not wanting to be pictured by herself. He automatically wrapped his arms around his girlfriend and told Jay he wanted copies.

They spent longer in the Hall of Crowns than they ought to have, but there were too many goofy picture opportunities. There were several where Evie and Mal had stooped to make it seem the crowns were on top of their head, with goofy faces Jay took all the photos he could. Luckily with a digital camera, that was basically limitless.

Even Carlos was a good sport and posed under tiaras and a scepter.

There was even more color commentary in the Hall of Gowns. All the iconic finery Auradon had to offer. Queen Belle’s coronation gown, Queen Rapunzel’s wedding gown, Sultana Jasmine’s gown during Unification, they were all there.

“That would do nothing for my figure,” Carlos said about a particularly poofy number that was Cinderella’s ball gown the night the prince fell in love with her.

Evie looked in awe, admiring the work that not only went into imagining such beautiful items but their construction. The gowns were older than she was, but still looked as perfect as the day they were sewn.

*I’m going to have a gown here, one day.*

Hope and ambition swelled in her chest, a dream that was for the first time well within her grasp.
The mood only ruined when some unknown tourney players thought they ought to make a comment when they passed them.

“Didn’t anyone tell you princess that the Evil Queen Ravenna doesn’t have royal status here? You’ll never have a gown fit for royalty,” he sneered at Evie, breaking her dream; the idiots thinking she had designs on marrying a prince and owning a gown for the occasion.

The smile fell from her face as she was reminded again that although her mother had been a queen, she was not a princess and probably never would be; not only was she baseborn but Ravenna was officially disentitled when she was banished to the Isle. For whatever reason, some students wanted to keep reminding her; others had taken to calling her “princess Evie” in scorn.

Both Jay and Mal started to walk to the arrogant boy but Carlos had stopped them.

“It’s not worth it guys, come on. Let’s see the armor,” he pleaded, not wanting to cause a scene and potentially be banished from going on field trips again.

“Yeah, they’re just jerks. It’s not worth it,” Evie pleaded, wanting to get back to having fun and ignore the mean boys.

They stopped, knowing how important school was to them. But while the boys were still laughing at her friend’s expense and walking backwards and not paying attention, a quick flick of Mal’s wrist had them all falling flat onto their faces. It looked like one even broke his nose. Other students who had witnessed it started to laugh as well, as the tourney jocks were not universally loved.

“Walk much?” someone they recognized from the band derided the boys, most students assuming they weren’t looking where they were going; too busy being cruel to the new students.

“Mal,” Carlos chided with no heat, suppressing a smile as he didn’t want to encourage her.

“What? That wasn’t me, that was instant karma,” although her delighted smirk did nothing to prove her innocence.

“Do not bleed on the exhibits,” a museum curator who happened to be there harshly told the boys as they wobbled up, unsure on their feet.

Her friends couldn’t hold in the smile and their mood lifted again. They made their way to the Hall of Armor, trying to get through the exhibits in time for lunch.

They thought they’d like the armor exhibit more, but it was more of the same to their eyes. It was filled mostly with the Knights of Camelot donated items. All of it polished as if they had never seen a battle, perhaps the museum thought burnt or dented armor would be too traumatizing for children.

The Isle Four made their way through the top floor and eventually came across the Hall of Villains. They hesitated, unsure if they should see what Auradon thought of their parents.

“Come on, we might as well see what it’s about. The Great Gatsby was written soon before the wars. Maybe they have baby pictures of your parents,” Mal encouraged them.

The four walked into the gloomy exhibit room, the light almost non-existent. There were portraits of lesser villains, their stories reduced to blurbs beneath their pictures. They came to the main room and there stood perfect replica wax figures of Cruella, Jafar, Ravenna, and dead center was Maleficent.

It seemed overkill to not only dedicate the entire room to the four villains, but the display seemed almost reverential; each getting a podium to lift them up in almost veneration.
Carlos stared at the figure of Cruella, her figure seeming a mockery rather than a monument to a powerful being that had almost put Auradon to its knees. Maleficent, Ravenna, and Jafar had all been modeled with their weapons of power: The Dragon Staff, Magic Mirror and Poisoned Apple, and Cobra Staff respectively. Their stories were epic sagas that started wars and their contribution to history still felt. Their portraits loomed behind the figures, the sole ones on a grand wall.

Cruella’s wax figure had a mad look upon her and she was chasing puppies. Her crime of animal kidnapping and cruelty didn’t exactly match the punishment she received. Hardly on par with the other three, but she had always been named as one of the worst villains with them, for reasons unknown to any of them.

He felt himself floating away from the museum and to another place. Where her deranged look was a daily occurrence and instead of terrified puppies, it was a terrified child who didn't understand why his mother yelled at odd hours of the night or wanted him to clean until his fingers bled.

Before that memory took hold of him, he immediately removed himself from the exhibit and walked towards the exit.

The other three had the same idea, vowing to never again come to that exhibit.

“I’m sorry,” Mal said, in a rare moment of contrition. “I don’t know why I thought…it was dumb of me to make us go in there.”

“You didn’t hold any of us at magic point, Mal,” Jay reasoned with her. They all thought they could handle it and that was proven wrong immediately.

“There were definitely no baby pictures, so…” Evie said to try to lighten the mood. It only half worked.

“Onward and downward,” Mal told them, they still had an hour before the cafeteria would serve lunch.

They made their way through the Hall of Castles. That was an interesting exhibit, seeing the architectural wonders and how much upkeep they each had to maintain.

*Perhaps my mother isn't too crazy for wanting one so badly.*

Evie thought as she saw the amenities of each castle and the luxury they offered. The history of updating with the times while still maintaining its historical charm was staggering. The fact that Auradon had so many was mind boggling. She rather would have had her mother encourage her to go into some professional field and *earn* a castle rather than ensnare a prince for one. It certainly would have caused a lot less resentment.

The Hall of Castles then led to the Hall of Magical Artifacts. It held everything from Aladdin’s Lamp, although it technically was the Genie’s but in grand Auradonian fashion they tended to glaze over the magical beings’ contribution, to Maleficent’s Spinning Wheel – unless of course the magical being was the villain then they made sure to mention that.

A simple spinning wheel that had belonged to an old nameless spinster, Mal wondered if the original owner had known it would have been *her* spinning wheel that sparked the beginning of the Great Fae War.

“That’s it?” Jay asked incredulously. He wasn’t sure what he was expecting, he didn’t even really know what a spinning wheel was or what it did, but it was just an old looking thing that didn’t look
like it could hurt a fly much less wield a perilous curse.

“Excuse you,” Mal took exception to his tone. “It’s a cursed object, it doesn’t need to look scary.”

“I’m just sayin’, I think a cursed sword or…even one of the tiaras would have been cooler.”

“When would Aurora even come across a sword? Maleficent cursed an object she knew the girl
would be around. It’s called strategy.”

Jay just rolled his eyes, still thinking a spinning wheel was lame. He met eyes with Carlos, who
would never say anything against Mal but Jay knew he agreed the spinning wheel was dorky.

They moved on and saw the Mad Hatter’s Hat, the Cursed Rose, King Triton’s Trident, Cinderalla’s
Glass Slipper, the Golden Pelydryn, and the ruins of the Magic Mirror. All of these relics of magic
and they were wasted in a museum.

I don’t understand how these powerful beings, some of them descendants of gods, would give up
their power. What does King Adam have on them?

Mal wondered how exactly King Adam gained power, it didn’t make sense to her that these kings
and queens would “vote” for unification. Even if King Adam did help with the wars, she didn’t think
he helped to the point where they ought to pay fealty to him, his price for tribute being their objects
of power if they had any. She could maybe understand it if he had taken them for his own use, but to
put them away in a museum to never be used?

None of it made sense to her; she thought there must be some missing puzzle piece that tied it all
together to make sense.

They came to the epicenter of the museum, above them an intricate dome mural and a single floating
wand. They didn’t need to read the plaque to guess whose it was.

The Fairy Godmother’s Wand.

Although they had no interest or plans of every actually locating it, it seemed fate had other ideas.

There it was, something so powerful that it could trap the most powerful fae and dark witches and
wizards alike and bind their powers.

Mal didn’t understand how something she could probably snap in half with no issue could cause so
much pain.

The blue light that surrounded it they assumed was some sort of force field, probably an insanely
powerful one given the object it was protecting. It was the only item in the museum protected as
such, everything else – including cursed objects – was only protected by glass.

Mal eyed the plaque and read out loud,

“Twelve inches, fir, core made from the hair of the Star Queen Yvaine. The silver wrought from
moonlight. Gifted to Nadine FéeMarraine, star fae, to protect over humanity. Best for transfiguration
– no shit – and charms.”

“That’s what kept us on the Isle for seventeen years,” Carlos said softly, just as unbelieving
something so innocuous could have done it to them.

What he didn’t say was that not only did it keep them on the Isle. It kept their parents there too. It
kept them from venturing out when food was scarce. It kept the pollution in so they couldn’t see the sun or the stars. It kept them from the ocean, Auradon, and everything else that was good or could have helped them in the world.

Staring at the wand hurt almost as staring at wax figures of their parents. Both had been instrumental in the scars, seen and unseen, they each carried.

Lost in their thoughts, they didn’t notice a gaggle of girls observing them.

“Look at those villain kids. You know they want to steal the wand. They were probably sent here by their evil parents to take it and brake down the barrier. They shouldn’t be allowed anywhere near it,” Audrey whispered to her friends, they each nodded their head in agreement.

Why else would they look so intently at Fairy Godmother’s Wand?

They each whispered their theory, the next one worse than the last.

Carlos was so lost in his melancholy that he didn’t even hear them.

Mal was the first to shake her out of her daze. The wand was nothing to them now; she wouldn’t let it be part of their life anymore.

“It’s time for lunch,” she told the others and they blinked out of their own trances. They were happy to think of anything besides the island, and their stomachs rumbled at the thought of food.

They had finally been taken off nutritional supplements and their restricted diet. One of Mal’s new favorite pastimes was trying out new foods and seeing what she liked. The variety Auradon and beyond had to offer meant that she could probably try something new every day for the rest of her life. She had every intention of tasting everything the world had to offer. As they walked towards the cafeteria, she had remembered seeing a particular part of the museum she really wanted to check out.

“You guys go ahead and order me something I haven’t tried before,” Mal told Evie and Jay as she grabbed Carlos’ hand and started to lead him in another direction.

“Where are you going?” Evie asked, confused that Mal was going back towards an exhibit they had already seen.

“Remember that suggestion you had yesterday? I’m taking you up on it.”

“What suggestion? I don’t’ remember…oh right,” she smirked as she remembered exactly what her friend was talking about. “Have fun, don’t get expelled,” She said under her breath.

“What are you talking about?” Jay asked, wondering why his girlfriend and best friends were acting so weird.

“I’ll tell you later,” she whispered, not wanting to risk an adult or a gossipy student hearing them.

Carlos was confused as to where they were going but he implicitly trusted his girlfriend so he just went with it.

He was more confused when they found themselves in a deserted hallway and then inside what looked to be a storage closet. It appeared to be where the museum kept its extra maps, pamphlets, and other paper supplies.
So no one is surprised or shocked

Keep this door securely locked

With graceful and intricate waves of her hand, her magic in the form of green light and fire seeped into the door and he heard the clicking sound of the antique locks falling into place.

Although this place is used to store

Let all who see it completely ignore

Let all what we do be kept bound

Let no one hear a moan or sound

A glimmering green light then encased the entire room and Carlos was even more befuddled than before.

But then Mal smiled wickedly and pulled him by his school polo into a searing kiss. He was still a bit confused but happily returned the kiss with equal fervor.

***

“Mal, what are we doing?” he asked between kisses. He didn’t want to stop but what was left of his reasoning thought that perhaps the museum, and chancing expulsion, wasn’t the most appropriate place for this kind of activity.

“We,” she replied as her hands made quick work of loosening his polo and unbuckling his belt. “are making a good day from a shitty morning.”

Part of him knew they ought to stop. Despite the rough morning, it was particularly reckless to do amorous activities in public. But when Mal found his favorite spot on his neck and started to suckle, it was easy to rationalize anything she wanted.

She magic-ed the door, we’ll be fine.

Whatever happened, she just couldn’t stop what she was doing with her lips. To get a better angle, he lifted her up and she automatically wrapped her legs around his waist and he pressed her against the wall.

She mewled in pleasure as his hardness rubbed against her sex, loving the friction and how his hands were all over her.

“Gods, I’ve missed your hands,” she huskily said into his ear and nibbled.

The air around them started to electrify with their passion and power, his own magic had gotten strong enough to manifest itself in a silver light. It started to crackle and pop, intertwining with her green fire in a storm around them.
Too lost in each other, they didn’t even notice and her magic made anyone outside the room none the wiser.

She yelped in surprise when he tore through her panties, not tolerating the barrier between them any longer. He smiled unapologetically, red eyes met glowing green and she tore through his polo in retaliation; hands exploring the expanse of skin that had hardened into more lean muscle during their time in Auradon.

In a swift movement, he had her turned away from him; holding both her hands above her head and she was unable to move. Placing her feet shoulder width part so she had a solid stance. She may have had magic powers that could tear him apart with a snap of her fingers, but she was his willing hostage within his arms.

He knew she didn’t care for skirts but he couldn’t help but appreciate how easy it was for him to caress her thigh and move upward, easy access to where she wanted his hands the most.

Carlos paid her back in kind, nibbling at her neck and sinking his teeth into the soft flesh, not hard enough to cause any real harm but just so she felt it and he knew it’d leave a mark. He wanted everyone to know that just because they weren’t affectionate in public, that Mal was taken and was his. Although the student body was afraid of her, they also couldn’t ignore her beauty and it rankled him to scent others’, male and female alike, attraction towards her.

When his hands finally made it to the apex of her thighs, he smirked with pride to find her already so wet for him. He rubbed along her slit, coating his fingers in her slick and finally curled into her sex.

She sighed with contentment, glad not to feel so empty but still wishing she could feel the fullness of his aching cock that rubbed against her backside.

They still hadn’t found a way to obtain birth control and every shopping trip always had a chaperone. They were finding it harder and harder as time went on to resist temptation.

His khakis were down around his ankles, the only barrier between them was his boxer briefs which had a growing stain of where his cock wept with pre-come.

Mal rode his hand, whimpering in pleasure; wanting to go faster and faster. His own breathing ragged as he held onto her and as his pleasure mounted from her friction and pressure.

“Take it out,” Mal told him breathily.

“What?” too preoccupied and unsure what she meant.

“Take your cock out, I want to feel it,” she demanded again.

She was playing a dangerous game but she didn’t care. All that mattered to her at the moment was feeling Carlos as close as she dared. It’d be the closest they had ever been, usually they were always so careful to keep their sexes apart, conscience of keeping his seed as far away from her core as possible.

But in that moment it was just the two of them in the world, the future and consequences didn’t exist.

All they had was each other.

She stayed in place while he used his other hand to release his straining erection, purple from its arousal and he pulled her straight against him. It wasn’t exactly what she wanted but it was as close as either of them was willing to go, even in their impassioned state.
They took a moment to take in the gravity of what they were doing, neither could muster an ounce of regret.

Mal against started to rock against his hand, reveling in the sensation of him within and behind her. She imagined when the day finally came when she could have all of him, not just his talented mouth or fingers.

Again, their powers started to swirl and fuse together; a perfect symphony of air and fire.

Carlos dipped and curled his fingers within her, trying to find the exact spot to make her gasp and moan. He had found it when she let out a trembled mewl,

“Yesssss, Carlos…**gods**.”

He started to pay particular attention to that sweet spot of hers, within seconds her whole body tenses and she arches into him. Her magic then released with her, flowing from her and into him; overwhelming him with sensation and he soon followed in her climax. His release spurting on her bare skin, thinking of his scent lingering on her causing him to come again.

They held each other as their breathing returned to normal.

***

As they came down from their high, neither really believing they had just done that in a public place, but feeling better than they had that morning.

“I’m a mess. We are officially gross. Are there at least paper towels somewhere?” Carlos asked, not wanting to go out in public with these particular stains. There was a drawback of not using their mouths on each other.

What were they going to do about their torn uniforms?

Still, neither of them had any regret.

Mal looked around and didn’t see any; she didn’t think the pamphlets would be any help. So thankfully she knew another spell.

\[\text{Let this mess remain unseen}  \\
\text{Make us head to toe clean}  \\
\text{So no one stops and stares}  \\
\text{Let our uniforms be repaired}\]

She would never thank Maleficent for the way she was raised, but she was glad she was adept at simple spells, they were coming in handy more often than she thought. She especially didn’t understand why Auradon Prep discouraged magic.

Well perhaps discouraged magic for what **they** were currently using it for, but otherwise benign spells for cleaning she didn’t see their problem with.

Magically, all evidence of their activities had vanished and all they had to do was straighten their clothes. Although neither needed help with becoming appropriate for the public, each had helped the other look presentable, but it was just another excuse to touch each other.
What should have taken a few minutes, took several more as they kept intermittently kissing as they fixed their clothes.

“I think I left a lasting piece of evidence of what we were doing,” Carlos pointed out, running a gentle hand over the love bite he left on her neck. Something he took great pleasure in doing since they came to Auradon.

Mal ran her own fingers over the tender flesh, she could probably magic it away. At the very least she could ask Evie to meet her in the bathroom and to cover it up with cosmetics. But she liked to wear his bite, as much as she liked him to wear her scratch marks.

So she opted to cover the love mark with her hair, she had taken to leaving it down and it had grown just long enough to cover his mark; only if one was looking intently or if she swished her hair out of the way would anyone see it.

He smirked; glad she wouldn’t get rid of it. He didn’t want to be completely obnoxious and have her parade it in public – well he did want that but he wasn’t insufferable enough to say so out loud – but it was something they both knew as there. Their own little secret.

She went in to kiss him again, not wanting to leave the safety and privacy of the closet. But he stopped them before they started all over again,

“We need to get to the cafeteria or we’ll miss lunch.”

She made a face but knew he was right. She quickly kissed him again and they fixed the rest of the closet that their magics had left in disarray.

With Carlos’ acute hearing, he said the coast was clear and Mal undid the locking and didn’t bother with the other spell. They popped out of the closest as if nothing had happened and walked towards the cafeteria.

Within a few steps an alarm had sounded and both immediately froze.

“That can’t be for us,” Carlos reasoned.

“If it is, it’s a gross over reaction,” Mal replied, ready to argue with anyone that an alarm because of teenage fun was ridiculous. They kept walking as they weren’t sure what else to do.

They passed the Hall of Magical Artifacts as it was between them and the cafeteria.

It appeared the wand exhibit alarm had been set off as the force field was turning different colors and seemed to be the source of the alarm ringing.

Carlos covered his ears, the sound too harsh for his sensitive hearing.

Guards came running up the stairs and pointed their Tasers around, ready to fire at whoever was trying to steal the wand.

Some students had come to see the commotion, and Audrey was the first to see Carlos and Mal near the exhibit and had jumped to conclusions.

“There! It was them!” she yelled, the guards then pointed their weapons at the accused.

“What?!” Mal yelled, unbelieving that Audrey would go so far as to accuse them of trying to steal the wand.
Sure her mother had ordered her to do just that but she didn’t know that and it’s not what happened.

The guards walked to them and grabbed Carlos’ arm,

“You’re coming with us.”

“I didn’t do anything,” he growled and pulled back, not willing to go anywhere with them.

The situation escalated with the guards raising their weapons to the two teens, Carlos pulling Mal back and his eyes going red.

“What the…?” the guard unsure what he was seeing.

The class chaperone swooped in and deescalated the situation. She clapped her hands loudly and got everyone’s attention.

“What is going on here?!” incensed that her students were being treated in such a manner. “You do not raise weapons to children, have you lost your mind?!”

“Mam, we are handling the situation.”

“I think not. Now, what is going on?”

The alarm finally stopped and everyone started to talk at once.

“The alarm for the Magic Wand went off, it’s protocol to come here with weapons ready.”

“They had been staring hard at it all morning, I’m telling you they were trying to steal it,” Audrey accused again, more and more convinced that’s exactly what happened despite not seeing them do it.

“I saw it too,” a loyal cheerleader corroborated her story.

“Those kids are nothing but trouble,” the tourney player from before had added.

“We were just walking to the cafeteria,” Mal defended themselves.

“Silence!”

The whole room quieted down, most surprised such a booming voice could come out of someone so little.

“Mal,” the chaperone directed the question. “What happened?”

“I don’t know, we were just walking to cafeteria for lunch. Then the alarm went off.”

“Lunch started half an hour ago. Jay and Evie were there but you guys weren’t,” Audrey butted in.

“They were still looking at exhibits, Audrey. They have their own lives, unlike your lemming friends,” Evie sneered at the cheerleaders, seamlessly lying to cover for her friends as soon as she figured what was happening when she came with Jay to see what the alarm was about.

“They were coming from the Hall of Castles. They had already been to that exhibit,” Audrey countered.

“Are you stalking us?” Mal asked, disbelieving she would weirdly know their movements.
“STOP,” the chaperone had run out of patience several minutes ago. “Look,” she pointed to a set of cameras. “There is a camera. There’s a video feed right on the wand. Can we please go look and see what happened.”

“Please lead the way,” Mal said, exasperated and getting hangry.

The four made it clear they intended to follow the teacher and the guards but she had other ideas.

“No. You all go back to lunch. I’ll speak with you later.”

Shit

The students all obeyed and they all returned to the lunch room.

The four pecked at their food, all keenly aware of eyes drilling holes in the back of their heads. Mal was so pissed she couldn’t even enjoy her beautiful dessert. Everything tasted like cardboard.

They knew they hadn’t touched the wand, but they couldn’t recall if they had seen cameras in the hallway where they had messed around in the closet.

“OK, they’ll probably just look at the wand footage. They have no reason to check the others, if there are cameras,” Carlos reasoned.

“What if they check all of them? Even if we didn’t touch the wand, that bitch pointed out we weren’t in the cafeteria,” Mal angrily spat.

“Well there definitely wasn’t a camera in the closet. So they can’t prove we did anything for sure.”

“Yeah, we just need to figure out a totally innocent reason we went into a closet…together…for almost half an hour…”

Of course nothing came to mind, they knew exactly what it’d look like to their chaperone.

“Oh my gods, what are we going to do?” Evie started to panic, her head in her hands.

“See! Look how guilty they look. They totally tried to steal the wand,” Audrey hissed in triumph across the room.

They’ll surely be expelled now.

The others had to agree, the four looked rather tense and it made sense with all that Audrey had told them.

Oh gods, we’re going to be expelled because Mal can’t keep her hands off Carlos’ freckled dick.

Evie started to take quick breaths, anxiety starting to grip her.

“Evie, calm down,” Mal told her friend, the last thing they needed was them totally losing their cool.

“I can’t just ‘calm down’ Mal, I’m having a gods damned panic attack here,” she snipped at her friend.

“That’s it.”

“What’s it?”
“Panic attack. I’ll say seeing my mom’s wax figure and the wand reminded me about the Isle and it induced a panic attack. I’ll start crying…”

“You don’t cry Mal.”

“Damnit, you’re right…I’ll figure out a way to cry. It’s workable.”

“They’re never going to believe it,” Jay said, worried but it may have been the best plan they had.

“Probably not, but they can’t prove it one way or another. Even if they inspect the closet, they’re not going to find evidence of anything, I cleaned it by magic. It’s our best shot. I had a panic attack, Carlos being the good and understanding boyfriend he is escorted me to somewhere private until I calmed down. We’ll say we’re really sorry for how it looked and we understand that next time we would get the attention of an adult. Mea Culpa, Mea Culpa, blah blah blah. It’s workable. It’s at least a viable alternative. They can’t expel us if they have no definitive proof.”

The each agreed it was their best shot and Evie calmed down considerably. If anyone could pull off such a lie, it was Mal.

Now that the weight of being caught was off their shoulders, they each visible relaxed and enjoyed their meal.

Jay had ordered her something called a chicken club sandwich, it was rather tasty. She only ate half because she was more interested in her dessert. It was rather massive and the Chantilly cream just melted on her tongue and set off every pleasure center in her brain.

It wasn’t as good as Carlos’ talented hands or mouth, but it was damn near close.

The tart strawberries were the perfect complement to the not too sweet cream and the buttery short cake tied everything together.

When Mal made sounds he had heard not ten minutes earlier he asked,

“Should I be jealous or concerned?”

He meant it as a joke but he was a little affronted when she nodded and smiled. As revenge, he caught her hand mid bite and stole a bit of her dessert.

Now they were in a heated staring contest, Mal’s mind going to all sorts of delightful places; mostly of Carlos naked in her dorm and covered with the cream while she cleaned him off with strawberries.

Carlos’ eyes flickered red as if he could read her mind and he whole heartedly agreed with the plan.

“OK, you guys seriously need to stop eye fucking each other, otherwise they certainly won’t believe the ‘panic attack’ story,” Jay warned but it was mostly because he was started to feel the effect of his friends’ amorous stares. Now he wondered if Evie would be willing to have their own fun in some random closet.

But she had just gone through a legitimate scare so he thought better than to ask. He did reach over to her hand and gave a comforting squeeze. She smiled at him and squeezed back, glad to have him there with her.

Mal rolled her eyes but toned it down a bit, she settled for playing footsie under the table and having a nice lunch with her friends.
The chaperone came to their table a little before 1pm.

“Mal, Evie, Jay, and Carlos. I want to apologize, we reviewed the footage and it’s clear none of you were near the wand and didn’t cause the alarm to go off. It was a couple of students from another school, apparently they were dared to touch the force field. Officer Hibbard, do you have anything to say?”

The chaperone stared hard at the old security guard, a man mostly bald but what hair he had left was snow white. He seemed insulted that he was being asked to apologize to a bunch of teenagers for simply doing his job, but he couldn’t risk going against an Auradon Prep faculty member.

The funds from each of their parents that donated to the museum paid his salary.

“I’m sorry, it seems we were too…hasty …in our reactions.”

“No problem, say ‘hi’ to the misses for us,” Carlos was the only one to reply, it was sarcastically but all four teens were glad that it didn’t seem like they reviewed any other footage and hopefully never would.

The Four were pleased they were off the hook and none the wiser of Mal and Carlos’ side adventure. They were surprised, however, when Audrey was pulled from the cafeteria.

For the first time all day, the gossip wasn’t about them and they all wondered what was happening to the head cheerleader.

The princess didn’t understand why she was being pulled aside, her worry started to grow they she was escorted to the security office.

“Audrey, do you want to tell me why you told the security officers you saw Mal and Carlos trying to steal the wand?”

“I didn’t say they stole the wand,” she automatically denied.

“You said ‘There! It was them!’ when we came to the scene,” the officer contradicted her.

She stumbled over her words for a moment, it was what she said.

“But I didn’t exactly say they stole it…I meant that I thought it was them.”

“So you did not see anyone trying to steal the wand?”

The chaperone knows she didn’t, the footage clearly showed Audrey didn’t show up until well after the two boys fled the scene.

“No…not exactly…”

“But you implied it. We have footage of you pointing directly at the four, and witnesses stating you accused them. Why did your friends seem to verify your story?”

The only answer the chaperone would accept was “Because we were lying” as that’s the only answer that would be the truth. But she wanted the princess to admit it, she was giving the teen a chance to come clean and redeem herself.

“But Ms. Robinson, you had to have seen the look on their faces when they saw the wand earlier. They stared at it for like half an hour.”
It seemed Audrey had no intention of being honest, which was utterly disappointing and not becoming of someone of her station.

“Audrey, this is a museum, what else do you do at exhibits?”

The princess wanted to stomp her foot in frustration, the chaperone just didn’t understand. They were villain kids, they had plans for that wand. She just knew it.

Audrey tried to explain herself again but Ms. Robinson wasn’t having any of it.

“Officer Hibbard, I apologize for the misunderstanding. We will be having a talk with the Headmistress when we get back to school,” she promised the security guard, Audrey deflated; accepting she was in trouble.

Resentment and anger started to build up, she just knew it was Mal’s fault. No matter what anyone said, the Four looked at that wand funny and no one could tell her otherwise.

The chaperone and student left, the officer had logged the use of security footage.

Mal should have had more faith in her power and spells. When going over the footage of the Hall of Castles, her and Carlos sneaking out of the closet didn’t appear out of the ordinary to anyone who saw it.

The bus ride back was rather tense. The students all wanting to talk about what happened but not daring to since the four looked none too pleased and some felt intimidated by their glower, with the exception of Mal who was dead asleep from the motion sickness medicine the chaperone gave her.

None could talk about Audrey either, since she still held sway and she was right there. It was eerily quiet.

Like she was in the morning. Mal had to be carried back to her dorm. This time it was Carlos who carried her bridal style to bed, and they all let her sleep. She was tired from the medication, from not being able to sleep in, and overall it was an emotionally exhausting day.

They all agreed they’d have a quick dinner and leave the homework assignment for tomorrow.

As Carlos took off her boots so she’s be more comfortable, Mal started to mumble, “I’m going to get Audrey,” she slurried an ominous promise.

“No, you’re not going to kill her,” he said gently, knowing it was mainly the medication talking.

“Not kill her, prank war.”

“It might be more merciful to kill her,” knowing how traumatizing Mal’s prank wars could be.

Last he heard, Uma still smelled like shrimp.

“She’s trying to get us expelled; she’s trying to get us sent back to the Isle.”

Carlos sighed, that was true. He didn’t know if a prank war was the answer, but they had to do something about Audrey. The princess had it out for them, and that day she had gotten too close for their comfort in succeeding.
“She doesn’t get to hurt you, no one gets to hurt you,” she said as fiercely as she could under the influence.

He felt a tender wave of affection for his emerald eyed beauty.

Some saw her as cold, vicious, and cut throat; a miniature of her mother. But here, Carlos saw her as fierce and loving, willing to end those who would hurt those she loved.

No one had ever loved him like Mal did. Not even Evie, whose sisterly affection he could not deny but he doubted she would have it in her to do what Mal could.

Mal at her core was a survivor, and there had been so many instances where it would have been smarter, certainly easier, if she had just cut him loose. There were certainly a line of other villains who would line up to be the consort of the next Isle leader. But she braved courting her mother’s wrath just to be with him. She saw him as worthy of the risk, he didn’t always know why. With her he felt cherished and loved; he was someone worth her love.

Mal would have her revenge, even if it were in petty ways that made her feel better. He would just have to do whatever it took to help her not get caught.

She was softly snoring, deep in sleep. He smiled and kissed her forehead and whispered, “I love you.”

He tucked her in and went towards the mess hall. He needed to tell the others of the ensuing prank war on Princess Audrey.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the delay but Stranger Things 2 came out, then it was Halloween. I could not resist the call of either. lol
The Isle Four lounged on the open grassy area known as the quad, enjoying the last vestiges of temperate weather. It’s been a week since the museum incident and most had forgotten already.

The girls were enjoying nice fluffy sweaters and the boys were in a losing battle of stopping them from stealing theirs. Mal was lazily sketching, random scenes with her friends. Evie, a bit more productive, sketched out ideas for her future fall line that would be in all the magazines and dress ideas for Homecoming.

Dragon Hall and the Isle at large didn’t have a concept of “Homecoming.” School was entirely voluntary, in some cases discouraged, and there was very little to celebrate; certainly they wouldn’t revel in a new school year.

But Evie was excited; it was a chance to show off her skills and a reason to dress up. It was still a couple weeks away, but it would take all of that time to make two dresses and two suits. Her friends had no real opinion on fashion, other than Carlos who had an eye for color and a flair for the edgy. Mal and Jay put their utmost faith in her abilities, Carlos wanted something black and white; simple and elegant; but she knew that was just “safe” Carlos talking. He thought he had to look a certain way, researching on the internet what typical teens in Auradon wore to dances.

Even with the Crown’s generous allowance, she would have to make every Auradon Farthing count and the others had given them their portion as they knew it was important for her to do this for them.

Dress making was not a cheap endeavor.

She was going to add a slash of red to Carlos’ suit she decided, crimson that matched his supernatural eyes. Mal’s of course would be purple, she hadn’t decided if she would go a rich plum or a lighter lavender. She wanted to do something unexpected but still within Mal’s taste.

Jay would be in oxblood and burnished gold, something to complement his deeper skin tone.

She of course would be in her signature deep royal blue with gold accents and faux ruby accessories.
She had thought about having them have matching couples outfits, but for their first formal appearance she wanted them to be seen as individuals, to show all of Auradon who they really were.

They wouldn’t have run of the mill dresses or suits from some chain department store. They also wouldn’t have some Auradonian born seamstress make them something either, even if they could afford it. They were from the Isle, they weren’t like the rest. The museum trip made that abundantly clear. So no, they wouldn’t dress like Auradonians but they wouldn’t be Islanders either.

Evie decided that they weren’t meant to fit in; they were born to stand out.

The boys had found a ball and were tossing it around, it was a relaxing Sunday.

Across the quad, they were being watched.

“I think this is a bad idea,” grumbled Chad Charming, not liking Ben’s suggestion to solving their problem.

“If you have a better one, I’m all ears,” Lonnie Li replied, taking in the two Isle boys. “Jay is huge. He’d be a perfect defender. Carlos looks quick. The dancers say he’s a quick study too; he already has a solo for the winter recital. Ben, you need a dependable charger out there with you.”

Ben nodded; he had done his own research. The two teens probably would have been invited to try out for the tourney team if he had gotten them to Auradon earlier.

“They’re thugs, I highly doubt they would even know the meaning of teamwork,” the Charming heir insisted, toting the party line.

“You need to give them a chance,” Ben felt he had told him for the millionth time. “…and what happened to your nose again?”

Chad at least had the wherewithal to look embarrassed; he mumbled something about being clumsy at the museum.

“Look, the bottom line is that we’re down four players. Brad and Mike are benched because they’re idiots and can’t muster the C average to stay on the team. James and John are injured and out for the season. All we have is a bunch of freshmen who don’t know what they’re doing because the team last year was mostly seniors who have graduated. So unless you want to pull out entirely this year – your senior year by the way if you forgot – we need at least two more players to even qualify,” Lonnie explained to Chad, tired of his whining. If he even suggested that they simply not play that year, she was plenty ready to kick him off the team and try to find an additional player. It was easy enough for Chad not to care as he was a prince; he was basically guaranteed a place in any university he wanted, regardless of whether he earned it through academics or sports. He would also never have to worry about paying for said schooling. She, on the other hand, wasn’t royal and couldn’t rely solely on her mother and father’s name to get her anywhere; besides maybe a university in Northern Wei. She would prefer to stay in Auradon proper, so that meant it would be a great boon to her transcripts if she had a championship under her belt; she could potentially get a scholarship.

The lesser prince stewed in his unhappiness, knowing their goalie was right but he still didn’t need to like it. He was also worried that Ben would find out that he had been antagonistic to the four teens; he couldn’t imagine Jay or Carlos joining the team with him on it. Their lineup suffered major losses since last year’s seniors graduated, they basically had to take everyone who had tried out, there were no more players they could pull from; ultimately if Jay and Carlos said “no” then their season was over before Homecoming.
“So who’s going to ask them to try out?” Chad asked, knowing he was the last person who ought to do it and the last person who wanted to do it.

Lonnie grimaced, slightly ashamed she didn’t want to do it either. She knew she shouldn’t listen to rumors but they were pretty hard to ignore. Carlos looked harmless enough, but Jay was built like an ox and she could easily see him as Mal’s top enforcer, which is what the gossip said he was. Her mother would kill her if she knew her daughter was avoiding the Isle Four based on gossip alone, but her mother wasn’t there so she hesitated.

“Come on you guys, you should really give them a chance,” Ben told his teammates, his patience running thin at how stubborn the class was to even give the Isle kids the time of day. He didn’t understand why everyone was still so hesitant around them. They’d been there for almost two months, none of them had done anything remotely intimidating. The only students who had extended the olive branch were in the band.

At least Audrey wasn’t there, he was certain he would hear another lecture,

*No offense Bennie Bear, you’re just too trusting. I know your mom fell in love with a big nasty beast who turned out to be a prince. But with my mom, the evil fairy was just the evil fairy…that girl’s mother.*

Of course that started a whole fight about how he wasn’t a child and didn’t need to be condescended to. He was the Crown Prince and future King of the UKA, he knew what he was doing. He was tired of being told he didn’t know what he was getting into, as if he just dreamt up this plan one night and went with it. They act as if he didn’t spend a year thinking it over and coming up with the plans. As if he didn’t have the best councilors Auradon City had to offer helping him out.

*You don’t understand. When I look into her eyes, I don’t see evil.*

What he had meant to say, was when he looked into their eyes he didn’t see evil; but that slip of the tongue had sent his girlfriend on a jealous tirade and had made some unflattering accusations to both himself and Mal; things that were totally untrue and unjustified. It didn’t help that later that evening Ms. Robinson had called him and Professor FéeMarraine to a conference with Audrey. Apparently his girlfriend had made some more accusations that day and falsely accused Carlos and Mal of trying to steal Fairy Godmother’s Wand while on the field trip.

As Crown Prince and President of the Student Counsel, it was up to him whether or not to bring her up on student ethics violations. Professor FéeMarraine was there in case he wanted to recuse himself as her boyfriend.

He had done so, leaving it up to their Magical History teacher to decide if what Audrey did was worth punishment. He could tell she expected him to take her side and get her out of trouble, but he didn’t think she deserved it, he would preserve the integrity of the student council, and he didn’t have the patience to grant her any favors.

He knew the Professor would be utterly fair and unbiased. He later found out that she simply asked Audrey to make a face to face apology to Mal and Carlos and the princess had refused. He couldn’t believe she was so stubborn that instead of just apologizing, which was a softer sentence than what he would have had her do, she would rather do a week’s worth of detention with the groundskeeper. He didn’t know what her problem was or where all this jealousy was coming from. It was one thing to be cautious because her family had been the victim of Maleficent’s fury, but he had eyes and ears everywhere; he was well aware of her petty and vindictive nature towards the four. All of his overtures of trying to mend fences had fallen on deaf ears and he was tired of trying for her sake.
So, if he wanted to invite Carlos and Jay to the team then he would. If that meant Audrey and the rest of the team and cheer squad would then have to work with and cheer for them; then so be it.

Mal wasn’t too thrilled with the idea of the boys joining the tourney team. It was another school activity that would eat up their time, but she kept quiet on that front because they did seem excited. Both boys were getting antsy with just doing school work. Carlos was a bit alleviated with dance but he wanted something aggressive. The two teens had witnessed a few games and seen professional matches on television. The rough contact sport had piqued their interest and perhaps it would do them good to have an approved outlet for some of their frustration at their poor treatment from some of the students at Auradon Prep and all the excess energy from the plentiful food and less physical demanding work they used to do on the Isle.

There was one issue, however, that she would bring up.

“Your magic is still new and you’re developing,” she warned both of them. Luckily their bursts of accidental magic had been brushed off as the wind or someone being clumsy. The boon to having a generation without magic is that no one could recognize it when they saw it.

Out on the field, however, they would not only be scrutinized but if either boy would be particularly angry or aggressive their magic could manifest in kind.

“If either of you lose control, they’re going…”

“Magic isn’t illegal, it’s just frowned upon. They’ll just think it’s something that happens, like with my hair,” Jay interjected, thinking Mal was being paranoid.

“That was just for a haircut though. You might actually hurt someone on the field. They’re not going to be like, ‘oh the Isle kid has dangerous magic, no big deal.’ They already think we’re thugs, add magic and they’re going to freak out,” she insisted.

Mal had a point, they already weren’t trusted and Jay was honestly surprised he and Carlos were invited to the team at all. Even if they were desperate for players, it didn’t seem like anyone in Auradon Prep besides Ben and the band trusted them.

“Don’t you know anything that could…bind our powers so we could play?” Carlos asked his girlfriend, trying to figure out a solution.

The purpled haired fae winced at the suggestion, the thought of binding their powers felt unnatural and wrong. Their natural magic had been fettered all their life, she never wanted to be so powerless ever again.

“I don’t want us to be helpless, what if they finally get tired of being diplomatic for Prince Ben’s sake?”

He understood his girlfriend’s worry, at any moment on the Isle they could have been attacked. Either as a vendetta against one of their parents or as an act of desperation because of a food shortage, there were some Isle habits they were finding were impossible to shake off.

“We’ll never be helpless, Mal. We survived the Isle for seventeen years, all without magic. We can take on anything they throw at us. I don’t mean to permanently bind our powers, isn’t there anything temporary?”
Mal wanted to argue, tell him even if it were temporary that seconds could mean the difference between life and death. She didn’t want to risk any of them, but whether he was doing it on purpose or not he had those big wide brown eyes that begged for her help and understanding.

So she breathed deep and thought harder about their situation.

They weren’t on the Isle and they wanted to live as if they weren’t, what was the point of coming to Auradon if they were going to be as paranoid as if they were still on the island?

*He wants a normal teenage life, he deserves a normal life.*

They all deserved the carefree life that every Auradon teenager had, even if those teens weren’t even remotely aware of just how easy their life was. Part of being a regular teen in Auradon was joining a sports team, where they could exert all this energy without worry because food was abundant and they didn’t have to be conscious of reserving their fat stores for the winter or any food shortages.

They could do something for the simple fact they wanted to and they thought it was fun.

“I know of some runes that can bind magic,” Mal gave in, recalling her mother teaching her the sigils in case her magic manifested and as a young fae, would need to sometimes dampen her magic for her safety and others’.

With Evie’s help, the next day before the boys’ first try out and practice, they had created simple leather wrist bands with imprints of sacred fae runes. From a casual onlooker, they looked no different than any other masculine bracelet they could have gotten from Target or a gift shop. The bands so simple, most would probably never even notice them. But if one cared to look, the underside of the band were intricate symbols seeped in magic.

As soon as Jay and Carlos put them on, they felt the binding magic. It wasn’t painful, but a sense of something missing lay just under their skin. Both had instinctually wanted to remove them but resisted temptation. It was what they asked for and it helped them contain their magic.

The girls each delicately tied the bracelets to their respective boyfriends, making sure not to make it too tight but also that they wouldn’t fall off.

With a quick look around and decided they were safe from prying eyes, they both experimentally tried to do some simple magic and nothing happened.

“If anything happens, the ties should be weak enough for you to rip off immediately,” Mal worried over them. He could tell she was agitated and hated the offending accessories.

They had spent so much time in a prison they didn’t deserve, even something as simple as a bracelet felt too confining.

He leaned down to kiss her and nuzzled his forehead to hers.

“We’ll be fine, I promise.”

“Anything happens, I’m burning this place to the ground.”

He believed her, and he loved her all the more for it. He was thankful she didn’t seem to remember her promise to start a prank war with Audrey, her Dramamine induced stupor made her memory hazy and perhaps made her speak words she didn’t mean. He wasn’t about to remind her of her ominous promise, thinking it would have been a short term satisfaction but a long term hindrance.
Audrey was willing to accuse them of stuff they didn’t do with no proof, she would probably have no trouble doing so when they actually were doing something against her.

“Wish us luck,” he said as he and Jay started to head towards the tourney field.

“You don’t need luck, you have talent. Which is more than any of these spoiled jerks can say.”

He grinned, happy she believed in him so thoroughly.

Coach Jenkins had been in a constant state of anger since 2/3 of his tourney team had graduated last May. His program had been decimated of all but three of their best players. His team now consisted of three seniors who were trying their best to keep the new players in line and teach them all they could. But green players could only be taught so much by mentors; true talent was taught by experience.

Then he lost an additional four players to laziness or irresponsibility. Tourney was a dangerous game and if they didn’t respect defensive maneuvers enough or to keep their shields up – which was something he shouted at least a hundred times during practice – then injuries happened.

Seeing the two new players on the field, for the first time in months he felt something other than rage; he felt like his team may have a fighting chance that year.

Jay was massive compared to the other freshmen players, and probably most of the adult staff at Auradon Prep. He had heard one of the other coaches, the one who taught Strength and Conditioning, say that all the boy seemed to do was school, work out, and eat. It definitely showed, he wasn’t sure what they did on the Isle but he wondered if there were any other boys they could recruit if they looked like Jay.

There was Carlos, who was a twig compared to his friend but so was the rest of the student body. Ben had vouched for them and they both seemed eager to try out.

“There are eleven players in tourney: three midfielders, three chargers, two defenders, two gunners, and one goalie. The goalie defends the goal, stops the ball from entering and she has to get the ball back to our side once its caught. The midfielders play both defense and offense, depending on who has the ball. They are only allowed in the 40 yards in midfield and to the end of the kill zone. After midfield, there is the kill zone, the big red and white area which is another twenty yards. That is where the cannons come in. The two gunners are on alternate sides, shooting at the other team. They only get four cannon disks per play, so they have to make it count. Gunners can only shoot at moving players. They have to have great aim and not accidentally shoot their own players, very hard things to do with moving targets. Defenders protect our chargers by attacking the opposing team’s chargers and midfielders. They also have shields and can deflect cannon disks as well. Defenders are allowed anywhere on the field. Chargers are only allowed in the attack area and up to the end of their kill zone. Chargers are typically the ones who score. Scores only count once we’re in the strike zone,” Ben went over the basics of tourney with Carlos and Jay.

The teens remained silent, taking in his instruction. He had a chart with the different zones on the field.
“This is the stick, shield, and those are the cannons…” Ben went on and went over their gear, trying to cover everything within a few minutes.

The cheer team was off to the side, doing their routine while checking out the new players. None of them were sure what to think. They had spent the last month gossiping and avoiding Carlos and Jay, now they were expected to cheer for them? Not only that, but they would all be spending much more time together. Whether it be during practice, on the bus to tournaments, or home games. They could tell the head cheerleader, Princess Audrey, was not happy; a frown marring her features although they weren’t sure who she was angry at: the Isle boys daring to step on the revered tourney field or Crown Prince Ben for inviting them. There were rumors about strife between the couple; the Crown Prince unhappy with his princess not supporting his edict, she unhappy with the daughter of the evil fairy who had terrorized her family still in Auradon.

After so many weeks, the Isle kids clearly weren’t going anywhere and Ben was their future king. They all started to worry about the side they had chosen, the brunet royal had control over their futures if they wanted any prominent posts in his court. He would no doubt remember those who had supported his earliest proclamations.

Some of the cheerleaders and tourney players, freshmen who had not had enough time to be totally loyal to either royal, felt they ought to take a firmer stand. Perhaps befriending the newest tourney players would be a natural transition without seeming manipulative.

Audrey steamed at the audacity of her boyfriend. Tourney was their domain and he was allowing
that riff raff in.

Was nothing in Auradon sacred?

The sport was violent enough; they didn’t need thugs who were probably all too eager to cause pain to make it even worse. From her peripheral, she could see her cheer underlings were starting to doubt her leadership. If they had to choose between following her or following their future monarch, the choice was easy. Normally she and Ben had a united front, but his so called “program” was the first time they had such opposing positions.

Her frown deepened when she saw the two Isle harlots in the stands, their heads buried in books and looked like they were watching their friends try out and do homework at the same time. She wondered if she had the authority to kick them off the field grounds, gawkers had no place during practice. But the two were also hanging with the band, she doubted any of them would listen to her if she tried to expel the girls.

She was not universally loved, she had known that. For the most part she didn’t care, those who didn’t like her were so small in the grand scheme of things she never really saw them anyway. What did a band member mean to a cheerleader? What did sheep mean to the lion? She only really cared about the opinion about fellow royals, those who would make up the King’s court once Ben took the crown.

The future she had seen for herself was starting to crumble before her eyes. The Queen’s crown had been so certain, she even knew her measurements. All she could do was helplessly watch the boys get in formation and start their practice.

Of course, the Isle boys had exceeded expectations.

Jay was as strong as he appeared to be. He ran through midfielders and defenders as if they were nothing more than annoying mosquitos. Carlos did exceptionally well, he was quick and elusive. The opposing defenders couldn’t keep up with him to take him out, those left who weren’t steamrolled by Jay.

As soon as the whistle sounded, all the anger and energy that had been building inside Jay was let loose. He wasn’t that quick, but he was quicker than the other boy. He heard the satisfying crunch of hitting him and he went down like a ton of bricks. To avoid suspicion, Jay looked for Carlos and ran towards him to protect his little brother, moving onto the next player he could hit.

Jay wore the padding the rules dictated he ought to wear. He wished he didn’t as it felt bulky and cumbersome. He recognized the one player in a yellow jersey, signifying he was on the “other” team during practice. The other player’s nose was still bruised and slightly swollen from the day Mal used her powers to trip him up.

Ben had said Jay was a “defender” and that meant he was to protect the Crown Prince, Carlos – who was also a charger – and one other charger. The bruised boy, he was a midfielder for the other team.

So it was well within the rules and Jay’s rights to completely mow him down. Even if he wasn’t anywhere near the charger with the ball, Jay preferred to take all precautions and nail down all potential attackers.

It wasn’t the coach’s preferred tactic but he couldn’t argue with the Isle teen’s results.

Ben and Carlos made it swiftly past the kill zone, but Jay was always there with his shield to make sure none of them got dinged. He even threw in a couple of unnecessary windmill flips to avoid the
disks, showing off to all those watching. The cannons were more powerful than he initially thought, and at the speed the disks were going he knew it would leave major contusions where they hit. But he was more than willing to take the strikes; he had always been stronger, to him that meant he would take the shots his brother wouldn’t have been able to.

He got a certain satisfaction from seeing the surprised face of the gunner, never had seen anyone take on a shot head on or intricately flip out of the way. The disks seemed to be mere annoyances rather than powerful projectiles that at least made other players stumble from the sheer force of them. Jay was able to stand his ground and some of the disks even shattered when they collided with his shield.

Carlos for his part, easily out maneuvered any player that got near him and ran out of the kill zone as soon as he could; he took a more practical and straightforward approach. Jay took care of those who looked to be eager to get him out of the game. Handling the ball was a difficult feat, unused to stick and having to do all that concentrating while running. The play stumbled along because he or one of the other new players had lost the ball.

They were doing as well with the ball as anyone who was playing for the first time in their life. He was able to pass the ball to Ben who had attempted a goal within the strike zone but Lonnie, the goalie, was just too quick for him.

The break whistle blew to end the play, every defender and midfielder with a yellow jersey was on the ground, trying to catch their bearings.

“You two! Get over here,” the coach yelled and pointed to both Isle teens. Carlos and Jay braced themselves to be in trouble, thinking they were about to be reprimanded for being too rough. “What do you call that?”

Jay and Carlos had no idea how to answer. They were surprised when the coach then started to smile.

“I call that raw talent,” the coach was about to burst with pride and an unexpected smile. “Come find me later, I’ll show you something you haven’t seen before. It’s called a rule book.”

Coach loved the intensity, but there were about a dozen good sportsmanship rules and penalties they had violated and wouldn’t do for a real match.

“Welcome to the team, boys,” Jenkins said proudly as he hit Jay’s shoulder. The teen was a bit unsure about that contact but overall pleased. The other boy in yellow was right behind him, disbelieving after only one play the two were welcomed enthusiastically to the team.

“Lets run that again,” he commanded, his normal severe demeanor returning, wanting to get real practice in.

“Woo!” Jay cried with a happy clap, eager to do it again. When he turned around, the boy in yellow was immediately behind him, staring him down.

Jay grew upon the island, he wasn’t daunted by anyone; especially not some blond pretty boy. Remembering how mean he was to Evie, Jay’s smile immediately disappeared and the grim look sent a shiver down the other players side; the teen in yellow knew he should expect the exact same treatment as before and that the Isle teen not only remembered him but was not one to forgive. Without a care, Jay walked past and bumped his shoulder; without turning back he didn’t see the boy try to pretend he wasn’t hurt but after a few seconds grabbed his shoulder, hoping the throbbing would go away.
He wasn’t sure if he could survive an entire practice with Jay’s force. Looking across the field, he saw Audrey who looked just as displeased as he was about the turn of events. He got back onto the field, he knew he wouldn’t survive her wrath if he didn’t keep at it.

After tourney and cheer practice, Ben and Audrey were freshly showered and dressed; normally they would go to a study hall together to catch up on homework or relax then head to dinner. That day was different, however.

“Sorry Audrey,” he said cooler than normal and she wasn’t quite sure if he was all that sorry. “But I have a meeting with Mal and the others. We’re working on expanding the program. I think they would have a lot of good insight on the needs of any children coming over,” he explained before she could make any snide comment, too used to her behavior.

“That’s alright,” she replied, surprising him. “I know I’ve been in a bad mood about the whole thing and I’m sorry. I know this is important to you. Let me know if you need any help?”

A small burst of guilt started to eat at him, seeing how hard she was trying. Perhaps she was just having a bad week. Everyone was entitled to have a bad day. She was always trying so hard. She had on a large statement necklace with pink roses, a diamond studded white shirt, and a Northern Wei cashmere carnation pink cardigan. It was dressier than most would ever wear to school, but not only as a princess but his girlfriend she always has to be seen at her very best; even if it was just on school grounds and after hours. It seemed the few days of not speaking finally got through to her that she couldn’t keep antagonizing the Isle Four.

“Thank you, Audrey,” he said softer and sweeter. “How about afterwards, I’ll take you out to Lumiere’s?” he offered the nicest French restaurant in Auradon City. It was way out of their way, in the heart of the city and it would be late when they got back. But he felt she deserved it with how she offered the olive branch and she was already dressed up.

Her beaming smile told him he made the right move and they would be ok.

“That’d be lovely, text me when you’re finished,” she happily said and gave him a chaste goodbye kiss. He was glad that all the previous jealousy seemed to have disappeared, perhaps it finally got through to her that he wasn’t doing anything inappropriate with either Isle girl. He went to where he said he’d meet the teens and once he was out of eyesight, Prince Chad came out of the shadows.

“Do we really have to be nice to those island rats?” he asked petulantly, unhappy with her new plan.

“Yes,” she stressed, just as irritated but what they were doing wasn’t working. “Be nice. Treat them like your teammates. Be ‘bros’ or whatever you guys do. Might help if you seduced the girls.”

“Both of them?” he wasn’t opposed as they were both beautiful, but normally Audrey derided him for his play boy ways.

“If you can, we need to divide and conquer. These miscreants have so far just ignored us. Perhaps joining the tourney team will be a boon to our plans. The boys will be distracted with the team and we can turn the girls on each other. It should be easy to get the boys with popularity. They’ll see it’s better to fall in line with Auradon then neither girl will have their bodyguards. There’ll be in-fighting with them over you. Soon, they’ll go running back to the Isle or sent packing.”

Chad wasn’t sure if it could be done, but they wouldn’t be the first set of girls to fight over him. He,
as the sole heir to both Cinderellasburg and Charmington, always had a girl trying to garner his attention. Besides Ben, he was the most sought after bachelor in the whole UKA. Evie also wouldn’t be the first girl he was an ass to, plenty had later melted under his smile and good looks. A small show of contrition and all was forgiven. He was a prince who would inherit two kingdoms, recalling how Evie stared at the royal wedding stresses and then later the castles, he thought it would be easy to charm her.

He did have his own coronation coming up when he turned eighteen, could be the perfect lure for the witch’s daughter.

Mal would be more of a challenge, the girl looked like she’d rather maim a boy than date them. But he was certain if his riches and natural good looks wouldn’t work, then the gifts his fairy godmothers bestowed upon him would make up for the rest.

*Perhaps she just needs the **right** prince to come along and sweep her off her feet. I am a Charming, after all. I’m everyone’s right prince.*

It worked with everyone else, he thought.

“Aunt Snow probably wouldn’t be too thrilled with me dating the Evil Queen’s daughter, but it’ll be short lived. I can brush it off to her seductive wiles and a rebellious phase,” he commented. Adults were easy to manipulate, particularly when it came to their princes. He could probably get away with murder if he was so inclined.

Audrey nodded, thinking her parents would have killed her if Mal had been born male and she had lost her mind by dating him. But there were always different standards between princes and princesses, it was just how things were. She was just glad Chad was on board, he was one of the few who agreed with her.

The Isle Four just weren’t **right** and they didn’t belong in Auradon. They may have Ben confused and starting to sway the other students, but that just meant that once they showed their true colors; Audrey and Chad would be prepared.

---

While Auradon Prep seemed to have an endless amount of classrooms in the main academic building, Ben preferred to have all student council and other meetings in the castle dormitory. It was convenient and it allowed the students to have easier access to the mess and their rooms once meetings were over. He also preferred the more comfortable ambiance of the castle. The Belle Building was all stone and metal, the castle was wood, carpet, and plush couches.

He was surprised to only see Mal doodling away as she had waited for the meeting to start.

“Hi Mal,” he smiled and greeted genially. “Where are the others?”

He had invited all four of them, thinking more heads were better than fewer; he thought that they each had unique experiences on the Isle and therefore more insight to how he could help.

“Evie is working on our homecoming attire, she ‘*can’t spare a minute.*’ Jay and Carlos started to do homework and I didn’t want them falling behind, so I told them to stay and finish. If they get done in time to attend at least some of the meeting then fine, otherwise not to worry about it. Seems tourney was more intense and time consuming that they thought.”
Ben sensed a slight accusatory tone in her voice but he let it go. He was aware of how demanding sports and other extracurricular activities could have on a student’s life. He was tourney captain, student council president, and the Crown Prince of Auradon City. He knew exactly what being a busy student entailed. Perhaps he should have considered that Jay and Carlos were stretched enough as it was, they were new to the whole Auradon school system. But they were willing, and it would look good on their transcripts. If they started to struggle academically, then they would all work with the coaches and teachers to help them as best they could.

“So you’re the lucky one left to attend this meeting, should I be grateful?”

“Oh, eternally so…but in fairness I couldn’t come up with a plausible excuse in time and Evie can be quit convincing when she’s wielding her sewing needle. Either I show up to represent them or I end up looking like a purple poodle at Homecoming.”

Ben laughed, appreciating her candor and that she was there at all. It was just as a favor to him, the meeting beyond what was required of her or any of them outside of school.

“How are classes going?”

“Good, way more homework than I ever thought possible. Feels like I go to school for twelve hours a day rather than eight. I have no idea how Evie, Jay, and Carlos are doing it with their extras.”

She also meant all the magic lessons they did in secret. She hated the thought of them giving up learning to expand their powers for school activities, but there were only so many hours in the day. Perhaps they would have to cut back somewhere. They only had a chance at school for this year, they could learn magic later.

“Yeah, Auradon Prep definitely teaches you time management. Do let me know if anyone starts to struggle.”

“Yep, we got the same offer from Dr. Li. We get lots of offers from the counselor. Seems she really wants us to seek other help. Everyone is just so helpful.”

Ben ignored that hint as well, her eyes letting him know she wasn’t fooled at all. He was very well aware the other adult was trying to push the Isle kids to seeing a professional trauma specialist. He was tempted to just order it so, make it a condition of staying in Auradon Prep but he couldn’t bring himself to do it. He thought it would do more damage than help. He couldn’t force them to see they may have issues; that was something he had to wait to see if it manifested itself in their behavior or they went to it willingly.

So far, the Isle teens were perfect students. No one had a complaint about their behavior. Even the more resistant teachers had begrudgingly said their conduct so far was beyond reproach, no matter how intensely they were watched.

Dr. Li was in agreement to let them come to them, everyone reacted to trauma differently. It could present itself as anxiety, unhealthy coping mechanisms, bouts of uncontrolled anger, or it may lay dormant for years. There was no way of knowing, and forcing the teens into therapy would be counterproductive.

So all they could do was let them know they were there to help them if they needed it.

“So what exactly did you want to know?” Mal asked, moving on; seeing that Ben was not taking the bait.
Ben explained in detail his plan, from its inception to the issues he has run into so far; particularly with funding and getting public approval.

“So what it boils down to, we’re having issues with 1) funding, 2) public support outside of Auradon City, and 3) available resources.”

“Basically, everything.”

“Yeah.”

Ben was slightly despondent that it seemed the program was as doomed as he feared, but he was encouraged when Mal didn’t say “too bad” and leave right then and there.

“OK, let’s start with funding since nothing happens without money. So if you were moved by the documentary then perhaps others were as well. Have there been any charity or justice groups that have come out in support of the program so far?”

“Yes, some of your Target wardrobe was donated from the Loxley Foundation.”

“Have there been any specific groups that have protested the program?”

Ben was hesitant to answer, not wanting the teens to have to worry about the opposition.

“You can’t protect us from reality, Your Royal Highness,” Mal said gently, knowing the look of someone wanting to spare someone’s feelings.

“Mal, call me Ben,” he reiterated, one day she’d be comfortable enough around him to be so informal. “There’s no one here.”

“Ben,” she relented. “We won’t be in Auradon Prep forever. None of us are naive enough to think this was a universally loved decision.”

“The Zerstörung Foundation has been very vocal about expelling you from the country and back to the Isle.”

“Ah.” That wasn’t surprising, Mal had learned about that foundation pretty much immediately after she got to Auradon Prep. Audrey threw it in her face a few days after classes started, a foundation created specifically to always remember the victims of Maleficent’s rampage. “Well, I think we both knew Auroria was out of the question. It’d probably be in rather poor taste to ask Agrabah or Charmington for their support. At least not for us…”

Mal had a contemplative look.

“Why did you choose us, Ben?”

“I thought as children of the ‘worst’ villains, that you would need help the most.”

“And no one tried to convince you otherwise?”

“Well, there were plenty of people who thought I shouldn’t invite you…”

“No, I mean no one tried to get you to choose anyone else?”

“Well,” he was hesitant to admit he mostly kept who he chose a secret; for the very reason that he knew people would try to talk him out of it. “I didn’t really tell anyone those specifics. Most found out after the invitations had gone out.”
“That lack of transparency probably hindered more than it helped,” she said bluntly.

“It’s what got you to Auradon,” he pointed out.

“And I appreciate that, but we’re talking about expanding the program. We may be the children of the worst villains, and maybe we did need the help the most. I won’t deny my mom’s a monster. There’s a good chance I would have died when I hit eighteen.”

“For what?” Ben asked, horrified. Whatever Mal may say, he was glad he chose the way he did. Even if the program never got off the ground, she didn’t deserve to die so young at the hands of her own mother.

“I wouldn’t worry about that,” she brushed off, not willing to delve into it. “But I will say we’re the worst to represent this program. We’ve already been tried in the court of public opinion and we’ve been found guilty.”

He wished he could deny that, but he couldn’t.

“Who would you have picked?” he tucked the question of why Maleficent would want to kill her daughter for another day, recalling Mal’s scars and thinking he wasn’t ready to deal with what the answer may be.

“Kids, like little kids. Probably of henchmen, someone no one knows and can’t associate horrible actions to. No one remembers the henchmen, not really. They only remember the villain. And people like little kids, it’s hard to accuse someone of atrocities when they’re three feet tall.”

Ben nodded as she had a point, he probably would have chosen Mal and the others regardless. He wanted to help everyone but the lack of space in Auradon Prep and Auradon Academy forced him to do triage. He chose the ones he thought needed the help the most.

“But what is done is done and I’m certainly not going back,” ever the pragmatist. “So, I think we need to start small. The Loxley’s are one family behind the program. The documentary producers are probably another. Funds should probably come from charities, not taxes. The latter just causes resentment, no one likes to be forced to pay into anything; especially if the pool comes from people directly affected by the Wars. . .”

Ben was surprised at how well Mal played at politics, it made him wonder exactly what she got up to while on the Isle.

They didn’t solve the issue any more than what they started with, but her insight had caused him to see different avenues to try that his older advisors probably never would have thought of.

It delighted him when Mal had made a standing appointment to discuss these matters with him, she seemed determined to have the program succeed.

He didn’t even notice they ended up talking for hours, much too late to catch dinner in the city but he was sure Audrey would understand.

Normally most hated 7th period, generally because it wasn’t 8th period and therefore it wasn’t the last class of the day. It felt like some horrible tease, where they were so close but still had so far to go. Most students were in the lull of their food coma from lunch and wanted a nap, but they still had at least two classes to get through before they could be free from school. Some were able to get their
study hall for 8th period and therefore de facto end their day at 7th period but most were not so lucky.

Jane FéeMarraine didn’t mind 7th period and would even say Honors Auradon Lit was her favorite class. Not that she was all that fond of the required reading or had a love of books in general, nor was the professor particularly high in her esteem.

The reason why it was her favorite class sat a couple rows in front of her and to the right, the perfect spot to admire him without being obvious. For the first couple of days, she along with the rest of the class had all but stared at him and Evie, wondering if they would pull out weapons or wield evil spells. The stories they had all heard growing up, painting them all as these malicious villains who couldn’t help but cause death and destruction.

After several days when the Isle teens literally did nothing but pay attention in class, most had stopped looking and focused on the lessons as well.

Jane never stopped looking at him. It seemed everyday she found something new to admire about him. He was one of the few who bravely raised his hand when he had an opinion or knew the answer to a question. The teacher at first wasn’t sure what to make of him, figuring an Isle child wouldn’t be able to keep up with the curriculum much less be in an honors class. He and Evie mostly kept to themselves, even with group discussions they were usually left to only work with each other.

He never seemed to let the stares or whispers get to him, he always seemed to have a ready smile on his face as if to prove them all wrong; trying to rise above and show he was as good as the rest of them, despite his villain blood.

Jane wish she were brave enough to approach them and offer her help or addition, but every time she even thought of trying she would squeak in fear and it wasn’t just because they were children of villains.

That admiration turned to something different when one day the sunlight caught him at a different angle or something the half star fae couldn’t define and she was left breathless with just how gorgeous he was. She noticed his thick eyelashes and deep brown eyes; she started to notice his strong jaw line and wide kind smile. A sweet ache would emerge in her chest whenever she saw him, and a fluttering in her stomach and racing pulse would accompany her whenever he would even look towards her.

She couldn’t believe she had a crush on the son of Cruella de Vil.

Being on the cheer team, and yes she considered being the mascot as part of the team, meant that she had access to all the latest gossip. She had heard all about how Mal was the leader of the organized crime syndicate on the Isle and that Jay was her second in command. The massive Isle boy being the muscle to drag the bodies to the dump site after Mal had killed their enemies.

The Moor fae supposedly had intricate scarification tattoos that designated how many people she had murdered, that tidbit had come straight from a seamstress who worked with the Isle girls’ uniforms. The fact that Mal was allowed to wear longer sleeves for their fall uniform, gave credence to the rumor. As to date, no one had been able to catch sight of Mal’s shoulders or arms above her elbows. The longer she remained covered, the more certain others became of the truth of the tale.

Evie was supposedly this seductive siren who lured men to her trap and she killed with poison; her mother reborn with cobalt hair.

Jay was rumored to have been Mal’s second in command. The muscle behind the throne that carried
out her dirty deeds that she didn’t want on her hands.

Carlos was allegedly their go-to torturer, learning cruelty from his mother and killed with joy. When everyone saw the scars he had on his leg, rumors of Mal punishing him for some failure or slight had come to light.

But Jane couldn’t believe someone with Carlos’ smile that lit up a room, would hurt anybody.

Mal, on the other hand, she wasn’t sure about. The girl had a perpetual scowl and walked down the halls with the confidence of someone who knew they were the most frightful and powerful thing present only could. Jane had seen her stare down full grown adults and wasn’t the one to back down. Jane’s mother had complained that some of the teachers were being ridiculous by “fearing such a small, harmless girl” but she didn’t blame them. Mal’s intense jade eyes could probably burn holes through adamantium.

Evie and Jay could have also gone either way.

She didn’t know if Mal could be as sadistic to give Carlos the scars (her supposed friend), but she couldn’t believe he would be friends with someone who had done half the things Moor fae was rumored to have done.

Anyone with such kind eyes that pierced through souls couldn’t associate with anyone so vindictive and evil.

From what she could see, they were all close friends. So that had to mean if Carlos was their friend, then the others couldn’t be so bad. Perhaps Mal was modest, there wasn’t anything that said she couldn’t be, that was the reason those longer sleeve options existed in the first place.

She had hesitated to even talk to him after her realized attraction because she thought her mother would never approve of him being her friend, much less a potential boyfriend. But then over the weeks her mother had dropped hints that she need not be afraid and that the Isle kids needed to be given a chance and expand their circle of friends.

So all she had to do was overcome her shyness and say at least a few words to him instead of squeaking. Her involuntary yelping was one of her more embarrassing features, along with her hair and nose. Features it seemed every other girl in Auradon had in perfect condition or proportions.

Then seeing how stunning Evie and Mal were, even with the latter’s unfriendly demeanor, and with their super cool fae hair, Jane felt even more inadequate than usual.

If he was just friends with such beautiful girls, she had no idea what it would take to be his girlfriend. It also didn’t help when he joined the tourney team a few days ago. She was happy she’d get to see him more often, but if he was as good during real matches as he was in practice then Jane was certain everyone would start to see what she had seen weeks ago. Once all the other girls realized how great he was, she wouldn’t stand a chance.

As days went on, she figured she would just get used to being an admirer from afar. It wouldn’t be the first time. She expected Abigail Darling, a junior cheerleader, would make her move once Carlos’ popularity grew; Jane had heard the cheerleader comment on his freckles several times.

I loved his freckles way before she did.

She thought, slightly bitter she’d never get a chance.

After one practice, however, she heard several cheerleaders insist they saw Mal do magic; they were
utmost certain the fae knew magic and was using it to convince Ben into these “meetings” about how to better service the children still left on the Isle.

Audrey was certainly enraged and talked about it ad nauseum; although she was all sweet smiles and “let me know if you need any help” when he was around. There were also a few cheerleaders and tourney players no long allowed to hang with them. Jane wasn’t sure what happened but she suspected Audrey sniffed out those reporting to Ben and exiled them from her social circle.

Jane didn’t think Mal was bespelling their Crown Prince, her mother would have noticed and put a stop to it right away. **But** she had noticed that every time someone had been rude to her, they had met an accident.

The first several times, she could brush off as a coincidence. Chad Charming and his fall at the Cultural Museum being the first instance she witnessed. But each and every one occurrence? And rudeness to the four happened often. The others may not be able to recognize the hand gestures as one of magic, but she was half fae even though most forgot because she didn’t look it. While Nadine FéeMarraine refused to teach her magic, and her mother didn’t use it other than during special royal functions, Jane had seen and knew magic gestures from research she had done when she was younger and curious. She wasn’t an expert and probably couldn’t name the exact spell, but it was enough to make her suspicious.

If Mal could do magic, then that gave Jane an idea.

Jane didn’t have any classes with Mal, but the school was small enough that she at least saw her in passing and knew her general routine. She caught the Isle teen in the bathroom before senior lunch. Most girls immediately vacated the bathroom as soon as they saw Mal was also there.

It didn’t seem to faze the fae and Jane wondered if Mal was used to people fleeing in fear before her.

Again, Jane had a feeling the rumors weren’t as far-fetched as she wanted them to be.

She stood to the side, trying to gather the courage to talk to the other girl. Mal caught her reflection and raised an inquisitive eyebrow, not expecting anyone to still be there much less just standing there staring. She went about the rest of her ablutions and pretended Jane wasn’t there hovering. When the girl with a fondness for bows was still there she stilled, a silent standoff.

The silence was only broken when Jane let out a high pitched yip of distress and Mal wondered, *What is wrong with her?*

Jane saw Mal’s confusion and when she moved to leave the bathroom, the brunette fae said in a panic,

“I like your hair,” but it came out louder and more rushed than she had intended. That stopped the Isle girl in her tracks and she replied,

“Thanks?”

*I wish Evie was here, she’d know what to do. I should probably offer a compliment in return.*

Mal was no stranger to lying in general, she was from the Isle after all, but she wasn’t skilled in the art of lying for the sake of social niceties.

It was odd to her to converse in a bathroom but she figured it may be an Auradon thing. Every time she went, there had been a gaggle of girls chatting away, only leaving because she had entered.
It wasn’t that she thought Jane ugly or anything, she just didn’t care in general. But she knew Evie and Carlos would want her to make an effort, and given that the other girl was brave enough to even approach her and gave a compliment, Mal thought that was worth forcing herself to be cordial.

“I…” she looked the other girl up and down, trying to figure out what to praise.

*Gods, this is harder than I thought. What do people compliment each other on? If only Jane knew how to fight or had a nice knife, things I actually know about.*

It also didn’t help that she was wearing the uniform, what everyone wore. So it wasn’t like Mal could compliment her on her clothes. It was basically the first time ever meeting her, so she couldn’t compliment her on school or achievements. The girl had an odd, almost triangular haircut, her hair also looked unnaturally stiff and the color could only be described as strangely streaky; so she couldn’t compliment her on hairstyle. While she wasn’t good at tact, there were some outright lies that anyone would be able to detect.

She needed to hurry up because she was pretty certain the normal pause was becoming a weird awkward silence.

“…like your purse,” Mal was pretty proud of herself, thinking Evie loved to talk about accessories. “How long did it take you to make it?”

*That should give her plenty to talk about while I think of other things to say.*

And Mal would be right if the girl was Evie, the blue haired teen could go on for hours about the style of the purse, material, stitching techniques, and all the other work it took into creating a piece.

But she was not Evie.

“Oh…I didn’t make it…I bought it…” well her mother did for her birthday but she wasn’t sure how to respond to Mal.

“Ok,” and again Mal had no idea what else she was supposed to say.

“It’s just that…I’m Jane, sorry…duh, I should introduce myself before I ramble on…I’m Professor FéeMarraine’s daughter…not that it really matters…I don’t know why I said that…you have really cool hair…and cool everything else… and I was wondering if you knew any magic… you know to make me cool too…your mother being such a powerful fae, transformation was one of her more notorious gifts…besides…you know…I would just super appreciate it if you could help me… I don’t know how this usually works…I know there is usually some sort of exchange…I don’t want to give you my *first born* or anything…but I have money, well not a lot of it but maybe a payment plan? I was hoping you could fix my hair, and my nose, and maybe…”

“OK, first of all,” Mal interrupted abruptly, before Jane kept going on and on. “You’re thinking of either Rumpelstilzchen or Neverland fae, what would I even do with a baby? It’s a destructive stereotype and I don’t even know where to begin how wrong it is to assume I’d take a child payment. Secondly, I don’t know if anyone told you, but there’s no magic on the Isle.”

“Well, I know that…but…”

“Then you’d know the type of magic you’re asking for is crazy complicated and even if I did know magic, which I don’t, then you should be asking a much older witch or fae. Why don’t you ask your mom?…You know… Bibbidi-bobbidi-boo and all that. Or better yet, ask her to teach you how to do it yourself?”
Jane sighed, her mother being the obvious choice to go to for such things; she had done it for Cinderella after all but,

“Mom says real magic is in books, and not the spell books. Regular books with history and stuff.” she said as she rolled her eyes. “She refuses to teach me anything, she doesn’t want me to ‘get dependent on magic.’ She calls it tough love, wants me to work on the inside, not the outside. That sort of thing.”

“Not even as a favor to her own daughter?” Mal asked, the hypocrisy not lost on either teen. It was well enough for the previous generation to not only use magic, but could trace their entire current success and status to it.

Case in point, Cinderella.

But she wasn’t about to criticize The Fairy Godmother to her own daughter.

“What about your own magic? You didn’t grow up with the barrier; didn’t you have bouts of accidental magic? She had to have taught you something.”

Jane shook her head “no” and both wondered if she had no magic. It was a possibility when humans and fae had half-blooded children. Jane had tried as a child, but she didn’t know if her research only found false spells or if she didn’t have the special spark all fae had.

“That sucks,” Mal went on. “Why don’t you stop dying it? It’s probably what is making your hair so…stiff.”

There were also several other signs of damage: Jane’s hair was dry, looked brittle, and overall unhealthy but Mal refrained thinking Jane already knew all that, she didn’t need her to rub it in.

“It’s the only dye that’s strong enough to overcome my natural hair,” she nervously stroked and twirled a chunk of strands; as if she were making sure it was still as bad as before.

As with Jay, magical hair was stubborn to change when it didn’t want to. It also explained why Professor FéeMarraine always had it in a strict bun.

“Why dye it at all?”

Mal didn’t understand; if it was harmful and looked terrible then the next logical step would be to just stop. Perhaps it was damaged to the point Jane would have to cut it all off and start fresh, the school mascot might prefer having damaged hair than no hair at all.

“It helps me fit in…we’re the only fae that’s ever been to Auradon Prep,” her voice getting quieter and quieter as they spoke and Jane had trouble looking Mal in the eye.

“And what? You’re ashamed of being fae?”

Mal wasn’t sure what to think; part of her angry that Jane and Professor FéeMarraine would hide their heritage. And furthermore, would denounce magic in the first place – all in the name of appearance and bowing to humans’ warped sense of propriety.

Another part of her, the small empathetic part, felt an odd ache in her chest at seeing how sad and perhaps embarrassed Jane was. It wasn’t her fault that there were so few fae around and her mother encouraged her assimilation to human norms.

Mal was tempted to show Auradon Prep and the UKA just exactly how fae she was, no one would
ever make her feel less than; especially when it was the humans that were weak and powerless, not the fae. But she refrained, thinking of Carlos and his gentle nature. What would he do?

She thought of how cruel the other students could be, perhaps she wasn’t being fair. She had only been there a couple months, who knows what she would have done to fit in if she had been there years.

“Sorry, I get it,” she didn’t really but knew it was the nice thing to say and she was trying. “Why don’t you go to a salon? There’s got to be at least one with a stylist that knows how to deal with magical hair.”

“The only one nearby is Iliófáneia, it’s impossible to get an appointment unless you’re royal and there’s no way we could afford to go there regularly.”

Mal was tempted to help her. She knew a spell for at least growing hair out, a glamor to make it stylish. Vanity spells were the easiest to do, and one of the first spells her mother taught her. They were simple spells even quarter fae could wield. Jane looked dejected enough that it even tugged at Mal’s admitted limited heart strings.

But magic was “discouraged” and she didn’t want the attention of Professor FéeMarraine. The magical history teacher was affable enough, but she knew she was a powerful fae no matter how much she bowed to humans. Mal might be the daughter of Maleficent, but she was just learning how to use her magic. It would be nothing for Nadine FéeMarraine to flick her hand and end her.

If the star fae wasn’t feeling murderous, then all she had to do was send her back to the Isle. She wasn’t sure if the professor held enough sway with Crown Prince Ben to listen to her if she said Mal was causing trouble and she didn’t want to find out. Neither situation was an option.

“Look, we both grew up without magic. We didn’t need it then, we don’t need it now. I can’t help you, sorry. I don’t even think you even need magic. Maybe after Auradon Prep, you can let it grow naturally. And there’s nothing wrong with your nose.”

“Yeah, but that’s like still a year away. The homecoming dance is coming up, and there’s this boy…”

Jane trailed off, not wanting to admit that her secret crush was Carlos. Mal being his friend, she probably thought Jane too uncool and meek for him. It was also clear to her that the Isle fae didn’t think too highly of her wanting to fit in with humans. But the other fae didn’t understand, Mal grew up on the Isle. There were plenty of other fae trapped there with her. Plus Jay was part djinn, and Evie was the daughter of a witch. Being magical wasn’t so taboo on the island. Jane was already shy and awkward, she couldn’t imagine how much lonelier she’d be if she were so . . . blatantly fae.

It took Mal all her control not to roll her eyes, she didn’t understand going through so much hassle for a boy. If one didn’t like the way she looked or had an issue with her heritage, then there were plenty of others around.

It’s not like boys were some rare resource that needed to be gotten at any cost. Girls for that matter as well.

She especially wasn’t going to help Jane with magic then; a boy particularly wasn’t worth courting the headmistress’ wrath and she also didn’t want it known she could do magic in general. It was better to let them think her powerless, if everything went to hell then she’d have an ace up her sleeve.

“If a boy doesn’t like you for who you are, then he’s not worth pursuing. You won’t be able to
glamor forever.”

Jane’s shoulders slouched, her hope dashed and she felt particularly foolish for even asking in the first place. Mal had a point, but she still had harbored hope that she would have been able to make Carlos see past her hair and nose later on, she just needed to fix them now to at least get his attention. All Jane could do was nod in acceptance, hoping Mal would leave and save her dignity by not witnessing her crying.

The purple haired fae was more than happy to leave and get to lunch.

Jane hurried to a stall and closed the door, wanting a few moments of privacy to let the tears fall. She felt stupid, ugly, and hopeless. Her mother wouldn’t help her, she had no means to help herself, and Mal couldn’t help her. She felt stuck and powerless. All she wanted to do was go to a dance with a cute boy, something she had yet to be able to accomplish in her four years at Auradon Prep. She didn’t understand why it was so hard for her. Every other girl seemed to be just so naturally beautiful; they walked around in effortless royal or noble perfection.

Audrey, Evie, Mal, everyone else on the cheer squad; all they had to do was be themselves and they had boys falling over themselves. She was hidden away behind the mascot helmet, always passed over and barely ever noticed. She may as well be invisible. At least if she were truly invisible, being looked over time and again wouldn’t hurt so much.

She knew she was missing lunch, but she couldn’t go out just yet. The tears kept running down her face and she probably looked a puffy red eyed mess. But a few more moments passed, the tears finally dried up and she had felt better. Still disappointed, but she needed to get the worst of it out of her system. Thankfully no one had come in, everyone still enjoying their noon meal.

She dabbed her eyes with some toilette paper, went to the sink and splashed water on her face. After a towel dry, she applied some fresh make up and once she felt she was at least presentable, she squared her shoulders and looked into the mirror.

Mal said there was nothing wrong with her nose, and perhaps she was right. But Jane still felt it was too long and a smidge too wide. Her hair was a weird rigid texture and the highlights were poorly done, she also felt it was just so plain. Even if it were its natural starlight platinum blonde, soft and fine; she’d probably still hate the style. It was the same style she had since she was a little girl, No wonder no one sees me. They all probably think I’m in middle school.

Add it to the seemingly unending list of things she found wrong with herself.

Part of her wanted to snatch the blue bow, hating how childish it looked; her mother had insisted it was just “darling.” She didn’t want to be darling, cute, or anything remotely kid like. She wanted to be an adult, a woman who got men’s attention.

Someone who could be someone’s girlfriend; specifically a freckled someone with black and platinum hair that fell charmingly in his eyes when he was writing an essay.

But she was too weak to take it out of her hair and toss, thinking her mother wouldn’t approve so she let it be.

Mal couldn’t help her with magic but she did what she could, she gave Jane a sliver of hope. College would come sooner than she thought; she would apply to universities in Camelot Heights or Westerly, areas with a more concentrated fae and magic community. Even if she didn’t go fully natural, there would be more magic hair friendly places that were affordable. There had to be.
Perhaps high school just wasn’t her time, but college could be.

No, I’ll make it my time.

Jane was more determined than ever.

Mal was clearly unafraid to be fae, perhaps she’d find her courage too and salvage the rest of her senior year.

And if her mother wouldn’t teach her magic, then maybe she could learn it some other way.

There was the internet after all; it’d been years since she last tried. She was older, more mature, and had so many more options open to her for research.

She’d make it work.

Sometime around eleven p.m. Evie was finally done with homework and had gotten as far as she wanted with their homecoming outfits. The next day was Friday and then she’d have the rest of the weekend until Homecoming Week commenced.

She had no idea so many rituals and traditions surrounded high school,

And we’re only two months in!

Still, with all the work and effort she thought it was worth it. She was doing what she loved and it was nice that her outfit and homework were the biggest things she had to worry about. She wasn’t worried about her next meal, aggressive customers who mistook her for one of her mother’s whores, or what her mother would do with her once it became apparent that marrying a prince was a pipe dream.

She was off the island and in a whole new world, a world of endless opportunities. She wasn’t sure where the others were, the boys were probably still trying to catch up with their own homework – their time being consumed with tourney. Mal had even somewhat joined the student council. At least that’s how Evie saw it, but perhaps a quasi-member of Crown Prince Ben’s court was more appropriate. The former Isle heiress had been meeting with him trying to expand his Isle-to-Auradon program.

Once I get homecoming over with, I’ll make more of an effort to go to those meetings. I want to help too.

Mal knew how to sneak in and be quiet, so Evie got ready for bed and was about tucked in when she heard a rapping on her window. She smiled when she saw the familiar smiling face of her boyfriend. She went over to the window and opened it for him; he gracefully slid in with many nights practice. She kissed him in greeting; he had a bundle of clothes with him. He had planned to stay the night, like he had been for the past couple of weeks, and would change in the morning and sneak back up the balcony to his room in the morning.

It was a ritual of theirs, all four teens had gotten too used to sleeping with their significant other. It was now a rare occurrence that they’d be too tired to exchange rooms, even with the boys’ training schedule; the only time it happened was when they had school projects that went well into the night and fell asleep in their own rooms. With how the floor chaperones put so little effort in determining if anyone was sneaking out, or perhaps the four where that talented at sneaking about, it seemed the
room assignments were merely a suggestion.

They weren’t even particularly careful to erase the evidence the boys stayed over. Their bathroom had a mix of masculine and feminine scented toiletries. There were even razors on the girls’ vanity, and four tooth brushes. The house goblins that did a weekly cleaning and gathered their laundry never said anything to them, and it didn’t appear they had reported them to the faculty.

Evie suspected the goblins didn’t care as their job was to maintain the rooms, not report students’ misbehavior. She also supposed they may still have a streak of loyalty to Maleficent and by extension, her heiress.

Whatever the reason, she knew she slept better with Jay with her. She felt safe with him there; she worried less that someone would break into their room and drag her back to the Isle.

He had undressed down to his boxers and both slipped into bed. He lay on his back and she snuggled into his side and lay her head on his chest.

“How was practice?” she was sleepy but never would be too tired to make sure he had a good day. And if he didn’t have a good day, then she’d plot to make whoever made it a bad day pay.

“It was good, Carlos is getting better at handling the ball. I think coach is going to have us play first string.”

“That’s great,” Evie didn’t know everything about tourney but she was aware being first string was a big deal.

“I also got to hit Chad a bunch of times. So overall a really good practice,” Jay smile widely, thinking of his favorite part of practice.

Evie snickered, so glad the arrogant prince was being put in his place.

“There’s something off with that boy, he smiles weirdly at me and Mal now.”

“Perhaps all the times I’ve hit him directly in the head.”

“Feel free to hit him harder, I think at some point you’ll knock some sense into him.”

He laughed at her clever joke and played with her soft hair. Admiring how it shone a deep sea blue in the moonlight.

“How are the outfits coming along?” he hoped he was done standing for hours while she pinned things to him.

It’s the only time I don’t like her on her knees in front of me.

He refrained from laughing at his own licentious thoughts or saying them out loud because he’s not a total idiot.

“You suits are pretty much done. You cannot get smaller or bigger within the next week.”

He rolled his eyes, she was referring to the muscle he gained from the steady stream of food and exercise Auradon provided. He knew she was joking, particularly since she had yet to complain about his added bulk and she liked to run her hands over the swells of muscles.

The Auradon Prep seamstress, however, did not appreciate having to create a whole new set of shirts and blazers.
“Carlos got bigger too, I’m not the only one,” he groused.

“He didn’t get so big he split his shirt sleeves.”

“Everyone got a nice show,” he insisted, a cocky smirk gracing his lips.

She didn’t disagree.

Evie then went on a small lecture about the difficulty of not only sewing but tailoring clothes to best fit each person. While the Auradon Prep seamstress had been rude and condescending, Evie appreciated the work she did. She then started to talk about the suits and dress she had made for them. It all sounded like rocket science to Jay, but he enjoyed how animated she got and how her eyes lit up when talking about her passion. He trusted in her fashion sense and talent, he had no doubt the four of them would be the most stylish students at the dance.

Once she was done, he spoke a bit about tourney; the different plays coach had introduced and how he was having a difficult time remembering all the rules. But she aptly listened even though he suspected she cared about the sport about as much as he did about zipper prices.

But because the other had loved what they did, it was easy to listen to each other speak about those topics. Their talking eventually died down and gave way to sleep. He listened to the soft even breathing of his girlfriend, glad she was safe and happy.

Jay looked out the window and beyond the gardens he saw a navy blue sky, diamond like stars twinkling away. He recalled his father telling him a superstition where the first bright star he saw was a “wishing star.” He even recalled the children’s rhyme.

*Star light*
Star bright
First star I see tonight

*I wish I may*
I wish I might
Grant the wish I wish tonight

As a child, he had said the nursery rhyme almost as a prayer each night, saying it to lamp posts or oil lanterns as stars could not be seen on the Isle and were the brightest items he could find. He couldn’t recall how long he had done the ritual, at least a few years after he met Mal who had painted a star filled sky in a cave, their first hideout before they found the Warehouse. She had no idea what stars looked like either, or what colors to use. They had asked some teachers once, but they said the sky was filled with all the colors they could think of.

The adults didn’t seem to get that there were some things beyond their imagination, as all they knew was the dark and dank world they had been born into.

So she painted the cave pitch black and then splattered every limited color available to them. There was one star she painted extra-large and bright, using a rare white pigment from crushed shells. The beach was off limits to them because of the barrier and it was on the other side of the island. But once in a while, these shells would wash up close enough for them to grab. They made the trip once a year and gathered all they could. All paint was rare and had to be made from precious resources: orange from onion peels, yellow from hard to find clays and leftover pumpkin rinds, purples from berries, and reds from various root powders. Mal guarded the paints jealously but used them in the hope that wishes could come true.
He had no idea what Mal ever wished for, but having had to take care of her after her mother had bouts of rage that ended in cuts along her back and arms; he had added wishing for the death of Maleficent to his long list of childhood wants.

They stopped when prayer after prayer went unanswered, they figured because they weren’t real stars then their wishes were never properly heard.

Later on they learned wishes were not for the likes of villains and by extension, villain children. Certainly an island full of children all wishing and begging for help would have been heard regardless if the stars could be seen or not.

So he had stopped wishing a long time ago.

Now in the comfort of Auradon Prep and Evie in his arms, he couldn’t think of a single thing to wish for as he saw an endless sky of bright stars to wish upon.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you guys for sticking with this! Holidays time is hectic!
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

FINALLY. At the very least it's a mega huge chapter, so hope you guys like it!

THANK YOU:
kradanvers - I'm so glad you think so!!
Puppyrules - I have fun thinking of and creating the details. Thanks for noticing. :-*D
warlockinatardis - Thanks for hanging with me and I hope you keep enjoying the story.
dontcallme_atmidnight - AHHHH I love it when people call my fic realistic.
moon_biscuits - As you can see, at 25k+ words, there is def more. lol
echomoon - You're so sweet!
XenoZaraZaron -Oh you make me blush. Thanks so much for reading and reviewing.

I hope everyone thinks the chapter is worth the wait. You guys are def worth writing for and I love you all!

*** indicate a scene with adult situations. If you prefer not to read that, that's where to stop and pick up at the next three asterisks.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It had been obvious to Mal that Auradon was not the Isle since she step foot on the kingdom’s soil. The air was cleaner, the sky was actually blue, and there were so many things Auradonians did that just didn’t happen on the island.

Nothing could have prepared her for the concept of “Spirit Week.”

An entire week dedicated to a show of how much students loved their school and hated their arch rivals, Sherwood Forest College High School. It sort of reminded her of the gang activity of the Isle, only the islanders weren’t as ostentatious or obnoxious. It seemed to her that the school had to make up things to care about, their lives not having the everyday stressors such as food shortages and bodily threats.

She thought it was incredibly stupid and a waste of time, but the beaming excited faces of her friends held her tongue. She also felt she couldn’t complaint that much when Evie essentially did all the hard work, all Mal had to do was show up for fittings and wear whatever the witch put in front of her.

Monday – Pajama Day

The fae frowned at the concept, thinking sleep wear was not something she wanted to parade in public with. Particularly since her boyfriend liked to sleep in his boxers, she wasn’t happy to have others see what only she should.

“No, not what we literally would sleep in. This is still a school, it’s just a chance to dress up super comfortably. Some will probably try to get away with wearing little to nothing, namely Doug, but the
band explained most just wear a simple t-shirt and fleece bottoms with cute patterns,” Evie explained to her.

It was still stupid, but Evie had a manic look in her eyes when she planned every outfit for the week and Mal knew to keep quiet when her friend got like that.

Evie’s enthusiasm made more sense when the fae found out there was a pseudo competition between the grades for who had the most “Spirit.” There was no discernable point system or any way to tell who actually “won” but it was a cut-throat all out competition nonetheless that Evie planned to win.

That’s how Mal found herself wearing a tabby grey kitten onesie the first day of Spirit Week.

Evie had to call on every ounce of will power she had to not laugh with glee when faced with Mal’s utter contempt while she wore such a cute outfit.

“You look like Beezy!” the cerulean haired witch couldn’t contain her excitement.

They looked towards the feline in question who had taken to lounging on Mal’s bed during school hours; he didn’t seem impressed with the comparison.

“I look like an idiot,” Mal dispassionately moaned as she looked in the mirror.

Beezy meowed, affronted. With a flick of his tail, he escaped from the window and sought more accommodating company.

“A cute idiot, and we’re all wearing a onesie. Come on Mal, it’s supposed to be fun. Loosen up.”

“I can’t take you seriously when you’re a unicorn.”

Evie twirled, clearly having way too much fun when she looked so ridiculous.

“That’s the point Mal, it’s not supposed to be serious.”

If they hadn’t been friends for so long, and the fact Evie was dressed up as well, she would have thought the witch was trying to play a joke on her. But she trusted her friend and walked boldly out their dorm and to class.

Regardless of how she looked, she wasn’t about to let anyone tell her she was too silly or feel small.

Then she saw Jay and Carlos in their outfits, a teddy bear and panda respectively, and a smile escaped her lips.

“OK,” she admitted to Evie, “we do look really cute.”

And she felt more comfortable than before when the boys were smiling and having fun with it as well.

She had to keep reminding herself that she wasn’t on the Isle, she was no longer heiress to the Leadership and her mother wasn’t around. She didn’t need to keep up a ruthless reputation and it was alright to be silly and have fun. She breathed in deep and pushed away the fear that if she were to show an ounce of weakness or vulnerability then she’d be razed down low; her mother nor any rival was there to admonish her or worse.

Maleficent is trapped on the Isle. Her magic is bound and she has no power here.

She felt as long as she repeated that over and over again in her mind, she’d be OK. She smiled and
forced herself to relax and have fun.

She didn’t even object when Jay took a group photo to immortalize the moment.

She still didn’t understand the point, but she couldn’t argue with the results. It seemed that everyone was having so much fun they forgot the four were from the Isle.

It was the first time anyone had smiled at them, and it wasn’t in contempt or mockingly.

“Oh Mickey in Disneyland, you guys are so cute!”

“Nice.”

“Yeah, Seniors!”

They got complements all day, even some high fives and fist bumps. Evie was right, most had just worn t-shirts, some with funny sayings on them, and fleece bottoms. The popular footwear was fuzzy slippers. Only a few were brave enough to wear something more extreme.

Such as Doug and the rest of the brass section, they had opted for Victorian nightgowns and night caps, each had an unlit candle in a candle holder in one hand and a pillow in the other. Whenever they passed a teacher, they would immediately find a flat surface and pretend to fall asleep.

“Noice onesies guy,” Doug admired their sleepwear. “I didn’t even know they made adult ones.”

“They don’t, Evie made them for us,” Mal informed him.

“No shit?” to say he was impressed was an understatement, the quality rivaled anything he’d seen in a store. “Think you could make one for me?”

“Me too! I want a monkey,” a nearby percussionist jumped at the chance.

“I want a narwhal,” the bass player requested.

“What’s a narwhal?” Doug asked his fellow band member.

“They’re the unicorns of the sea, read a book.”

Evie was slightly overwhelmed at all the people talking, each clamoring for one of her designs.

“You guys, email Evie your requests and she’ll give you an estimate,” Mal said to calm them all down. They all nodded enthusiastically, whipping out their smart phones and working on Mal’s demand.

“You’ll have that castle in no time,” Mal smiled to her friend. She was rewarded with the witch’s beautiful smile, unbelieving that her dream was coming true faster than she thought.

Queen Belle grinned when she saw Mal in her usual spot, but instead of the Auradon Prep uniform, she wore what looked like a fluffy grey Persian tabby cat costume. Upon closer inspection, it was a large onesie; like the ones she would have Ben wear when he was younger.

She sighed at the memory of her Crown Prince toddling around in a lion onesie, practicing his roar.
She walked over to the teen,

“Hi Mal, do you need any help with your homework or checking books back in?”

“Hi Ms. Charisse, no thank you. Ms. Millechoses was around to process my books back in. Might need you to check these out, though.”

Belle felt a little guilty for keeping the pseudonym going with the teen, she had never thought she would have started a friendship with the fae. She normally used the false name to keep undercover when she wanted to escape to her favorite library. But as time went on, and she made it a point to talk to the Isle teen whenever she was in town, she felt like she was living some double life.

Although part of her was a little put out Mal didn’t recognize her, she was Queen of all Eighteen Kingdoms after all.

*I’ll tell her, just have to find the right time.*

In the meantime, she looked at the stack and saw it was rather substantial and none of them looked to be required reading. Her curiosity got the better of her and she started to pick them and read from them. Mal didn’t seem to mind, although Belle thought logically,

*Why would she? I’d have to see them in order to check them out.*

Fairy Lineage Through the Ages
Fae Genetics – A Mendelian Study
Fairkind Families of Auradon
Inheritance Law for Children and Grandchildren

“Interesting reading, Mal. Are you researching something specific?”

*Trying to figure out Carlos’ father.*

“I thought to look up my own roots, Auradon Prep doesn’t really offer comprehensive fae history other than as tertiary figures to humans and dwarves,” Mal said out loud.

Mal didn’t seem all that upset or surprised, she kept on reading and making notes. She said it as cavalier as if she was describing the sky.

“I thought Professor FéeMarraine had a specific class on Fae History in Auradon?” Belle was a bit surprised that Mal wasn’t in the class as she clearly had an interest.

“She does, and I’m not in it. So maybe her lectures are different; but I got ahold of her reading list and pretty much every book is written by a human, one is written by a Dwarf but it’s just his point of view of the Fae War. I’m assuming there are fae other than Maleficent. And given Professor FéeMarraine’s tendency towards…” she struggled to describe what she found out about her and Jane’s drastic measures to appear human, she didn’t know to call it self-hatred or perhaps it was self-preservation. Either way, she felt there were clear human leaning biases.

She was also hesitant to say it to an Auradonian adult, she didn’t want to seem anti-UKA or something; it was the last headache she needed.

“…it seems like Professor FéeMarraine has been in Auradon for a very long time.”

Belle frowned, unsure what Mal was implying. After a pregnant pause, the Queen understood that the teen wasn’t going to expound upon her comment.
“I do have a response to your criticism of Friar Lawrence.”

“Oh?”

“Yes, so Juliet could not simply wait to be exiled as the family would have found out where she went. She had very few to no options, so they would have paid attention to where she went if kicked out. It also would have been rather odd if Juliet was ambivalent about potentially becoming disowned. She is also the only child of a prominent noble, so it’s highly unlikely she would have been banished quietly, even if she tried to subtly go to Romeo, she would have been reported by someone, even if the Capulets didn’t have someone specifically keep tabs on her. So they could have figured out she married Romeo before she and Romeo were reunited, and put her under permanent house arrest. The hatred was deep enough where they’d probably rather have their daughter live a de facto spinster than have her married to a Montague. Regardless if they banished her, the Capulets would have been rather ‘put out’ to say the least their only child had married into their enemy’s family if Juliet had managed to make it to Romeo. There were probably other hot headed Tybalt-like cousins that would have stormed the Montague abode and where Romeo was exiled. So in order to prevent further bloodshed and allow them to put ‘Juliet Capulet’ to rest and never look for her again, she would need to have ‘died.’”

Mal contemplated the older woman’s take on the story, but she still wasn’t totally convinced.

“I agree the Capulets would have found out about Romeo and Juliet if she had waited to be disowned. But I’m not sure if they would have done much; Juliet would have embarrassed them enough for snubbing the Prince’s kin, Paris, that they may have just washed their hands of her. It would have also gotten out, assuming the Friar would have come forth with the truth, that she and Romeo were legitimately married and furthermore had consummated said marriage. So she basically lost all ‘value’ as a marriage pawn, an annulment impossible. Plus there’s also Prince Escalus, he was fed up with the two families at the beginning of the story. He had exiled Romeo and already lost a cousin to the feud. I highly doubt he was going to be lenient to anyone from either family stepping out of line, no matter who started it. The Capulets would have not only been going against Prince Escalus’ decree to stop the bloodshed, could they survive the bad press that they hunted their own daughter? A potentially pregnant daughter? What the Friar should have done was take Juliet to the Montagues, work with them to get her to Romeo, and then work on a way to start undermining the Capulets.”

Belle wasn’t sure what to say, she didn’t think a teenager would have been capable of being so pitiless.

“What if the Montagues rejected Juliet?”

“Romeo is exiled, they probably would have been glad he found himself a wife at all. I also imagine that since it’s their son and not their daughter, they’d be a little more forgiving. ‘Boys will be boys’ and that bullshit…sorry…You know what I mean.”

Unfortunately, Belle knew more than most how much boys and men were able to get away with and felt the foul language was justified.

“I also feel like Signor Montague would have found it hilarious his son managed to marry Capulet’s only child. Like I said, the Capulets lost a marriage pawn and would probably be embarrassed in front of all Verona. Add that it was Montague’s son that did it? That’s what I believe you Auradonians call ‘the cherry on top.’ Juliet also potentially carried their legitimate grandson and heir to House Montague. Despite hating her family, she’s nobly born. In any other scenario she probably would have been a potential, if not primary choice bride for him. They’re not going to reject her.”
Belle found herself, again, contemplating her favorite book in ways she had never thought of before. She always knew she’d have a mid-life or existential crisis over a book, she just didn’t think it’d be over Romeo and Juliet.

“Ms. Charisse” then asked about Mal’s other readings, wondering if she had such insights to other novels or was Romeo and Juliet a one off.

Although she had her reading she wanted to do, Mal was more than happy to talk to the library aide. Belle enjoyed another afternoon of conversation about literature.

**Tuesday – Twin Day**

It was only the pure love of friendship that Evie and Mal shared that had the latter up even earlier than normal.

“Whyyyyyyy,” Mal whined quietly as she let Evie do her hair.

“Because it’s twin day, Mal. That means we have to match.”

The fae teen’s eyes glazed over, hearing what Evie said but not really processing it. She desperately wanted to go back to sleep. She rested her eyes and the next moment she opened them, she was in front of the Neptune Stairs.

“How did we get….?” Mal asked, baffled at how she went from their room to outside of school.

“Mal, you slept through getting dressed and breakfast. You really can sleep anywhere,” Evie explained, amused.

Mal only rubbed her eyes to get the last of sleep out of them, blinking quickly to finally realize where she was and what she was wearing.

She and Evie wore matching scoop neck sweater dresses, dyed in a galaxy color palette. It reminded her of their first night in Auradon and seeing their first starlit sky, the most pronounced colors were orchid and lapis. Their form fitting jeans were simple and flattering, their outfit finished with black knee high boots.

So impressed with her outfit, she almost didn’t notice her hair was a different color as it fell into her face when she turned to look at her outfit at different angles.

“My hair is blue,” she looked to Evie and saw that her hair had changed as well. Somehow she had slept through her friend dying their hair an ombré of magenta and cerulean. The top of her hair was her natural purple but ended with Evie’s natural hair color. The witch’s hair was inversed.

“Magic?” she mouthed, knowing there was no way she slept through an actual hair dye. Evie nodded, proud that her spell work had turned out so well. Mal was proud of her too, the lessons clearly helping.

Looking around as other students started to make their way to the academic building, their idea of twin day was more toned down. Most wore matching outfits they got from chain department stores, nothing handmade or tailored; definitely none of them had gone as far as dying their hair.

Pride bloomed in Evie’s chest,

*I’m going to win Spirit Week.*
Even though there was no official tally or even prize, she was going to crown herself the winner and no one could convince her otherwise.

She was especially proud when Jay and Carlos joined them; they had both followed her directions perfectly.

Jay had his hair down, the dress code was relaxed in all things during Spirit Week, and half his hair was a shimmering pearl, matching Carlos’ lighter shade flawlessly. She wondered which had done the spell, there was no other way to get such a colour or to do it so pristinely without magic. Their outfits were counterchanging of red, black, and white.

The way the others students praised them for their original outfits and commitment to Spirit Week, it didn’t seem like anyone could tell they had used magic to change their appearance.

Again, the only ones who came close to their level of Spirit Week were the band. Doug led the charge as someone with sunglasses, slicked back hair, and perfectly pressed suits.

“Are you supposed to be someone specific?” Carlos asked, wondering why they chose that specific outfit to twin, or to septuplet.

“Yeah, we’re Agents from the Matrix,” Tyler from percussion said, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

All four Isle kids shook their heads, they had no idea what he was talking about.

“Oh my gods, movie night. Tonight. Stat. Cannot be held off, it is blasphemy to have never seen The Matrix.”

All other members of the band had agreed. It was of paramount importance that the Isle Four see the movie trilogy, even though the movies were about as old as they were.

Mal put the kibosh on movie night, especially since it seemed there were three of them and rather long.

“OK, Sunday night. That’s the night,” the band acquiesced immediately; they all remembered they had a ton of homework and papers to do as well.

It had nothing to do with being slightly afraid of Mal. **Nothing.**

That night, it was the first free one any of them had in weeks. Coach had given them a rest night as they had been practicing so hard the previous weeks. They were under strict orders to eat well and rest up, the next day they would be at their regular schedule.

All their homework was done and Evie’s wardrobe choices were ready to go.

Jay, again, was in her room and they had undone the glamors that spelled their hair into other colors. A gentle run of their hands through each other’s hair had left a trail of blue and gold sparkling light, their hair going back to normal.

***

But they weren’t done with playing with each other’s magic. Evie trailed her hands softly over his
arms and the blue light followed wherever she touched. Jay shivered at the magic that flowed from her to him. He had returned the favor, his magic going straight to her core and feeling herself slick with want.

It seemed forever since the last time they were intimate and neither were going to waste the evening. He gently pulled at her clothing, knowing how much effort she had put into the outfit, he would never think to destroy or tear anything she created.

Hungry kisses and luxuriating in his long hair, she led them to her bed. Soon both were disrobed, their magic light dancing upon their skin.

He easily lifted her off the ground and gently laid her on the bed. He worshiped every inch of exposed skin with soft kisses and nips, she would giggle at how his five o’clock shadow would tickle her sensitive spots.

She thought two could play at that game and went straight for his weak spot, just below his ear on his neck. She felt him shiver at her ministrations and felt his leaking hardness against her stomach. From his desperate sounds he wanted to go further, but he was always respectful of her boundaries and never went further without her permission.

Evie felt a power high from his restraint, knowing she could probably make him wait forever and he would. But she had mercy on him, and her own desire to move forward, and guided his hand to her core. He slowly slid one finger in, always to make sure she was ready for more. Soon he added a second and she sighed at the feeling of being full, eager for more.

“More,” she commanded, her breathing ragged and hard.

Jay then added a third, easily sliding in and from her bucking hips he was confident she was properly ready for him.

“I want you in me,” she mewed, getting desperate for more than just his fingers.

“Are you sure?” he asked, always wanting her to be sure and that it was what she wanted.

They were also playing a dangerous game, one that could ruin everything they worked for but in that moment, she didn’t want anything more in her life.

“Yes…please,” she begged.

He obeyed and lined himself to her entrance. Although he was almost in pain with how much he wanted to be inside her, he would never forgive himself if he had ever hurt her in any way. He inched in slowly, in awe of the pleasure of how tight and wet she was. He wished he could make the feeling last forever, but he pumped in and out of her; the pace enough for them to feel every part of each other but not to lose control.

The sensation almost too much for Evie, she gripped his back tightly and he knew he’d have her marks down his back in the morning.

All she wanted was more of Jay, desperate to have him she begged,

“Please Jay, go faster.”

“No,” the only time he would deny her. “I’ll lose control.”

But he did add power to his thrusts, angling himself in a way that he knew from practice hit a
particular spot that had Evie all but screaming in delight.

He then reached between them, wanting her pleasure to come first and rubbed at her pearl and within minutes her core was convulsing around him with her climax.

So he would not spill within her, he pulled out and was about to finish himself off, she had grasped him. They looked deep into each other’s’ eyes and she started to pump his shaft, slick with her juices. They were both sweating with their exertions, hair a mess but he didn’t think she had ever looked more beautiful to him. Her soft hands firmly gripped him and pumped steadily and she quickened her pace as his moans grew louder. Soon he shivered his own release, thick ropey spurts of cum landed onto her stomach, he came harder at the thought of his scent marking her as his.

When he was fully spent, he rolled off of her and lay on his back next to her. For the next few moments, they got their breathing under control and their mixed releases cooled.

Evie had enough practice with the cleaning spell that she need not say anything out loud; a simple movement of her hand and all evidence of their passions were erased.

***

The thought of marking Evie as his grew louder in his head, he couldn’t get it to stop and he had a suddenly epiphany.

“I love you,” he said to her as she was about to succumb to sleep.

She was not expecting such a declaration and she was suddenly wide awake, her mouth open in shock and unsure of how to even articulate words.

He felt like an idiot for not thinking things through and suddenly springing such a thing on her.

“I know we’re been kind of casual this whole time and I get I just kind of blurted it out…but I just couldn’t keep it to myself…you don’t have to say anything back. But I do love you.”

He then kissed her gently and held her close, keeping his promise that she didn’t have to say anything.

While she had a hard time speaking, her thoughts whirled through her head like a tempest. So many questions bounced around her mind and she had no idea how to answer them that she didn’t get any sleep that night.

Jay didn’t seem to have that same problem as he breathed deeply and gently in sleep, looking peaceful.

Anyone else she might have kicked him out of her room while she contemplated the new shift in their relationship. But she didn’t want to be alone and she felt safe and warm within his arms. It was selfish to use him as a security blanket while he confessed his feelings and she didn’t reciprocate, but she couldn’t bring herself to leave the sanctuary of his arms.

Even the next morning while they got ready for another theme day for Spirit Week, he didn’t pressure her to give an answer or even give a hint of what happened last night. He simply kissed her goodbye while he snuck back to his dorm and Mal snuck back in.

She desperately wanted to tell someone what happened, but she didn’t know if Mal was the right person to talk to; the fae was Jay’s best friend and she wasn’t sure how she would react.
So she kept quiet while they got into costume.

**Wednesday – 90’s**

“Why are you wearing what looks to be a riding dress, with petticoat and lace?” Amy Kingsleigh asked. Curious as to why the Isle Four were dressed so drastically different than everyone else. “And why are the boys in similar era suits?”

“Well the poster said 90’s. I didn’t like the look of the 1990’s, so I chose the 1690’s, specifically 1697. Mal had found all these great books for me about fashion through the centuries and I just fell in love,” Evie excitedly told the cheerleader, twirling so they could see every angle of her masterpiece.

She was grateful for Spirit Week as it was a great distraction from her inner turmoil.

The entire cheer team was in track pants or super wide legged baggy jeans and had several plastic bracelets and chokers; their hair in interesting twists or ponytails and crimped. The tourney team, with the exception of Jay and Carlos, were all decked out with frosted highlights, Raybans, and spikey hair.

“Damnit!” Doug exclaimed when he saw them, his hair bleached platinum blond and as curly as a poodle’s. “Yours is way funnier.”

Him and ten others were dressed as ‘N Sync and the Backstreet Boys,

**Whatever those are.**

Although she knew they were all speaking Common, Mal had a hard time understanding Auradonians often.

“I told you guys, we should have done a musical number.”

Doug hated, in a friendly way, that he was losing Spirit Week to newcomer Evie.

“We didn’t have time to come up with choreography,” Jesse of woodwind defended themselves.

“Evie has created three intricate outfits for **four** people and I’m pretty sure she has something amazing for the Homecoming Dance. You’re all just lazy,” he flippantly told his band mate. A small push fight broke out but no one was seriously hurt as no one was truly angry.

Although it was true to the time, ‘Nsync won the fight against the Backstreet boys.

Evie and Mal were in their own dorm, doing their homework while the boys were at practice.

“Jay said he loved me,” Evie finally admitted after keeping it in all day, unable to focus on her Calc homework any longer; breaking the silence of their study time.

Mal’s eyebrows shot up in surprised, she hadn’t thought their relationship was like that and wondered why Jay hadn’t said anything to her. She also wondered why Evie hadn’t gone to Carlos.

“What’d you say?”

“I was too surprised to say anything. I’m still trying to digest it. He said I didn’t have to say anything, but I feel like that’s not true, at least not forever. I know I can’t ignore this, and he’s going to need an
answer at some point. But I’m still at a loss at what to tell him.”

“Do you want me to get Carlos?”

Evie thought about it, he would be better at empathy in most cases, but she didn’t think this would be one of them. While most assumed Jay and Carlos were best friends while Mal and Evie were as well, it mostly stemmed from assuming their friendship split along gender lines. But Evie and Carlos always felt the other was their sibling.

“No…I just don’t think he’d understand…he’s only ever been in one relationship and he found the love of his life on his first try. I don’t think he’d see things impartially.”

Mal tried not to preen at Evie’s observation of her relationship, but understood what Evie wanted. Whether Carlos wanted to admit it or not, he was a romantic at heart and probably not what Evie needed at the moment.

“Well, then what do you feel?”

“Another question I don’t know the answer to.”

Evie was hesitant to say even more. Although she felt Mal was the closest thing she’d ever get to a sister, she knew her and Jay went back far longer than she and Mal did. Jay and Mal had grown up with each other having their back; something precious and rare on the Isle.

But she needed to get this off her chest and Mal would at least give her a chance to explain herself and not go running to Jay.

“It’s just that…a big reason we got together was because of you and Carlos.”

“Me and Carlos?” Mal had no idea what her relationship had to do with her and Jay.

“Yeah, it’s like you two started to date, and me and Jay just kind of hung together because we didn’t have anyone else. And then you and Carlos were just so…couple-y. We both started to feel like we were fourth wheels…”

“Isn’t that normally how many wheels there ought to be?”

“…and just felt left out. So one night, we were bored and just looked at each other and he was like ‘want to try making out?’ And he was the first guy who asked if I wanted to, instead of just assuming I would because I worked in a brothel. He was hot, so I was like ‘…sure.’ So it just went from there. Even less guys bothered me anymore because I was friends with you and then I was dating Jay. I was basically untouchable. We got together because of convenience and mutual hotness.”

Mal simply listened, her friend needed to work through her thoughts.

“And then we got to Auradon Prep. We both flirted with a lot of people and neither of us seemed to care. So I thought we were just still together for fun. And I guess I always thought that we’d find birth control and…”

Evie looked hesitant and unsure she ought to say what she wanted to say next.

“And?” Mal asked, encouraging her friend to go on.

“And I thought I would have sexy adventures.”

“Sexy adventures?”
Mal was genuinely confused, not judgmental.

“Yeah, like in all those books our mothers didn’t want us to read. Like I’d meet a prince, a geeky but somehow super ripped hottie, a sweet sensitive musician that loves farmer’s markets – whatever those are – and a brainless jock that has a horde of puppies and I’d get to sleep with all of them with zero consequences. Like I’d just really be able to rub it in my mother’s face I wasn’t a virgin and that it didn’t matter.”

Mal tried to remember if she read any of these books and she couldn’t. It seemed more wishful thinking than any actual literature that existed.

“But Auradon Prep is nothing like the books. The guys are hot and all, but they’re all such jerks. Like Chad, I totally would have considered him if he had just shut up. But no, they all open their mouths and I just…ughhh…can’t.”

“What about Doug? He’s cute and nice.”

“He is, and I love that broad shoulder sexy miner-slash-warrior look most Dwarves have but he’s all ‘I can only date Dwarfish girls, otherwise my mom would kill me.’ Like if he can’t decide for himself who he wants to date or if staying within his culture is that important, then pass. I don’t need that drama.”

Mal agreed the pickings were slim at Auradon Prep. Although part of it, at least to her, was that no one could compare to Carlos and that made her particularly disinterested.

“It sounds like to me that you want to see what else is out there. Even though what is convenient to you isn’t much. There are people outside of Auradon Prep, and if you want to explore all your options then that’s what you should do. I mean we’ve been putting together college application packets, that might be the time you can really…experiment.”

Evie was surprised at how unbiased and understanding Mal was being. She was certain she would be offended on Jay’s behalf and berate her for not returning the feelings of such a great and basically perfect guy.

“Look, I love Jay.” as if reading Evie’s mind. “He’s been my best friend since we were like seven. I wouldn’t try to convince you to stay with him when you weren’t 100% enthusiastic about him. He deserves that and more. In true Jay fashion, it sounds like he kind of just realized his feelings and sprung it on you. So it’s fair to give you space and time to figure it out. But he doesn’t deserve to be treated like a place holder until you find better options. It sucks that he fell in love with someone who may not reciprocate. But it’s better to be heartbroken now, than later and finding out parts of your relationship was a lie. It’s the lying that truly hurts.”

Evie took in what she said, remembering the not so distant past where Mal learned that lesson that hard way.

“So, if you want to be single then be single. And that’s just how it is and he’ll accept that. But you should tell Jay soon, at least as soon as you really know.”

“That’s part of the problem, I don’t know if I really know. Because you’re right, Jay is amazing. He’s sweet, polite, super fun to be around, funny, amazingly hot, and listens in bed…”

It was starting to go into too much information territory but Mal wasn’t sure if she ought to stop Evie’s train of thought.
“OK, I have a confession. You have to promise not to be mad.”

“That’s not how feelings work,” she mostly said that because she knew she could never make any such promise and was already anxious as to what Evie would be scared to tell her.

“Fine, you just can’t yell at me.”

“O….K….”

“…Jay and I have been having unprotected sex.”

Mal gasped, whatever she was expecting it wasn’t that.

After everything we’ve seen in the brothels?! With everything we have to lose in Auradon?!

“Wait,” Evie said quickly, seeing the horrified emotions cross her friend’s face. “Remember that you and Carlos had sexy fun times in a closet in a public museum and could have gotten caught.”

That took the wind out of Mal’s sails and she held in every admonishment she had ready at the tip of her tongue.

“It’s just that Jay has gotten so much more muscular and I can’t keep my hands off him. Plus he’s so aggressive on the tourney field and I can’t stop thinking of how powerful he is in bed and my brain stops working. The band told us about ‘pull and pray’ and none of them are pregnant…so…we thought it would be OK?”

Saying it out loud, Evie knew it sounded ridiculous but in the throes of passion, it was believable and made perfect sense.

I’m going to kill Doug.

Several emotions whirled through Mal and she knew the Dwarf was a bad influence, her face couldn’t decide on which expression it ought to exhibit. Evie took it as a good sign she wasn’t immediately vaporized by magic or set on fire.

“Eves, look…I’m not angry,” Mal had decided to be pragmatic and mostly told the truth. “It’s just that the brothels have P.O.O.T. and it’s basically the same thing and plenty have gotten pregnant.”

“But at least we get our moon blood regularly now and could tell sooner.”

“No, that’s worse because it means we’re ovulating regularly now.”

“Oh, right,” although it took a few minutes for Evie to recall what ovulating meant.

“Did you read that book I got you from the library?”

“Well…I started it but then all my other homework built up and I can’t read as fast as you…so I returned it so you wouldn’t get a late fee.”

“I am going to check it out again and Xerox the important parts.”

Evie didn’t want more reading but perhaps it was useful information that she really needed to know.

“OK, you’re having sex with Jay…anything else?”

There was nothing Mal could do about it now and she doubted they would stop.
“It’s just that I really trust Jay. That’s what I wanted to tell you.”

“I guess I don’t understand the problem. I mean, I’m no expert but you’re attracted to him, he treats you very well, he’s awesome, you trust him…that sounds like love to me.”

“Yeah but…”

Evie took a deep breath and tried to articulate her feelings as best she could.

“…what if we’re only together because we’re each other’s only option? Or second choice? I mean if Carlos wasn’t in the picture, would you two have gotten together?”

“No, seriously,” she insisted at Mal’s incredulous look. “Like you two were friends for so long and none of us are bad looking. It’s something a lot of people wondered. I remember your mom asking if he was to be consort.”

“Eves, it’s just not like that between me and Jay. Yeah we both considered it but it just never went anywhere. The fact that it didn’t tells me it wouldn’t have. Neither of us is exactly shy or indecisive about getting what we want. And who knows what would have happened if I didn’t start dating Carlos. I mean, it just as easily could have been you I ended up with.”

“Really?” Evie didn’t think Mal had ever considered her as more than a friend, she was rather flattered.

Mal tried her best not to roll her eyes at how pleased Evie looked, but some things couldn’t be helped.

“Yes, Evie. People asked about you too, just not in your presence because they were afraid of embarrassing me. My mother asked if you were to be consort at one point too…preferred you actually.”

“Wow…Consort Evie. I think it has a nice ring to it,” Evie lost in a short day dream of what could have been.

“Besides Eves, he said he loves you. Don’t you think that means something? Particularly that he’s not carrying some secret torch for me and waiting for me and Carlos to break up?”

“Sometimes men say things they know women want to hear,” Evie admitted sheepishly, knowing it didn’t really cast a great light on Jay and it wasn’t necessarily fair for her to think such things about him. But it was a fear that ran deep in her and she couldn’t ignore it.

“Since when do any of us say things we don’t mean? I mean unless we were trying to steal from someone or trying to get away with something…but we don’t do that to each other.”

“It’s what my dad did to get my mother to sleep with him,” Evie couldn’t look Mal in the eye when she said that, she only played with her hands and imaginary lint on her clothes; she hoped Mal wasn’t too mad and didn’t think she was a complete idiot.

It suddenly became clear where Evie was coming from. Her dad duped Ravenna into thinking she could escape the Isle and live in a castle, but he had lied and had completely abandoned her and her unborn child. Perhaps it was a fit of pique or madness, but sleeping with whores wasn’t enough; he had wanted the Madam of Fleur de Pomme, or perhaps the lure of bedding The Evil Queen was a temptation he couldn’t resist.

Mal made Evie look her in the eye and held her hands,
“No matter how rich or entitled your father is, he’s trash and an idiot. I don’t blame him for leaving your mother, she’s terrible. But if he knew how wonderful and great his daughter would turn out to be, I’m sure he’d be kicking himself and come begging your forgiveness. He should have come back for you. If not to take you into his family then the very least he owed you was a nice family in Auradon.”

Hearing Mal’s words and the genuine look in her eyes was overwhelming for the witch, she felt her heart was set to jump out of her chest. Her whole life she thought she was nothing. Her mother thought she was just some pawn to marry off to whatever prince would have her and get them both off the Isle. Her father thought she was not even worth seeing once, otherwise how could he just leave her at the mercy of the Isle? Even if he didn’t want to claim her, Mal was right, the very least he could have done was take her from the horrible fate of the island and give her to some peasant family in Auradon or even an orphanage.

She didn’t even know what he looked like. She had been afraid to look him up; paranoid the faulty at Auradon Prep was looking through her internet search history and would wonder why she was interested in a noble a few kingdoms away.

Tears pooled from her eyes, the fae’s kind words having a profound impact on her; tears gently rolling down her face. Mal had the rare gift of making people feel wanted; it was something Carlos had confided in her.

Between Jay’s love and Mal’s fierce declaration of her worth, it was all too overpowering and foreign to her.

“If Jay says he loves you, then he loves you,” Mal insisted as she wiped away her tears. “He always had his choice of women and men, here in Auradon and on the Isle. There were plenty of whores, farmers’ daughters, and merchants that had thrown themselves at him.”

“I never saw or heard about that,” Evie had doubted her friend.

“Because he always turned them down and they were too embarrassed to say anything…and afraid of you.”

“Afraid of me?” Evie never had anyone fear her, not with Mal and Jay who were so much more formidable.

“You’re the daughter of an infamous poisoner…and there was that one guy,” Mal refused to expound upon that as Evie knew exactly whom she was talking about. “Anyway…they tended to not get in your way when it came to Jay.”

This was a new revelation. Jay apparently had many other options to him on the Isle, and he had refused them. It wasn’t as if she would know about any indiscretion, the Isle citizens were particularly discreet when it suited them and she spent all her time working in the brothel; her mother making sure her exposure to people kept at a minimum to maintain her virtue.

“And Jay has choices here too. Not all the cheerleaders are royal or have this weird obsession and fetish for virginity. And they aren’t shy about what they want. You just haven’t noticed because you’ve basically been living in the sewing rooms and our dorm. Jay’s too nice to meanly reject them publicly no matter how bitchy their rumors get. I wonder if part of their motivation for spreading them is from hurt pride…maybe we should revisit our ‘no cursing’ policy,” Mal considered as she got off topic.

“No, we aren’t our parents. We can rise above.”
“Ugh, I feel like they count on us to ‘rise above’ so their actions have no consequence. Back in Maleficent’s day, a fae or enchantress would curse mortals for sneezing at them wrong. We have way better justification.”

“No cursing.”

“Fine. Anyway, neither of you are anyone’s second choice or consolation prize. You have options both here and the Isle, but for the same reasons Jay had; you know none of them are worthy of you and you’re with the best choice.”

“Thanks Mal.”

Evie had felt better to get so much off her chest. She wasn’t that much closer to deciding, but it did relieve some insecurities she had held for a while.

“I’m going to the sewing room, I want to do some sketches and maybe start something new. Get my mind clear.”

“Have fun.”

Evie had been gone for only twenty minutes and it’d be another hour or so before the boys were free for dinner.

Mal couldn’t concentrate, the numbers blurring on the worksheet and all she could see was Evie pregnant. She would be kicked out of school and Jay would go with her. Despite the witch’s fears, the djinn would never abandon her or a child of his. Mal couldn’t fathom leaving Jay, so she’d go and Carlos would follow. So if Evie got pregnant and kicked out, they were all screwed.

She wanted to be mad but another part of her, however, totally understood giving into temptation. With how often they were alone with each other, practically living together, she and Carlos had been coming closer and closer to penetrative sex. She couldn’t honestly say they wouldn’t be trying the “pull and pray” method in the near future.

But she hated the idea of their lovemaking being soured or tainted with fear. She didn’t want to seem ungrateful but Auradon Prep was rather vexing her at the moment with their archaic rules against sex.

_OK, what ingredients do I have on hand and what do I need to collect for tansy tea_?

She abhorred resorting to the poison, but it was their best, and only, option and her patience was running out.

While she thought of the potion she severely wished not to have to take, out of her peripheral a book appeared. When she focused on the study table, there sat the Maledictae Grimoira. It had moved from the closet to the table on its own volition.

_That can’t be good._

It had looked the exact same as when she had put it away; evil and foreboding, the dark binding and sigil almost taunting her with how wicked it was.

She immediately picked it up and put it back in its hiding place.

As soon as she had turned around, the book was back on the table.
“Come on, don’t do this,” she told it in frustration. It had been almost two months since she had hidden it away, why was it showing itself now? She tried again to place it back in the closest but again, it had transported itself back to the table.

“OK, fine. I’ll look at you,” she hoped it was just bored or wanted attention. Certain magical items could take on a personality of their own. Perhaps she couldn’t hide it away forever, but that didn’t mean it could make her perform spells.

Thumbing through some pages she had seen:

Sphere of the Infinite Agonies
Blood and Eye Boiling
Eternity of Schadenfreudic Punishments

“**Nope, nope, nope, nope;** none of that. No thank you Book, but I shall have to pass. Get back to me when you have a birth control spell,” she grabbed the Book and walked back to the closet, thinking of spells she could try to keep it hidden. But she didn’t even make it half way towards the closet before the Book flung itself from her hands and back onto the table.

In front of her eyes the Book then flipped on its back and turned around, a green glow encompassed it and when the dust settled, it was now a light taupe; the binding looked almost like suede; the back was now the front. Instead of a dragon in profile spouting fire and in a fighting stance, it was now circular and had hold of its own tail in its mouth, it encompassed the fae rune for balance. Instead of black onyx, it was a burnished bronze.

“The Kreisdrache,” she whispered in awe, gently caressing the sacred symbol she never thought she’d see in her lifetime.

She wasn’t sure what was going on, the Maledictae Grimoira had gone from a dark book with its Feuerdrache sigil, a long held symbol of death and destruction, to the Kreisdrache which was the emblem of perfect balance and eternality; holding life and death in equal measure and representing the Endless. It was neither good nor evil; it just was.

The first page now read “Neudictae Grimoira.” It was a completely different book, did her mother know about this version of it?

“OK, Book. You have my attention, what are you trying to tell me?”

As if understanding her, it opened itself and started to flip through pages swiftly. It landed on,

“Null Rune, use when no life nor death is wanted…are you serious? Is this a birth control spell?”

The Book glowed a warm green and Mal took that as a “yes.”

“Has this damn spell been here the whole time?”

Again, the Book glowed a warm green and she wasn’t sure why but she felt that answer was somewhat smug; as if the Book was telling her she ought not to have ignored it for so long and her problem could have been solved weeks ago.

“Rune must be etched under the stars while sky clad – great, we have to be naked – and must not be disturbed in order to work. Nullification works as long as rune is in intact. Rune must be etched on the abdomen, no lower than the pelvis. Ok, problem. This only works if it’s undisturbed. If we’re having sex and sweat or rubbing against each other then it’s not going to stay. I’m certainly not going to cut this into us as I feel ’etching’ is suggesting.”
Mal was a bit disappointed as it didn’t seem like a viable option.

“Do you have a suggestion to remedy this?”

What had her life come to where she was asking a book? But then again, books were what contained knowledge itself so it probably knew vastly more than she ever would.

The Neudictae Grimoira seemed flattered that she would actually ask its advice and it then flipped to another page.

“Sealing spell, creates permanent stasis of whatever its cast upon. This includes but is not limited to: runes, enchantments, and transfiguration. For physical items, it can permanently fix an item to a place. WARNING: If used on human, fae, or otherwise skin, it will burn. Use caution. Wow… ummm…wow…”

She couldn’t believe it was so simple and in her possession this whole time. She had no idea the spell book contained non-harmful spells. A bubble of irritation at her mother, who never indicated the Maledictae Grimoira was anything other than a book of curses. Perhaps her mother thought she wouldn’t need anything of the sort. Or perhaps the Book could sense the will of the owner, she certainly couldn’t see Maleficent needing anything other than the evil part of the Book. Thankfully the Book seemed self-aware and cognizant. It just wanted to be useful and not ignored as it had been.

“Thank you Book, is there a removal spell for when we’re much older and want kids?”

The Book flipped only one page and right next to the Sealing Spell was the Unsealing Spell.

“WARNING: Unsealing from skin burns twice as bad as Sealing. Damnit, of course. But still, we are in business. Where’s my phone? Here’s my phone. Texting Evie to get her ass back here. There, sent. Now lets see, what other goodies do you have, Book?”

Evie lost herself in fabrics and sketches, the stress of the day melting away from her.

She wasn’t religious, her mother never instilled any favor towards any gods; they were merely there to be called upon if she were doing a spell but Ravenna had never bothered to try to teach her on an island with no magic, but if she did have to choose a religion then it’d probably be fashion. The studio was her temple, she felt at peace and comfortable like nowhere else in the world.

All she could focus on was pinning the mannequin, determined for each outfit to be perfect. She couldn’t believe she was almost done making outfits she wanted to make, not just variations of the same skimpy lingerie for the whores. She wasn’t forced to repair torn clothes for hours on end, the pile never getting any smaller. The only other Sisyphean task that competed with it was the laundry. Her mother didn’t want her to ruin her hands by the harsh chemicals or constant hot water, so there were other brothel workers that did the most arduous cleaning but she had to help sort and fold. It felt like days sometimes where she’d sort a mile high pile of clothes, fold them, then the pile would reappear.

Instead of the sense of servitude with being the Fleur de Pomme’s seamstress (or the closest things they had to one), in Auradon she was creating pieces. She was allowed to fully express herself through her designs and see them go from ideas in her head to paper and then to real life.

The fashion teachers were helpful and supportive. They were the only staff that had actually trusted her, they never once looked at her oddly or as if she was going to poison someone or steal anything.
They allowed her free reign of the studio. She was given all access to all sewing machines and other supplies. For her personal projects she had to pay for the fabrics, but all buttons, lace, and other notions were still free to her; she was still frugal in her designs as she was more than aware of what everything costs and didn’t want to be greedy.

Part of her had been afraid that her classmates would spread rumors about her creations, either to ruin the surprise at Homecoming or to disparage her attempts. Audrey had not been too subtle in her barbs that the Four had been doing better than any of the Auradonian students would think Isle children would do in Auradon. Or to make condescending remarks on how they thought it was “cute” or disingenuously “inspiring” that they would try to fit in. But it turned out there was an honor code amongst designers, everyone kept to their own work unless they asked for help.

When she gave sewing tips, none of them scoffed and dismissed her, they were thankful and shared some of their own if they saw her struggling.

With one last adjustment to Mal’s neckline, she stepped back and admired her work. Weeks and hours upon hours of sweat, blood, and tears and there were four outfits she had made.

She was glad she was alone; tears of pride had trickled down her face. She didn’t think anyone at Auradon Prep would understand, they had grown up with such privilege and abundance; but to her, to be able to follow a dream and make it a reality was something she didn’t think she’d ever have a chance to do.

Luckily she was able to get herself together before another student had come in, wanting to work on their project in hopes of having it shown at the Winter Recital.

“Hey Evie,” Fianna Skywalker greeted the blue haired student politely. “Wow, are you done with your Homecoming outfits?”

Evie nodded proudly, always ready to talk about her work.

“Yes, I put the finishing touches on. I just need Jay not to get any bigger and rip seams,” she joked.

“Oh he has certainly filled out indeed,” Fianna all but purred out, thinking of the Isle boy and what she’d like those arms to do for her.

Evie blinked rapidly, a little shocked at Fianna’s declaration; it was the first time anyone at Auradon Prep had mentioned Jay without trepidation.

“You’re so lucky to have guy friends who go along with Spirit Week,” the other girl went on, not noticing her discomfort. “My last boyfriend wouldn’t even consider matching outfits much less dying his hair or the intricate time period outfits. Jay looked ah-mazingly hot by the way, so thanks.”

The Skywalker scion took a moment to laugh at her own joke, feeling comfortable enough with the villainess’s daughter to do some idle gossip.

Evie felt an odd and ugly feeling bloom in her chest, Fianna’s words twisting in her gut. She just nodded as if she were participating in the conversation, picking up a few sketches and acting as if she wasn’t affected by what the other girl was saying.

Fianna absentlty stitched a project she was working on for class while she continued to chatter.

It did force Evie to think about how Jay never once complained during the week, even Carlos in private whined about the several layers of costume she had made. Jay took everything in stride, she had always thought that he was just that laid back; but perhaps given his proclamation, he did it for
her.

During their nights together, he always asked about her projects and she knew she could babble on forever. Mal’s eyes always glazed over and she knew the fae girl was only minutely paying attention.

Jay was never like that with her.

“And Jay is like, so polite; he always opens the doors for you and Mal, letting you go first. Boys here barely even remember to keep the door open for the person behind them; even the royals! You’d think they’d be the most polite people ever, but they’re only like polite to other royals. Asses, amiright?”

Evie was so used to Jay and Carlos that she never really thought about it, but Fianna was right. Jay was always considerate and thoughtful, letting them go first through doors and in general. He also took heavy or cumbersome items when he saw someone struggling, all before anyone even asked. It wasn’t a benign sexism thing either, he did it for everyone; not just the females. She knew the theatre and band kids were always grateful for his help.

Jay’s always really sweet and thoughtful that way.

“And seeing Jay tackle people on the field, it just does something to me; know what I mean?”

She did and she really was starting to lose her patience when Fianna would just not stop talking. Mal was right, Jay had options in Auradon Prep, and would probably have even more as time went on and others realized how remarkable he was. The other students certainly had eyes and no one could deny Jay’s charm and handsome looks, they were just now catching on that he wasn’t a threat to them.

“Like Carlos is really cute too, but in a nerdy puppy sort of way. Jay just has a presence about him.”

Evie started to reconsider her words to Mal, perhaps they ought to do non-life threatening curses; certainly to at least ward off unwanted advances.

If Fianna had been paying any attention or wasn’t so self-absorbed, she probably would have noticed the glower Evie sported or the errant magic that started to charge the air with her annoyance.

Luckily the Auradonian born girl only had to repair a hem and was finished within the next few minutes. She put away her things and mentioned as she left,

“Tell Jay to text me, I’m sure there are several outfits we could come up with for all to enjoy. Great talk, see you tomorrow!”

The Skywalker girl literally had an entire conversation by herself and Evie knew that even if she wasn’t dating Jay, she would never expose him to such a vapid creature. He certainly deserved more than someone who thought the world revolved around herself and wouldn’t let anyone get in a word.

She looked to the tri-fold mirror and saw three reflections of herself. On the Isle she probably would have killed to have a mirror so big and that could give so many angles. Her mother certainly would have appreciated it. Her mother taught to always look in a mirror before going anywhere, to make sure every hair was in place and her make up spotless. She had been taught to always look hard and long for any flaw and to correct it right away.

She was taught that how she looked was all that mattered; whatever was reflected in the mirror was the most important thing in the world.
With the help of her friends, she learned there were other things so much more important, something a mirror couldn’t reflect back to her.

A mirror couldn’t show her kindness, bravery, or intelligence. It took a while for her to see those within herself and that they should take precedence.

A mirror couldn’t reflect the deep routed insecurity her mother instilled in her or the pain of her father’s abandonment. She wished it did, she would have fixed those flaws long before she would have even noticed black heads, large pores, or supposedly undesirable hair.

*Jay is amazing and he is not a liar. He loves me, and he deserves the best version of me and that is more than who is in the mirror.*

She didn’t want Jay to be with anyone else and she didn’t want to be with anyone else. That was the truth of the matter and she hated that something so simple had eluded her for so long.

“I love Jay,” she said aloud for the first time.

*OK, I said it to myself. That was easy enough, now I just have to say it to him.*

But the ugly insecurity she harbored reared its head, thinking maybe she had waited too long and he could have changed his mind. The anger she felt before with Fianna’s declaration of attraction had been replaced with the heavy lead of doubt.

*Gods damn it.*

She let out an annoyed huff, wondering why it was so hard to just stick to one feeling and ignore anything she didn’t want to deal with.

Her inner turmoil was interrupted by a text from Mal.

*[get back to the dorm, important news]*

Evie wondered what her friend wanted but didn’t dally and made her way back to the castle.

**Thursday – Class Colour Day**

**First Years – Rose**
Sophomores – White
Juniors – Blue
Seniors – Gold

“I feel like we’re not allowed to sit anywhere,” Carlos mentioned as he was painted head to toe in shimmery gold paint.

Literally painted head to toe in shimmery gold paint that rub off on *everything*.

“Small price to pay for school Spirit, Carlos,” Evie paid him no mind, thinking he just needed to get over it. She adjusted her crown of laurels, and then looked to make sure the rest of theirs had been perfectly placed as well.

She had planned to tell Jay that morning but with getting ready, she had lost track of time and chickened out. She took it as a good sign that he still wore the outfit, but the irksome voice of her mother wouldn’t relent and she acted as if nothing was happening. She just had to hope he would understand her procrastination.
Carlos moodily pouted, he thought he was rather a good sport during this whole insane exercise in social interaction but he felt maybe she had gone too far. Most had simply worn clothes that were gold or varying shades of yellow. The friends were all painted gold and wearing golden togas. He had no idea what either meant to the other, but he felt rather exposed.

He wished Jay would back him up but the large Isle teen was too busy flexing for their gawkers to be too mad at having to be covered in gilt paint.

“Are we going to get kicked out of class?”

“For what? Having too much school…damn it Doug!”

The Isle kids whipped their heads in the direction the normally blue haired witch was looking, wondering what caused her to curse.

And it was Doug and several other band members also painted head to toe in shimmery gold paint. The trumpet player seemed just as offended as Evie was that there were others with the same idea for Class Colour Day. The only difference was that they were all wearing matching gold suits rather than togas.

“OK, you guys are going to have to change,” Doug spoke on behalf of the band and acted as if he had the authority to give orders.

“We will do no such thing. You must have cheated and seen my sketches and stole my idea.”

“No, no, no, no. We’ve been planning this since First Year. We’re Gold Bonds, you guys are just Greek statutes or something.”

“I don’t know what ‘Gold Bonds’ means but we’re Chrysus Nymphs, followers of the Greek god that embodies gold and riches. You guys are reusing suits from Tuesday. We are way more appropriate and original for Class Colour Day.”

“Not even close. We’re a James Bond pun, nothing beats that.”

“It took over two hours to get this paint on.”

“I don’t even know if this paint is skin safe, that’s how dedicated we are.”

“What do you mean you don’t know if it’s skin safe?” Tyler asked, bewildered at this new development.

“Ty, chill out. Shirley Eaton didn’t actually die in Goldfinger. We’re fine.”

Mal thought she ought to do something since it looked like Evie and Doug were about to go toe to toe for the right to be painted in gold, but she was rather amused. She wondered who would win in a fight.

Evie has powers and height, but Doug is probably from a long line of Dwarf miners and warriors. His arms are rather impressive, not Jay impressive but impressive nonetheless. I wonder if it’s too late to start taking bets.

But she would never know as Carlos, the peacekeeper, intervened.

“Hey guys, we all look great and worked really hard on our costumes. And we’re all in the same class, what’s really important is that we look better than the Juniors.”
He also wasn’t afraid to use his height and stance to get Doug to back up, and it was made clear when Jay joined him that no one came that aggressively close to Evie even if they thought she could defend herself.

Carlos had found their common enemy and both Evie and Doug looked to the gaggle of students a grade below.

“We do look pretty amazing,” Doug admitted, the Juniors weren’t anywhere on their level of awesome. He also inched away from Evie, getting the message that he had come on too strong and too close.

“We do,” Evie agreed and figured two people could have similar great ideas. She was glad for the gold paint, she was pretty sure she was blushing with how protective Jay was despite what was going on between them.

“Damn it Doug!” someone else shouted from the side.

All jaws dropped in disbelief when the cheer and tourney team had come up also head to toe in gold paint. Their costume consisted of form fitting body suits with about a foot of the bottom their outfit pitch black.

“What the hell are you guys supposed to be?” Doug demanded.

“Duh, we’re the Oscars,” Audrey growled, she did not put on a bald cap to be copied by the band or the Isle upstarts.

Carlos sighed, his attempt at diplomacy was for naught.

The three social groups had geared up for a fight when Ben had come around the corner.

“Wow, you all look awesome,” he said genially. He was wearing a simple blue suit with his crown, a red rose on his lapel and a white shirt. As the Crown Prince, he thought he ought not to take any one side despite being a Senior. He felt he represented the entire school so he wore all the class colours.

Every gilded student, with the exception of Mal, Carlos, and Jay, had turned to him and he swore they all growled. He wasn’t sure what was going on but perhaps he ought to stay out of it. He slowly backed away and went towards homeroom.

That day was later dubbed the Senior Gold Debacle and new Spirit Week rules included having to sign up costume ideas with the student council, it would be “first in time, first in line.” There were also mandatory assemblies about conflict resolution and teachers learned how to deescalate tense situations when student competition got out of hand.

There was also a full ban of any kind of body paint.

Three years later, the goblin janitorial staff was still scrubbing glittery paint from the classrooms and halls of Auradon Prep.

Jay and Carlos were hanging in their dorm, they had decided to take pizza from the mess hall and play video games in their room. The girls had called a “girls night” and forbade them from their dorm.
It wasn’t something the girls did often but Carlos figured they were owed a night off from them then and again. He was curious as to what brought it about however.

“How long did it take Mal to say ‘I love you’ when you first said it to her?” Jay asked randomly as they lounged on their beds before deciding which game to occupy their night with.

Carlos was surprised by the question but thought about it. He then blushed recalling the night they confessed their love for each other and figured that part of the story wasn’t what he wanted.

“Umm, I guess more or less right away.

Jay sighed, disappointed in the answer and suddenly finding the ceiling most interesting.

“I figured as much.”

“What’s going on?”

The veteran thief hesitated but figured he needed to tell someone and Mal wasn’t around.

“I told Evie I loved her last night.”

“Oh,” Carlos wasn’t sure how else to react, he always figured the two of them were just casual. Neither of them seemed to be acting differently that day. “Wow…what did she say?”

“She didn’t say anything, that’s kind of the problem I’m having.”

“…” he definitely wasn’t sure what to say then, but felt hurt on his friend’s behalf. He had no idea how heartbroken he would have been if Mal hadn’t returned his feelings. “I’m sorry, man.”

“Yeah, I wish I just didn’t say anything. I feel like I just completely screwed everything up.”

“Can’t fault you for being honest.”

“But now it’s going to be weird and awkward. She’s probably taking her time to figure out a way to let me down gently and break up with me.”

Carlos wish he could reassure his friend, but he didn’t know what was going through Evie’s head. Normally he knew her well enough he could have but it was new territory. He wondered why she didn’t say anything to him, maybe she wanted a female point of view; hence the “girls night.” Mal, he wasn’t surprised she didn’t tell him anything; she was a vault of secrets when she wanted to be. It also usually didn’t occur to her to share things like that, preferring to keep away from other people’s business and was never one to gossip.

He winced at the image of Mal trying to be tactful and comforting. Jay was her best friend, he just hoped she remembered that Evie was her friend too.

He didn’t know what to say to Jay, so he went with his instinct.

He climbed into bed with Jay and wrapped his arm around his shoulder. Jay adjusted so his head so he was propped against his bicep.

“Is this what it’s like to be the little spoon?”

Carlos grinned and laughed softly.

“It’s nice.”
They lay there for a moment, comfortable with each other and the long haired teen appreciated the closeness. He felt less like he was going through it alone. Jay worried if his relationship with Carlos would also change. He couldn’t imagine his life without any of the other three with him.

When he was on the Isle and had nothing, he at least had the three.

He knew Mal would stick with him, he had no doubt about that. Neither of them would put pressure on Carlos to pick a side, but if things went worst case scenario then he also put a strain on his best friend’s relationship. He didn’t want Evie to be shut out. She didn’t deserve that just because she didn’t love him back. Jay didn’t want there to be sides at all, he hoped that things could go back to the way things were before.

*I’ll have to make sure that no matter what, we have to remain friends…no matter how much it’ll hurt…gods why didn’t I just keep my mouth shut?*

Carlos hugged him closer when he scented the salt of Jay’s tears.

“This sucks,” Carlos said as he rubbed his friend’s arm up and down. “And it may suck for a long time, while we figure out how to make it work. But we will make it work. We’ve been through too much to let this break us apart.”

While Mal was his best friend, Jay was glad to have Carlos who was more attuned to others’ feelings. He figured Mal would have set something on fire by now.

“Come on, lets try to beat the next level of Hero Rising. Aaron Stone is calling my name.”

Neither really acknowledged Jay’s tears as he wiped them away, both distracting themselves with games and talking about the upcoming tourney game.

**Friday – Jersey Day**

Jay and Carlos got ready for the day, thankfully the theme for Friday was the simplest. They were supposed to wear the jersey of their favorite sports team. It was also the first time they were matching the rest of the tourney team, everyone deciding that they would wear the home game team jersey. Not only was it in solidarity, but it was tradition and part of team building.

So both Isle teens wore the blue home jersey, freshly pressed and in pristine condition. By Saturday evening they would be drenched in sweat with grass and dirt stains.

“I wonder how Evie got all the dirt and grime out,” Carlos absently wondered, since both the home and away jerseys have seen the tourney field. He recalled all the times he had to do Cruella’s laundry, he thought he knew every trick there was when it concerned stains.

Jay supposed magic but also remembered she was in charge of cleaning garments for the brothels. She probably learned all kinds of ways to remove a variety of stains.

Evie still hadn’t really talked to him since Wednesday, he was trying to be patient and give her space. But it was wrecking on his nerves and perhaps he’d ask her today to just put him out of his misery. It had to be better than living in the limbo of their relationship.

They normally met the girls at the mess hall but both boys were startled when they heard a knock. They did a quick scan of their dorm to make sure all contraband was hidden. Carlos got the door and was surprised to see Evie there.

There was a tense silence, no one sure why she was there alone to meet them at their dorm.
“Hey Carlos, Mal’s waiting downstairs. Do you mind giving Jay and me a minute?” Evie asked, somewhat nervous which was not normally like her. But given the situation, the de Vil scion understood it was a special circumstance.

“Sure, I’ll see you guys later,” as much as he wanted to be there for both his friends, it was a private moment he wanted to get away from as soon as he could.

Jay braced himself and sat on the edge of his bed. He had a feeling he would be skipping breakfast and possibly first period. He had never been heartbroken before so he wasn’t sure how long it would take to get himself together enough for the public.

*Mal can get my assignments and let me see her notes. I feel this will be a whole day off occasion.*

After Carlos left and she had closed the door for privacy, her heart broke at how despondent Jay looked and hated that she was the cause of it.

She hoped to never have to see that look on Jay’s face again. She came over to him and gently tilted his head up to look at her.

He was confused at the warm smile she wore and then more so when she kissed him. Automatically he had wrapped his arms around her and deepened the kiss.

It wasn’t exactly what he expected with a breakup, perhaps it was a last kiss goodbye and he was going to hold on for as long as he could.

She pulled from the kiss and leaned her forehead against his.

“I love you,” she breathed out, not letting him go.

He was speechless as that was the last thing he expected to hear.

“I’m sorry it took me so long to sift through the garbage expectations my mother and father left me with. I know you’re nothing like what they taught me to expect. I know you’re protective, strong, sweet, and completely amazing. It wasn’t fair to you, and I hope you can forgive me.”

Her voice was small but clear, he hated that Ravenna and the nameless and faceless Archduke would make a girl who by all rights should be confident in all things doubt herself. But he understood and was so relieved she had loved him back.

“I have the love of the smartest and most beautiful girl in all of Auradon, how could I not?”

His voice said that not only was she forgiven but that he understood and would never think of the last few days ever again. She didn’t know how he could be so understanding, particularly since she had left him not knowing for two days; it had to be hard to bear. She knew she probably wouldn’t have been so accommodating but it was just another thing that made Jay great.

She gave him the dazzling smile he had so loved and kissed him again. His hands had started to wander, used to these types of kisses leading to something else.

But she had broken away from him and in her no nonsense tone,

“No, we have breakfast then school. I didn’t spend hours perfectly pressing and cleaning these jerseys for us to wrinkle them and look slovenly.”

He didn’t argue with her, but laughed and promised that that night they would definitely wrinkle
“Nope, we’re having another girls’ night.”

Jay frowned, he felt like he hadn’t spent time with her since Tuesday.

“No pouting.”

“Why? You had a girls’ night, last night.”

He was going to accept her decree regardless, but felt he should at least whine a little in hopes of getting his way.

“We did and need another…grand plans Jay, grand plans.”

That sounded a little ominous to his ears but figured she had been spending much more time with Mal and was picking up on a few habits.

“Alright,” he gave in and pushed her gently away by her waist.

“Ouch,” she grimaced as he hit a tender spot.

“What’s wrong?” he couldn’t have shoved her hard enough for it to hurt.

“It’s nothing,” she quickly responded, perhaps a bit too quickly. “I just ran into a chair and I have a bruise.”

He accepted her reason but something nagged at him that it wasn’t the truth. But Evie wouldn’t keep something serious from him so he let it go.

As they got themselves together to leave, he noticed she was wearing his gold jersey, the number 8 clearly showing it was his. He was wearing simple jeans and his blue jersey. Evie had decorated hers up with an embellished rhinestone gold chain belt. The shirt was so large on her it was almost a dress, the bottom of the jersey billowing out like a skirt under the belt.

He wasn’t sure what it was, but some primal instinct inside him purred when she wore his clothes. None of the Isle teens were big on PDA, more so because of the strict Auradon Prep rules; but it was little things like clothes sharing that stated what they could not otherwise physically do: they were taken and everyone else ought to be aware.

It made him smile even more now that he and Evie were officially beyond casual and in love and exclusive.

He stole one last kiss before they had to go meet Carlos and Mal.

Carlos was relieved when he saw his best friend and his roommate with the biggest smiles he had ever seen them wear. It seemed their talked went the opposite way he had feared.

Mal seemed nonchalant, probably because she already knew what Evie was going to say and probably what their “girls’ night” was about.

They all had breakfast and went to their first period, a normal day for them but to Evie and Jay; it felt it was a completely new day, everything fresh and full of potential.
None of them aware of the gossip storm they created as they walked through the halls.

The Friday before a big game was understood as a goof off day, there was no use in practicing anymore as they had been nonstop the entire month before. The conductor also knew better than to try to get the band members to pay attention as they were all excited about the dance and could use a break. There was still one last dress rehearsal after school, so the Wind Ensemble first period class was a cacophony of sound. Some decided to practice regardless as not everyone in the formal band class was also in marching band; others were talking, everything a loud white noise.

“Why did no one tell me that the Isle kids were all dating each other?” Kirara rushed into the room and went directly to the core marching band.

“What?” Doug was slightly bewildered because it was the first time he was hearing it.

“Yeah, Mal and Evie are wearing Carlos and Jay’s jersey. They’re totally dating.”

“What? No way,” Dwayne piped in, not believing it. “It’s jersey day, it’s probably the only jerseys they have on hand.”

“They had the theme for Spirit Week since the beginning of October, they had plenty of time to find something. They’re dating. All the girlfriends and boyfriends of tourney players are wearing their jerseys,” Kirara insisted.

“I have never seen them act like boyfriend and girlfriend,” Megan added.

“That’s because PDA is against the rules.”

“Yeah, because that stops so many people at Auradon Prep…like Deven and Shane,” Doug said sarcastically. The band automatically turned their heads towards the mentioned brass players and there they were, making out while the conductor read the newspaper.

The percussionist was not about to let it lay, however, and insisted her gut feeling was correct.

It then devolved into the entire band giving their two farthings about the Isle teens’ love life. That then further devolved into a betting pool because no one was about to let their opinion go to waste.

Soon the whiteboards were filled with various pairings and who thought which couple was the right combination.
“I don’t know why you insist on calling them Malos when I’m the only one in that pool!” Doug was fed up about his choice of nickname being ignored.

“It makes no sense for one,” Bradley, a flute player who had deemed himself grandmaster of the “Isle Love Pool.” He would collect the money and refrain from placing a bet. It took ten minutes for everyone to solemnly swear that none of them knew for sure who was dating whom. “The dominant of the pair, their name goes first with all portmanteau couple names. Everyone knows that.”

“No, no one knows that because you just made it up. ‘CarMal’ sounds so much better. It rolls off the tongue and sounds like candy.”

“The candy is ‘care-ah-mel.’ ‘Car-mel’ is what the hicks in Corona say.”

“Screw you Bradley,” Jasmine from woodwind said, offended for her hometown.

“It doesn’t matter because you’re not going to win,” the grandmaster said dismissively to the trumpet player. “This is such a farfetched coupling that I don’t even think you’re taking this seriously.”

“What?! Mal was wearing the number 10 jersey. That’s Carlos’ jersey.”

“So that just means that they’re friends because Mal didn’t have another one. Clearly it’s Jayvie all the way and Mal and Carlos are just friends,” Kayla explained, putting all her money in that combination.
“No, that’s just your wishful thinking because you want to bone Carlos.”

“I do not confirm or deny my betting is influence by my own wishes.”

“I’m sure as hell hoping Jay is single,” Rosalina joked.

“I think what we’re really forgetting is that people of the opposite and same sex can just be friends,” Don pointed out.

“Carlos and Evie are always hugging and messing with each other’s hair. They have to be together. They look perfect,” Diedre sighed, thinking the two would be so romantic.

“No way, they’re like brother and sister. I’ve definitely maybe heard them say that. This isn’t Game of Thrones,” Shane groused, slightly grossed out.

“You haven’t heard anything because the Four barely hang with anyone else.”

“I’m with Bradley on this one. Carlos is a sweet, sweet cinnamon roll and Mal is a beautiful murder goddess. There’s just no way,” Jaqueline commented.

“OK, you guys really need to put an end to that rumor. Ben wouldn’t let any Isle kid who’s murdered anyone into Auradon. He had to have done some kind of background check. Mal hasn’t murdered anyone…and Malvie is too obvious. You guys are stacking too much into one pool, you’re not going to make any real money with so many people to split the pot with,” Doug said condescendingly.

“It’s not about the money, it’s about seeing the obvious and being right,” Deven defended his choice. “And if you want to talk Isle Kids who play with each other’s hair, that’s Mal to Evie all day and like every day.”

“How exactly are we going to find any of this out? Is someone going to ask them?”

The band room suddenly got deathly quiet, no one volunteering to be part of the inquiry. They were all on fairly good terms with the Isle Kids, but to go as far as to pry into their personal lives? None of them wanted to test Mal’s patience.

“I guess someone could ask them on a date?” Kirara suggested, thinking whomever they asked would at least be polite enough to let them down gently.

No one volunteered, most too shy to deal with that kind of rejection even if it were to win a bet. They also ran the risk of one of them saying “yes.” While some would love to date them, they didn’t want their relationship to start off with a lie.

Before anyone could further debate, the bell rang to end first period. They left the white board up with directions to not disturb it.

“Sure we should leave this up?” Doug doubted. While he knew deep in his heart Mal had never murdered anyone, that didn’t mean she wouldn’t start if she saw the board.

“Why? None of the Isle kids are in band, they won’t see it,” Addy wasn’t worried.

“Yeah but what if one of the newbs in Concert Band take a pic and show it around?”

“Then it’s in Bradley’s handwriting and we say it was his idea.”

“Mal would murder him…metaphorically,” he added thinking of the rumors he wanted to quash.
“Even First Years aren’t that stupid.”

But apparently said First Years had no trouble barging into a betting pool and expanding the various combinations. It had gotten so extensive they had to use another whiteboard.
“Hmmm, I didn’t even think of three or moresomes,” Addy contemplated, wondering if she could change her bet when they all gathered in the band room after school.

“What assholes did this to our board?” Doug was not impressed by the commentary. “I don’t recognize half these names.”

“Apparently the dance and drama kids want in on the action.”

“Psspts, whatever. More money for me when I win by myself.”

“In your dreams Doug, in your dreams.”

“I’m surprised at all the Ben and Mal entries. Although I can see it for the same reasons I see Carlos and Mal. Sweet cinnamon roll and beautiful metaphorical murder goddess. They just go together so well.”

“Well Audrey’s a right cunt, so I’m not surprised there are so many people cheering for their breakup. Little surprised it’s Mal and Ben. I would have thought him and Evie would be better suited. She is technically of royal blood.”

“Sometimes I have this fantasy where Ben takes the mic after a game and just breaks up with her right in front of everyone. It’d be so much more painful and therefore awesome if he left her for Mal.”
Both vindictively laughed at the image, each starting to come up with worse and crueler ways Audrey would get her comeuppance.

“Oh sweet Mickey on high, King Adam would have a stroke. We’d probably see a civil war with Auroria if their princess got dumped for Maleficent’s daughter.”

Still the two got a good chuckle out of the hypothetical.

“My board! My beautiful board!” Bradley cried when he saw what the heathens did to his perfectly managed board.

All throughout the day and during dinner, Mal couldn’t shake off the feeling she was being watched. Normally it was the cheer team, they usually never were all that subtle with their sneers and stares.

This time, however, it seemed the band, drama club, and dance teams were throwing looks towards them but immediately turned their heads when Mal looked back. They were trying to be inconspicuous but failing.

“What is everyone staring at?” Mal growled, she knew it wasn’t just in her head.

“No idea, it’s pretty uncomfortable. I know the dance team suddenly wants to know all about me,” Carlos admitted, people were acting strange.

The dance team wasn’t ever cold or aloof, but they were definitely more invasive than normal during class.

“What did you tell them?”

“Pretty much nothing. I mean we’re all pretty private and I just don’t know what their deal is.”

Mal was glad for that, she would get to the bottom of this weird new obsession with them.

Jay and Evie were rather put out, with the new intense focus on them they felt they couldn’t even look at each other; their new confessed love felt stifled under the inquiry.

Across the room, the band all speculated what the Isle teens’ every move meant.

“They look like they’re just eating. No one is indicating romantic interest to anyone.”

“No, I know I’ve seen them all touchy before. I just can’t remember who with who.”

“Maybe if you guys stop staring at them like a bunch of weird stalkers, they’d be more relaxed. Look at how tense they are.”

The band then started to bicker about whose fault it was that the Isle Four were onto their shenanigans.
On the opposite side of the room,

“See, look at how edgy they are. They’re practically hunching over. I know they’re plotting something. They better not ruin Homecoming,” Audrey huffed out, she would be particularly incensed if anything ruined her last Homecoming, especially one where she’d be crown Homecoming Queen. “That tramp has been keeping Ben so busy with ‘Isle to Auradon’ program. What kind of stupid name is that? I swear, Mal better…”

Jane tuned Audrey out, ever since the princess got nominated for Homecoming Queen, and looked to have the win, she had been even more insufferable than usual. When she wasn’t bragging about winning the crown and what she was going to wear, she was complaining about Mal.

It used to be that Audrey would complain and accuse both Evie and Mal of trying to steal Ben, but it seemed she settled on the latter as the sole one who was trying to seduce the future king. Now the half star fae felt all she ever heard about anymore was Mal. Most of the cheer team tried to commiserate with Audrey, agreeing that Mal was up to no good and probably a whore. Others, Jane felt, were just as tired and struggled to not roll their eyes; wanting to talk about anything other than whatever the Isle fae was or wasn’t doing.

It also didn’t help that every plot Audrey was paranoid about didn’t seem to be coming to fruition.

*I mean it’s been like two months, if the Isle Kids were going to try something, wouldn’t they have done it by now?*

It wasn’t as if Maleficent was the patient or indecisive type, at least not according to the stories; especially not the way the Dornröschens’s told it. If Mal’s mother was the type to be so enraged at not getting an invite to a christening, then logically Mal wouldn’t be the type to take the constant rudeness and not being invited to weekend parties the popular kids at school threw. There were plenty of students, particularly seniors, that had estates and mansions nearby and cars to drive off campus.

*Not that I get to go to any of them.*

Jane thought bitterly at how her mother never let her go off campus, even on weekends. Sure, plenty of students boasted that the parties had alcohol, sometimes even drugs, but that didn’t mean Jane would partake. She just wanted to go to say she went and be part of the social scene.

She was so tired of being babied and cloistered away. She was tired of being the same boring old Jane she had been since First Year.

Even her name was unexciting.

“Plain Jane,” what was mom thinking? It’s like she had me destined to be as boring as possible.

But as long as everyone was staring at the Isle Four, she hoped none of them were focusing on Carlos, she thought she may as well get her fill of her favorite platinum and raven haired beauty.

Although she didn’t have a date to the dance, she figured the Isle Four were going stag as a group. That meant they might all be open to dancing with other people, perhaps it’d be her chance to talk to him. At the very least dance close enough for him to notice her.

*I wish my dress wasn’t so frumpy.*

Of course her mother went with her dress shopping. Even though they could afford a tailor, when her mother was done giving instructions it ended up a shoulder covered, boxy monstrosity that was
covered in ruffles and Cinderella blue. Again, she felt she was in middle school with that dress as it hid any hint that she was a young woman with curves. The one advantage she thought she had was that she was curvier than some of her peers. She desperately wanted to show them off but couldn’t gather the courage to defy her mother.

Sighing, she stole longing stares at Carlos and just hoped he could see past the dowdy dress and get to know her.

**Saturday- Homecoming Game & Dance**

The tourney stadium was packed. The entire school was there including distinguished Alumni, everyone sporting the school colors. On the opposite end, there were teems of white and green, everyone gearing up for the big game

“Wow guys, I love your signs,” Addy admired before the game officially began and she had to perform.

“Thanks! Mal made them,” Evie boasted.

“I particularly like the detailed beheading of the Sherwood Forest Falcon. Is that Jane as the knight?”

“Yes, I was told she was the mascot. I thought it was only right she would be the one to kill our opponents.”

“You know what? I can totally see Jane holding the decapitated head of our rivals in victory.”

Addy never in her wildest dreams would ever think shy, demure Jane would ever wield a sword or stand so confidently with the bloodied head of the Sherwood Forest mascot but Mal painted a convincing picture.

“Ladies! Are we ready for a great game?” Professor FéeMarraine couldn’t contain her excitement, she loved Homecoming.

“Knights, knights, knights!” a group of students shouted as they passed by.

“I’m so glad you guys decided to join in. I know Homecoming is…” the Magic History teacher paused when she realized what exactly was on their signs. “…is that my Jane?”

“Yes, we will defeat the Falcons most thoroughly,” Mal enthused, looking towards Evie to make sure she was expressing the correct amount of fervor although the game as a whole meant nothing to her. If Carlos and Jay weren’t on the team, she definitely would not have come.

They both smiled at the teacher, totally oblivious that their signs were causing distress.

Professor FéeMarraine struggled, she wanted to confiscate the posters as they were much too graphic, and they depicted her daughter so violently but she also didn’t want to discourage the Isle girls. The artwork was so detailed and had to have taken Mal hours to produce. No one seemed bothered by the imagery, in fact most students cheered and whooped as they passed them, so perhaps she’d let this one slide.

“…it’s…lovely. Great work, girls.”

“Thanks Professor FéeMarraine,” they both said simultaneously.

The game started, thankfully, so Nadine wouldn’t have to directly look at the sign. She just hoped no
The game was in its fourth quarter; although technically the game was supposed to only be an hour, broken up in 15-minute quarters, with all the time outs and pauses it seemed like the game went on forever.

The intensity and anticipation also made time slow, both sides of the stadium getting wilder and louder as time went on. One half of the seats were a sea of blue, gold, and white; the other, an undulating mass of white, green, and canary yellow.

Mal and Evie tried to keep up with the various group cheers and motions that everyone seemed to know by heart. The cheer team and mascots were constantly moving on the field, peppy cheers of “Oh-aye, oh-aye” and short verses repeated over and over again. Clinking sounds of Jane in her Fighting Knight costume could be heard over the cheers as she danced and tried to keep up with the cheerleaders.

Even the Sherwood Forest students had their own “Soaring Falcon” chant and movements, all perfectly coordinated with their arms out as if they were flying through the air.

Although she thought the game was stupid, Mal did find herself getting caught up in the furor; she had shouted cheers and encouragement as loud as the rest of them, hoping for a win.

On the benches, Head Coach Jenkins was shouting plays and pulling from and calling players onto the field. Despite the addition of Jay and Carlos, they couldn’t count just on a few players out of 11 to win the game. The assistant coach helped keep the players organized and where they were supposed to be.

[This is a nail biter folks. There is 47 seconds left in the clock. We’re all tied up. The Sherwood Falcons, 2. The Fighting Knights, 2. What a game between Auradon’s fiercest rivals!]

The Isle boys tried to ignore the announcer; they didn’t need reminding how close the game was and the bitter rivalry they had walked into when they joined the team.

When the game was on the line, even petty grievances against their fellow students melted away.

“Go get’em Chad,” Jay mindlessly encouraged the prince who had antagonized them since they joined the team.

“Thanks, Jay,” the prince of Cinderellaberg and Charmington replied after he downed some water.

[The teams get into their huddles and take up positions along the kill zone. The cannoneers have been laying down a withering hail of cannon fire.]

Jay and Carlos were benched, giving them a rest from the first half, hoping to get the freshmen and other team members a chance to play as well. Jay had taken out a few of the opposing team due to injuries, he had racked up the most “unnecessary roughness” penalties in Auradon Prep history but he wasn’t red carded and out. Coach Jenkins had already fought with the referees about unfair calls and that they were dishonestly targeting the Isle teen. All the adults were tense but unwilling to budge or give up.

The whistle blew and they had maybe time for two more plays in order to win.
The tipoff is ready. Long pass goes to #7. #7 dishes off to #23. Nice block from #20. The ball is lost, poor handling by new freshmen #13 but it's saved by #7. They quickly make their way across the field, barely missing the cannoneers. They make it past the kill zone, they're in the clear! #7 is within the strike zone AND WHAT A SAVE BY #36, THE FALCONS’ GOALKEEPER.

The guest team’s stand erupts in cheers, happy the game isn’t over and they still have a shot. The Fighting Knights all groaned in unison, so close to a winning goal.

Twenty-three seconds left. You could cut the tension with a sword. Ball is still in Knight’s possession.

They were running out of options and Jay was determined not to lose his first game, much less an important one such as Homecoming.

He didn’t understand Homecoming or why it was important, but damn it he knew it was.

“Coach, put Carlos and me in,” Jay demanded, he had an idea.

“I don’t know Jay,” he didn’t want to lose his best players and they were toeing the line already with how many penalties Jay had under his belt. “One more penalty and they can suspend you from future games.”

“That’s if I were still a defender. If I were a charger, then it’s unlikely I’d have to tackle anyone.”

Carlos and Coach Jenkins whirled their head to the long haired teen, unsure what he was planning. The latter also looked at the smaller athlete. Jay was built to be a defender, Carlos not so much.

“Trust me Coach, Carlos is tougher than you think.”

Still, Coach Jenkins wasn’t sure. But he didn’t have much to lose with so little time left in the game.

And we have substitutiosn from the Fighting Knights. Coach Jenkins must be getting desperate as #8 has had multiple penalties against him and one more could mean a suspension. Also joining the field is #10; perhaps they’re hoping his quick feet will save the day.

Before the whistle blew, Jay quickly told the huddle that he and Carlos were switching positions. Only Ben seemed confident in the new plan and the others fell into line despite their doubts.

The whistle blew and they had one last shot to win the game.

Carlos and Jay worked together, years of trust and friendship allowed them to read each other cues as if reading each other’s minds. They operated as one to fake out the other team. They had switched positions and the Sherwood chargers were not ready for the onslaught of Carlos’ raw power, surprised that such a comparatively wiry player could plow them over with the same ferocity. Jay weaved in and out, taking advantage of their shock.

The cheerleaders weren’t as enthusiastic as they normally were, they were still hesitant to accept the Isle teens and the several penalties Jay accrued had just confirmed in their minds that he was too violent to fit in.

Jane, on the other hand, shouted “Go Carlos” in hopes that he would hear and know she was on his side. Unfortunately her voice was lost in the cacophony of the stadium.

Even the announcer wasn’t sure how to articulate the game.
The entire stadium exploded in cheers when the ball hit the net. Every Auradon Prep tourney member rushed to them in victory and all but tackled them in glee. Even Chad was patting them on the back and yelling their victory.

The Falcons limped off the field, accepting their defeat and wanting to go home.

Neither Evie nor Mal knew what came over them. They didn’t particularly care for the game, but seeing how hard their boyfriends worked for the win, their blood heated with the thrill of competition and how aggressively the boys took on their opponents, both girls rushed down to the field.

If neither girl had more control over their powers, they may have set off sparks at how joyful and proud of their boys they were.

The team as a whole was still weary of the Isle girls so they parted away from Carlos and Jay, giving the girls plenty of space and thinking they wanted to congratulate their friends.

The entire stadium got dead quiet when the girls had thrown themselves at the boys, wrapped their arms around them and kissed them in front of everyone.

Jaws literally dropped as no one had expected that to happen.

Students were shocked as they either had no idea the Isle Four were dating or had completely lost the betting pool. The parents and adult alumni were somewhat scandalized that students would put on such a display. Several professors were trying to sift through the crowd to admonish the teens but were unwilling to stoop so low as to yell.

The boys twirled the girls in their arms and returned the kiss, clearly happier to have them than the win.

Only one lone voice pierced the silence,

“Yes! I told you all, everyone can suck it!”

None of the Isle teens had heard that, too lost in their bliss. But once the kiss stopped and they realized not only where they in public but everyone was shocked silent, they thought maybe they had made a mistake.

*It was just a kiss, why is everyone acting like we took off our clothes?*

Mal was ready to fight anyone who said anything negative.

No one noticed the Auradon Prep Fighting Knight run off the field and disappear.

Ben was included in those who were shocked, he had no idea Mal or any of the others had been dating.

He told himself the sinking feeling in his stomach and how his heart skipped a beat was not because he was hurt Mal was taken, but that she or the others didn’t trust in him enough to tell him.
He was upset, he firmly convinced himself so no other thought could flourish, because clearly they weren’t as good of friends as he thought they were.

He would never say his eyes went downcast and he looked despondent. He would never say he had a horrible aching in his chest for something he didn’t know he wanted was taken away or never there to begin with. He would never say he yearned for the way Mal looked at Carlos to be directed at him.

He would never say such things, but Audrey couldn’t help but see all of that and more written on his face.

The castle dorms included a massive reception hall, some might even call it a formal grand ballroom, that was covered in blue, gold, and white bunting for Homecoming. Several students milled about, mostly Homecoming committee and other student council volunteers doing last minute preparations. The dance started at 7:00pm but most wouldn’t start pouring in until about 7:30pm or even as late as 8:00pm; most wanted to be “fashionably late.”

Doug was a volunteer; he had helped put ribbons, balloons, and every other school dance decoration to anything that didn’t move away fast enough. He wasn’t exactly thrilled to do the job, but it looked good on his college applications so he sucked it up and did the best job he could.

He was already dressed in a deep jade green suit with a light amethyst shirt and plaid bow tie. It was a bit garish for most but that’s because they didn’t understand Dwarf fashion, particularly from Dwarves from a long line of gem miners, who tended to favor the jewel tones.

He danced to the background music the DJ had started, she wouldn’t put the speakers on full blast until the dance officially started, but it was something for them to work to.

It wasn’t the catchy tunes that put the extra pep in his step and the smile that wouldn’t come off his face.

Addy was about to wipe it off for him if he didn’t stop looking so smug.

His happiness had everything to do with the mountain of cash he won from the dating pool.

*Everyone thought I was crazy, crazy like a fox!*  

He then started to think of all the stuff he’d treat himself to with all his winnings.

*Maybe I should treat the Four to a nice double date a Lumiere’s. We’re all winners today.*

His grin went even wider when he saw the scathing look his fellow volunteers brandished towards him.

“I still say you cheated and knew all along,” Don said bitter to the core.

“Wrong, mon frère. I am simply on a different wavelength than you all. I can read love auras and you all should have listened to me when I said each my couples were perfect for each other.”

“You are such a twat,” Addy scoffed. “You said no such thing. All you went off of was the jerseys and you happen to be right.”
“You wound me Addy, you really do. Like all Dwarves, we can sense where jewels are and love auras. They’re natural talents we happen to possess.”

“None of that is true.”

“My family’s gem mines and the big ol’ bag of cash I won beg to differ.”

I’m going to kill him.

But before Addy could make good on her silent threat, the Isle Four in question came rolling in. No one had told them about being fashionably late, but that didn’t stop them from being the best dressed students he had ever seen and making a splash.

He had heard that Evie had talent with a sewing machine and needle, some of the band members in fashion classes with her, but he was surprised by the actual ability. Evie was not afraid to use color, something his Dwarvish heart could appreciate, and she paired each friend with hues that complemented their skin tones.

The detailing on the dresses must have taken hours; he wondered how she was able to complete four outfits, on top of every costume for Spirit Week, in time for the dance.

Evie wore royal blue, something that complimented her fair skin and dark eyes. Her dress was made of satin with a princess scoop neckline and bare shoulders. What really caught his attention was the ruby red star burst beading that bloomed from her waist. He thought she looked lovely with faux ruby accessories, a small tiara sitting perfectly on her head with intricate braids that must have taken hours to accomplish.

Jay’s a lucky guy.

Doug was surprised that her boyfriend wasn’t in a matching suit, but it seemed she wanted something that complimented each’s colouring and taste best.

Jay wore a form fitting oxblood asymmetrical button closure jacket, which showed off his broad shoulders; from the looks of the other volunteers, Doug could see they all appreciated the outfit greatly and not because of the skill that went into it. The unique jacket had burnished gold buttons and threading, he wore simple black pants and shoes to finish up the outfit.

Carlos was clearly the peacock of the two Isle boys, his geometric paisley black and white jacket was loud but he wore it with confidence and it was just the right amount of “too much.” The black pants and shirt were complimented with a crimson neck tie, giving the outfit a lone splash of color.

The students were most surprised by Mal’s outfit. It was the first time any of them had seen her in a dress, other than the skirt of the school uniform. It was a modest boysenberry Cocktail length number with holographic beading all over the bust. The dress had a sweetheart neckline, her décolleté and down her arms with three quarter sleeves was covered in a semi-sheer plumb ninon.

Her makeup was simple, just some blush, mascara, and a nude lip gloss; she had looked so pretty and feminine, Doug wasn’t even sure if it was the same girl; surely Mal had a happy and smiley twin no one knew about and had taken her place.

Something echoed and buzzed in the back of his mind, something to do with why Mal always wore long sleeves. He didn’t believe she was some serial killer who scarred herself as trophies of her kills. Although most of his fellow idiot students would believe such nonsense and gossip about it until they were hoarse, he wondered why she chose what most called the “modest” uniform. Only those who got special religious waivers got to wear them, Mal didn’t strike him as fitting into that category.
Although the rumors were ridiculous and salacious, he did always believe there was a tiny bit of truth in them somewhere. So while he didn’t believe she was a killer, he did wonder about the rumors of scars. There had been all sorts of theories when she first attended Auradon Prep, from cage fighting to farming accident; the serial killer angle turned out to be the most popular. The truth was that no one knew why she had scars, only that the constant was that she had them.

He might have dismissed those rumors as well, sometimes people were just modest. But the fact the story of what they looked like stayed persistent. And some things just started to click in his head, things he had noticed but not had given any thought to.

She always glowered, it seemed as if she was just waiting for someone to do something to her or attack. She always kept to her personal space, the only ones allowed in were the other Isle teens. Even then, Doug had observed that they were not as touchy on her shoulders or back. She seemed as hard as steel and cold as ice.

Most assumed she was just a villainess and that’s how they were.

Doug wondered differently.

Perhaps she had earned that scowl, she certainly earned distrusting most Auradon adults. He couldn’t give a real opinion of the treatment of villains. He wasn’t alive during the Fae Wars, but he had seen the scars of his father and uncles; he had heard all seven war stories.

The story of how Maleficent had decimated the Dwarves’ homeland in Charmington once the war spilled outside of Auroria’s borders was infamous and recited every Unification Day. Perhaps Maleficent and the other villains deserved the Isle, perhaps they deserved worse, he couldn’t say.

But he could say that none of the villains’ children deserved the Isle. They didn’t even deserve the parents they had, they simply were born under an unlucky star and paid for the sins of their parents because of a simple twist of fate, and they had lost the genetic lottery.

If Maleficent was as bad as they always said she was, he could hazard a guess as to where exactly Mal got her scars.

It seemed he was the only one who could put those two things together.

He couldn’t even begin to fathom the why of the scars.

He banished the questions from his mind; the Homecoming Dance was not the time to theorize what horrible things happened to the Isle Four while they grew up.

They all looked like they were trying their best to fit in at Auradon Prep, even with so many students resisting their efforts.

He almost laughed at their confused faces, he was certain they were wondering where everyone was when they were punctual.

Most students would wait until the dance was well under way, not only to be “fashionably late” but to make sure they could make an entrance with as many people able to see as possible. It was Audrey’s strategy for every dance and normally it always worked.

But Doug suspected that the Four, despite being “early” were going to turn heads regardless.

Recalling it was due to them that he was now a rather wealthy Senior, he almost skipped in happiness to greet them and compliment them on their attire.
Audrey would usually have the most expensive, exclusive designed dress that took months to create; being born a Dornröschen meant that she had every resource at her disposal to always be the best dressed student at Auradon Prep; money was never an issue.

She was disappointed to see that her entrance was not met with the usual student fanfare, everyone was too busy actually dancing and crowding around the tourney heroes and gushing over Evie’s designs.

A princess never pouted or showed what she was truly feeling, it took every lesson growing up to not stomp her foot in frustration.

*It's my senior year, it's supposed to be my year.*

Everything she had worked the last three years seemed to be slipping from her hands and was for naught. No one seemed to be able to talk about anything besides the Isle Four dating and their custom made gowns. Most royals and nobles had their outfits bespoke and made just for them for specific occasions, only the scholarship kids ever wore anything off the rack.

Audrey had even gone as far as making her seamstress sign a disclosure that she wouldn’t not only keep the dress design a secret, but to never make another one and patent its design so literally no one could ever have it again. She wanted something special and one of a kind, that’s exactly what she would have.

Evie’s dresses were made by her. People couldn’t believe the talent, regardless if they were Auradonian or from the Isle, and everyone loved the unique designs. They also gushed that she was willing to recreate, the Isle designer more than happy to have anyone and everyone wearing her creations.

There were talks of Evie doing their dresses for the next formal event.

All Audrey could get from most were, “Oh you look so good…it’s Auroria Pink.”

Yes, she had a signature colour, but that didn’t make her gown any less magnificent.

*These are genuine Argyle pink diamonds! Cut and hand sewn into this dress especially for me.*

The princess of Auroria stewed in frustration with her group of friends, Crown Prince Ben and other tourney players among them, as they danced and socialized. A part of her resented Ben as he never had to worry about what he was going to wear, although she would never admit to that. He had a Royal Ceremonial Uniform he tended to favor, the uniform for the Auradon Guard, where he held the honorary title of Colonel. He could re-wear the blue and gold, the sigil of laurels on his back, the gold sash of the Royal Order of the Garter, the badge of the Auradonian Lion, and a few miscellaneous military medals that even Audrey was having a hard time recalling what exactly each and every regalia denoted, as much as he wanted; it was basically his signature look. No one cared and no one could gainsay his choices.

She, on the other hand, would be scrutinized from head to toe, from her neckline to skirt length. She had to be modest without being boring, fresh and new without being garish or too avant garde. There was a miniscule window of what was acceptable and fashionable, it took months of planning to land within that small space. She couldn’t even think of wearing the same thing twice. She felt as if she were failing some unknown judge for not being the center of attention at her own Senior
Homecoming.

She tried to pretend everything was alright, a smile never left her face. But it was the first time she felt she was an afterthought. She couldn’t help but notice Ben’s periodic glances to the Four and she knew exactly who he was zeroing in on.

She tried to distract herself by reiterating the rumor about Mal’s scars, only to the cheer squad and when Ben clearly wasn’t paying attention, the fae’s dress cut in such a way that again, her shoulders and down to her elbows were covered. But that fell on deaf ears and most just commented on the intricate beading on the bust, and wondered if that was created by Evie as well.

Perhaps if she never dated Ben, she could see Mal was beautiful in the deep purple. She ignored the voice in her head that told her purple was for royals and Mal looked as if she was born into it.

All the Isle teens looked great, far better than she ever thought they’d ever be able to dress themselves. She probably could have also appreciated the time and detail that went into their outfits. But her jealousy turned into cold fear of actually losing Ben, not just him straying.

Men had wandering eyes, and as a princess there were certain things she couldn’t do with him that she knew men wanted to do before they were married. She had even heard that men sometimes wanted things she shouldn’t do as a lady even after they were married. She had seen and heard too many stories about the other nobles and royals, particularly Chad Charming, to think they were all chivalrous and virtuous as the stories told. She had always thought she just needed to keep certain “types” of girls away from Ben and he wouldn’t fall into temptation. He had always been the perfect gentlemen around her but he was still a man, something her grandmother stressed she should never forget.

But she was starting to see that Mal and Evie weren’t these sirens out to seduce princes. Even she could begrudgingly admit that both were clearly enchanted and in love with their boyfriends. Now that everyone knew, most couldn’t believe they hadn’t seen it sooner; it just seemed so obvious.

Audrey wasn’t the only one shocked to see the fae smile so much. The win at the tourney game was probably the first time most had ever seen her smile, and it was all direct at Carlos as he showed off some dance moves he had learned in class or his natural grace and rhythm; there had been an ongoing dance competition among all the school’s dancers, and even among some who would never be called graceful but they were having so much fun.

The “Villain Kids” were slowing just becoming “kids” among the students of Auradon Prep. It cut a fear into her far more than the thought of them working for their parents and wanting revenge. If Ben’s program actually worked, if the children of villains could assimilate into Auradon then everything she was taught about villains, and assumed about their children, were wrong.

And if she really thought about it, neither girl had ever acted flirtatious with anyone. Her attempt at throwing Chad in the mix to turn them against each other had failed miserably, and now she knew why.

Ben always insisted nothing inappropriate happened during his meetings with Mal. She even saw the progress they had done, proof that their long hours together were spent actually working and tackling the task of expanding his program.

He would, annoyingly, gush about how pragmatic the fae was or her natural leadership skills. He would go on about her decisiveness and how well she could articulate her point and be persuasive without being aggressive. He never said one thing about her looks, but Audrey was starting to see that perhaps Ben could be attracted to more than just beauty.
So if Mal wasn’t purposefully trying to seduce Ben, then those longing looks and too long stares he sent her way meant that his feelings ran deeper than mere physical attraction and he wasn’t just doing what other men did.

Audrey had so much more to fear than having to play step-mother to bastards or a wandering eye. She no longer feared that Ben would stray to satisfy an urge, and whatever the consequences that could come from that. She feared he was developing real feelings for someone that wasn’t her.

Before she could worry any more than she already did, or think of ways to distract Ben, Headmistress FéeMarraine announced,

“And now for your Homecoming King and Queen!” the music had stopped and the spotlights on the stage. Two rhinestone encrusted crowns sat upon ruby red velvet cushions, matching fur lined sashes with “Homecoming King” & “Homecoming Queen” were held by Homecoming Committee volunteers, everything glittering under the bright lights.

So entranced in her thoughts, she didn’t even notice they announced the winners of the rest of Homecoming Court.

Audrey barely heard the Headmistress say her and Ben’s names and the thunderous applause that followed. She felt like she was walking through a dream, just going through the motions but always making sure she was smiling.

While her mind was in chaos, she was thankful her body knew how to act.

She accepted the crown, the first of several she had expected to accept in her life but now not as sure, and a large bouquet of red roses. She allowed them to put the sash over her dress and smiled at Ben. He even looked like he was happy to be there, with her and that everything was fine.

They were the picture perfect couple who just won their Senior Homecoming, the stuff fairy tales and movies were made about.

Months from now when people looked back on photos on Facebook and in the yearbook, they’d only ever guess they were dreamily content and so in love.

Under the lights and glitter, with his smile wide and beaming at her, she almost thought maybe she was just being paranoid. She had just won Homecoming Queen, she was the captain of the cheerleading squad, her tourney team just won a big match against their biggest rivals.

The world was good and perfect.

She felt relaxed and safe in his arms as they had their first dance as Homecoming King and Queen. She didn’t know what song it was, all she could do was revel in the feeling of being his Queen. That had ended too soon and so did the dream feeling of perfection.

“Here’s for all you lovely couples out there, a classic,” the DJ boasted and the dancefloor cleared of everyone who didn’t have a date.

Mal thought it was a little insensitive to single out the non-couples like that, but most didn’t seem to mind or at the very least accepted it. Carlos led her to the perfect form and first position. She had known most of the formal dances, Evie insisted they all learn them; something she picked up from her mother and from constantly watching RBN.

Although the DJ said it was a classic, it was the first time they had ever heard of it. After hearing the
tempo, they decided on a waltz. Most others had kept up with the tempo, but looking at how happy, healthy, and flourishing Carlos was; everything just fell away. They naturally came closer, slowing their pace until they were just swaying gently in each other’s arms. They were no longer in the grand ballroom, they were in their own private world where she only saw kind eyes that loved her so.

Evie and Jay couldn’t stop smiling at each other, sharing a secret that only each other knew. But everyone could see the secret as it radiated off of them, the secret of being so deeply and truly in love.

**Wise men say only fools rush in**
But I can't help falling in love with you  
Shall I stay?  
Would it be a sin  
If I can't help falling in love with you?

**Like a river flows surely to the sea**
Darling so it goes  
Some things are meant to be  
Take my hand, take my whole life too  
For I can't help falling in love with you

They understood why it was a classic song, so simple but profound and something they were living right in that moment.

So wrapped in love, neither couple noticed as they floated off the ground.

The students around them gasped, unsure of what was happening and moved away; they were afraid that whatever was happening could potentially effect them. The Isle Four were still dancing to the music and none of them seemed aware of the world, much less the commotion they were causing. A soft trailing golden light followed their dance steps, and rained down above the students’ heads.

Headmistress FéeMarraine hurried to the dancefloor, trying to assess what was going on. When she saw nothing dangerous was happening, she was in awe at their raw power and the romantic in her was touched that it would present itself in such a way.

She hadn’t seen such love since Cinderella in her gorgeous ball gown, twirling with Prince Christopher Charming. She sighed in nostalgia, the beauty of true love.

“Professor FéeMarraine, are they OK?” Ben asked, worried that they could hurt themselves.

Audrey stood back, her stomach sick in wondering how the Four could be so in love while her own romantic life was so uncertain. She was a princess, Happily Ever After was supposed to be guaranteed for her.

She told herself over and over that he was concerned for them all, not just Mal.

It was a hard sell as Ben couldn’t keep his eyes off of the fae. But she repeated it nonetheless otherwise she was not going to get through the dance without falling into tears.

“Yes, yes…they’re fine. They clearly have some latent magic. It can present itself in times of heightened or particularly strong emotions.”

It took everything for The Fairy Godmother to not giggle,

*Oh young love, it’s a powerful magic all its own.*
So charmed and entranced at the display, she didn’t notice the subtle flinch the Crown Prince at hearing how deep the affections ran. Ben probably wasn’t even aware he was doing it himself.

“How do we get them down? Get their attention?”

“No, we don’t want them to lose their trance. They’d fall right down and at their height, they’d probably would hurt themselves. I’ll get them down.”

She took a solid stance and went over the spell in her head, remembering the hand gestures needed.

Doug stepped closer, curious to see magic as it was so rare; Unification Day the one Auradonian holiday he ever looked forward to.

With flicks of her wrist and almost singing,

**Softly down like a featherborne**

**Safely down to the floor untorn**

White sparks flittered around the Four, still unaware of what was happening and they all started to gently float down. When they reached the floor, they continued to dance. It still took several moments and almost bumping into other couples before they finally realized the song was over.

Mal’s smile disappeared, Audrey supposed it was only reserved for Carlos, when she realized people were staring again.

*Why are these people so weird?*

The students and faculty realized they were gawking and quickly looked away. The dance went on later into the night.

The group had broken apart for a short while, other students wanting to socialize with them, all gushing about how romantic it was that they could take flight. The Four slightly panic stricken when they heard they had done accidental magic. But no one had come to take them away or even admonish them.

Even Fairy Godmother had winked at them and bade them to continue to have fun, “Has anyone seen my Jane?” the magical history professor asked as she left the Four, she couldn’t remember if she had seen her all night.

The Isle Four did as instructed and they could say it was a perfect first school dance.

After a few hours, the ballroom was basically empty, few were still hanging around and some had even started to clean up. There were several parties off campus happening, Jay and Carlos had been invited. The students still seemed weary of Mal, but since she was the girlfriend of a tourney player they knew they came as a packaged deal.

Both Jay and Carlos were interested but the former finally noticed that his girlfriend wasn’t there.

“Where’d Evie go?”

“She has a surprise for you,” Mal whispered, and from her smirk he knew it was a surprise he was
going to like. “She’s waiting in our room.”

“Sorry, guys. I’m going to sit this one out,” he promptly told his teammates and walked off, not bothering to hear pleas for him to change his mind.

“I have a surprise for you too,” she quietly promised Carlos, who had shrugged to his teammates as if he were helpless against his girlfriend’s wishes but he wasn’t sorry for that for one minute.

The team was disappointed and had mentioned something about being “whipped” under their breath, but they had a party to get to and left soon after.

Jay walked briskly through the dorms, wanting to run but not wanting to seem suspicious. He eventually compromises and starts to speed walk, it seemed as if everyone had left campus; even the adults as he didn’t see any of the usual floor monitors. He even felt confident enough to head straight to the girls’ floor rather than go to his dorm and climb down the window.

It was odd to hear the dorms so deathly quiet, even as late as it was there was at least some sort of white background noise made from the inhabitants. It hadn’t been that quiet since when they first got there.

Jay gently rapped his knuckles on the door, still taking a precautious look around to make sure no one was around,

“Evie?” he whispered. “It’s me.”

He slowly opened the door when he heard a low, feminine “Come in” and his eyes widened to what he found in the girls’ dorm.

***

There must have been dozens of white pillar candles scattered everywhere, giving the room an enchanting golden glow. A path of red and white rose petals led the way from the door to Evie’s bed, where she lay on her stomach only wearing more rose petals, a single perfect red rose held in her hand as she waited for him with a seductive smile.

Seeing Evie nude and surrounded by rose petals was probably his favorite surprise of all time.

She had a fresh bare face and her hair was completely down, he thought she looked as beautiful as a water nymph from Greek legends.

“I thought the tourney MVP ought to have a proper celebration of his game winning strategy,” she purred out as she smelled the rose, her eyes playful and coy.

“This is certainly the best kind of motivation to win every game,” he bantered back. He started to carefully take off his jacket and other clothes. He enjoyed the view and wanted to make the night last, so he was in no rush.

He could feel her eyes burn his skin as she watched him as closely as he watched her. Her breath hitched in anticipation as he became shirtless and his hands went to his belt, undoing the clasp and teasingly and almost torturously slow unzipped.

Soon he was as unclothed as she was and he came to the bed, she rose to her knees and they
immediately kissed. As entranced as he was by her beauty, he couldn’t help but notice something that appeared on her otherwise pristine skin.

He broke the kiss and gently ran his thumb over the design, looked into her eyes; confused and silently asking what it was.

“This is your second surprise. Apparently the Maledictae Grimoira is also the Neudictae Grimoira and it has all sorts of useful spells…such as this Null Rune.”

He remained silent as he wasn’t sure what that meant and looked more confused than before.

“As long as this is on my skin, then no life will flourish…it’s a birth control spell.”

Jay had to blink a few times, letting that information sink in. It was certainly welcomed news. He knew it should have been something forefront in their minds but both had a hard time making rational decisions when they were alone together with little to no clothes on.

They had probably dodged a poison apple by tempting fate and not getting pregnant, but he couldn’t bring himself to regret anything he’s done with Evie.

He kissed her gently, rather than passion it was filled with promises,

“No matter what happens, I’m in this with you.”

As much as he believed in Mal’s magical skills, there was no such thing as a 100% for sure spell and he wanted her to know he wasn’t going anywhere.

She embraced him harder, returning the kiss with her own promises although she couldn’t articulate them as well as he could. Deep down she knew he would be a steady and constant presence in her life, hearing him say it out loud just set her heart aflutter and gave her a sense of security she hadn’t known in her life before him.

He gently laid her down on the bed, slowly memorizing her body all over again. Although they had been intimate before, declaring their love made everything seem fresh and new. His eyes were open to every facet of Evie and loved everything about her; the good and the bad.

“I want to try something new,” she broke their kisses and seemed shy.

“New?”

She bit her lip and nodded, finding courage in his loving eyes.

“You’re always hesitant with me, and I love that you always want to make sure I’m OK with everything. But I trust you and you don’t have to keep treating me like I’m made of porcelain.”

He nodded, knowing that he had always been so careful and she was giving him permission to take some liberties.

“But I also want…” she blushed a deep red, still slightly embarrassed of what she was about to ask.

“Hey,” he told her gently. “You never have to be afraid of me.”

“I see you on the field and you’re so powerful and…aggressive.”

The air charged around them with magic, Jay was eager for her to continue.
“I want to see that kind of aggression and power with me…in bed.”

He couldn’t deny that there were times where he wanted to do more, go faster, be more dominant but he always refrained as he was afraid his strength would hurt her. His blood pumped hotly through him as she gave him permission to not be as gentle.

“I don’t want to hurt you,” he explained his own fears.

“I don’t think you could. I trust you.”

His heart fluttered and threatened to burst through his chest, she was the first to trust him so completely and intimately.

“If I start to do anything you don’t like, we need a stop word.”

She agreed. They were still discovering new things about sex and each other; it would be smart to have a word to let the other know something wasn’t good or right and they could stop immediately.

“Appletini,” Evie decided on after a few moments.

“What is that?”

“Not sure, I heard a cheerleader say it when she was bragging about a date…I think it’s like a really small apple.”

“OK, appletini.”

They kissed, sealing the promise that they trusted each other and could try something new. There had been something he had wanted to try but felt it was a bit too barbaric.

He lifted her up suddenly and flipped her to her stomach and positioned her where her upper body was lowered and her hips high in the air. He knocked her knees apart and he lined his cock along her pussy. He still hesitated from entering her, wanting to make sure she was OK. But from the slick that was all but pouring out of her, she was more than agreeable to the submissive position she found herself in. She pressed against him, rubbing her core along his hardness to silently give him permission to go on.

Remembering her wishes and listening out for the stop word, he thrust into her with one motion and not hearing any protest he picked up the pace. With no worry about pregnancy, he let himself go in the sensation until all he knew and could feel was Evie.

Jay leaned over and embraced her from behind, holding her weight and immobile as he thrust into her. She reveled in the feeling of being restricted and in his strong arms, she could let go of every worry and fear; Jay had her safe in his arms and he was in control.

Seeing and feeling her submit to him, knowing she was his and his alone had his climax rip through him; more intense than anything they had done before. As he shuddered and emptied himself inside of her, marking her as his from the inside he sought her clit. He would never leave her unsatisfied and as he still thrust inside of her, wanting every last drop of his release inside of her, he rubbed her to her own completion.

They both shook in each other’s arms, falling to the bed as both were too weak to hold themselves up.

“I love you,” he repeated as he kissed the nape of her neck, still within her. She reached back to run
her hands through is damp hair.

“I love you too.”

They fell asleep in each other’s arms, content in a way they never thought they’d ever get to experience.

***

Carlos had started to head to the boys floor, eager to see what the surprise was.

“Nope, surprise isn’t there,” Mal impishly told him, rare for her to be so giggly and mysterious.

He was intrigued and let her lead them across the tourney field and into the woods. It was a familiar path to him,

“Why are we going to the field?” he tried to remember if there were any spells she had wanted to attempt.

“That’s part of the surprise.”

He only smirked and suddenly grabbed her by the waist and twirled her around. She let out delighted laughter, dizzy and happy when he let her down. They kissed, carefree and normal; something they never thought they would ever get to experience.

Whenever it was just the two of them, they couldn’t stop smiling. He adored her dimples, and promised himself that he would spend the rest of his life to making them appear as often as possible.

“Lets go, I’ve been working on this for two days.”

She pulled him towards their field and he willingly followed.

“Ah, so that’s what those ‘girls nights’ were about.”

She didn’t answer but her mischievous smirk told him all he needed to know.

They walked for several yards and he noticed that she started to shiver. It was almost November and the dress she wore did not cover nearly enough to be warm.

He took off his jacket and wrapped it around her shoulders.

“But you’ll be cold,” she tried to think if there were a portable warming spell and she couldn’t recall.

“We’re not far from the field.”

“I’m not cold…” from her look, she didn’t really believe him and thought he was just trying to be unnecessarily tough. “No, really. It’s actually refreshing.”

And it didn’t matter to him even if he were cold, he wasn’t going to take his jacket back.

“You hated the cold when we were on the island.”

“I guess I got used to it, happens when Cruella makes you sleep in a closet for years.”

“No talk of her, this is a happy night,” she stopped them and ordered, kissed him to make a point.
“I promise.”

“Good.”

They made it to the field, barren from the late fall season. A firepit had been dug and built, a plaid blanket laid out with a large picnic basket.

His heart ached sweetly at the effort and thought she put into the surprise. The sky was clear and the stars shown as bright the night they first got there.

_Fiat Ignis_

Green fire ignited from her hand and flew to the firepit, they instantly were enveloped in warmth. She led him to lie down on the blanket and she kneeled down next to him, opening the basket.

She had revealed a dozen chocolate covered strawberries, combining each of their favorite things.

He adjusted so he was laying his head in her lap.

Carlos would swear that night he must have died and awoken in Elysium. Mal’s fingers softly combing through his hair, gentle and chocolate sweet kisses between bites of succulent strawberries.

He could stay in that field with her forever.

“This is an amazing surprise, I love it. Thank you.”

“I have one last surprise.”

“Ms. Lefay, I do believe you spoil me.”

“You deserve all of this and more.”

Carlos decided that Mal kissing him to drive her point was his favorite.

“And I like spoiling you.”

“Well I hope you know I’m taking this as a personal challenge to surprise you next.”

“Trust me, this next surprise is for me as much as it’s for you.”

***

He leaned on his elbows to prop himself upright, trying to see what she was doing next as she got up; his mind hazy with relaxation and giddy in love. His attention became rapt and his focused cleared when stood at his feet and started to unzip her dress.

Thankfully the magic fire kept them plenty warm as she would have definitely caught a chill, fae or not, when she let her dress fall, stepped outside the cloth, and stood above him in just her lacy panties and bra.

_I have definitely died and by some miracle earned a place among the blessed._

Although she wore very little, she couldn’t help but feel powerful and sublime as Carlos gazed at her as if she were a love goddess, beauty personified.

Although he wanted to gaze and worship every inch of skin she was willing to show him, he
couldn’t help but notice the new tattoo she currently had.

Which he was certain she didn’t have two days ago.

When she noticed what he was looking at she explained,

“IT appears that Book has far more useful spells other than curses, one of them being a birth control rune.”

She let the gravity of the news hang in the air, without having to say it out loud she told him they could finally make love without worrying about siring an unwanted child.

She had found a solution to their problem and now there was nothing stopping them from taking each other. All he could do is stare at her in wonder and admiration.

She started to wonder if she had overestimated his readiness, his silence not giving her confidence to go on.

“If you’re not ready, we don’t have to…I can wait…”

“No, no, no, no, no, no, no, I’m more than ready.”

He wanted to make sure she knew his momentary shock into speechless was due to his brain not having enough blood to respond and not an indication of hesitation on his part. He got up and with a snap of his fingers, his clothes had been removed and neatly folded on the ground besides them.

“I do love how well you do that,” Mal purred, mimicking the same spell they had practiced enough where they no longer needed words.

“You know Evie would have murdered us if soiled her outfits,” he grinned to her, both nude and comfortable under the full October moon.

“It would have been worth it.”

He couldn’t wait another minute and kissed her deeply.

He then kneeled before her, his goddess of the Moor.

His tongue found its way through her folds and straight to her pearl. He held her steady as her knees became weak under his attention. Her hands gripped his silky hair, the pain a delicious sensation and made him hard and leaking.

She pulled his head away from her, not wanting to cum just yet; in the moment of passion, he had forgotten that she now had a birth control and they could pleasure each other with more than just their mouths. She gently pushed him to his back and she stood above him.

Slowly she lowered herself onto him, feeling the burn of being stretched in such a way. Perhaps they should have taken more time to prepare her, but it was a hurt she had been wanting for so long. She hissed as it felt he was splitting her in half and he completely stilled; wanting to make sure she was OK.

But her smile told him it was a welcome sort of pain, something he knew he enjoyed as well.

Their magic had swirled and crackled above them; silver, magenta, and green dancing amongst the stars.
After a few moments and she had gotten used to his size, she started to slowly ride him. His eyes rolled to the back of his head, lost in pleasure. She picked up the pace, wanting more and more of him. He steadied her hips as she rode him, his own thrusts starting to meet pace with her. His nails turned to claws as they dug into her, the added sensation pushing her over the edge.

Blood red eyes met luminescent green,

“Mal, I love you,” Carlos huffed out as he met his own release as her core pulsed around him.

Too lost in each other, they didn’t notice their magic explode from them; power emitting from the field and all through Auradon Prep.

There weren’t enough people in the school to notice the lights flickering or feel the pulse of power.

They lay with each other under the stars, both thinking their first time was perfect and couldn’t be anywhere more beautiful. Neither of them thought anything needed to be said. The fire kept them warm enough through the night that they slept under the watchful full moon.

It wasn’t until the next morning when they thought they ought to go back to the school even though it was doubtful anyone would notice they were missing until much later. But the field was in full bloom and lush with greenery,

“Glad we don’t have to explain this,” Carlos joked but in awe of what their love had wrought.

“We should still get away while we can, in case someone decides on a Sunday morning hike.”

They dressed and made their way back to campus in their formal wear. It took twice as long as neither could resist kissing each other every few miles.

Chapter End Notes

So part of the delay was how much I wanted to have happen and it totally grew way beyond what I thought. So this chapter is basically twice as long as my normal chapters. Would you guys prefer to keep them around 10-12k and just have a cliff hanger-y type break between them OR just let my muse write as she will and the chapters are as long as they will be? Given if the latter, the chapters would be further between updates.
Archery class was canceled for the day due to rain. Evie took the opportunity to go back to the sewing room and work on items for the Winter Recital, she was determined to be one of the students to get a showcase.

For the same reason, Carlos decided to go to one of the empty dance rooms, practice so his solo would be flawless.

Mal thought of taking a nap, but she realized she hadn’t had much one on one time with Jay in the longest time so she followed him to Strength and Conditioning class and crashed it. The teacher was the wrestling coach and didn’t seem to have a problem with Mal’s presence. There were some other girls from other grades also in the class as well as Lonnie.

Jay had developed a camaraderie with most of this classmates, he jovially said hi or high fived people as he passed them. There was no one he would really consider a friend but they had all come to the realization that he was not there to hurt them. The awkward first weeks had faded away and most were self-motivated to do whatever exercise they thought they needed to work on.

Mal was treated to a lecture on never skipping “leg day.”
She was not a fan of the humidity that quickly rose in the room due to everyone working out, the smell was quite off putting as well.

She didn’t think she’d miss being outside with the open fresh air.

Both Isle teens were given wide berth in the weight room. Although the other students had come to trust Jay, the same couldn’t be said for Mal. The rest of the class had all gone to their preferred bench or apparatus, trying to subtly listen in and spy on the mysterious fae.

They weren’t subtle enough and Mal had the foresight to sneakily inscribe a mumble rune onto her and Jay. Anyone listening in wouldn’t be able to make out what they were saying, most assumed they were just out of ear shot and none brave enough to try to come closer.

She could feel their eyes watching her, she knew they wondered why she wore long sleeves and she had to resist the temptation to blind them with her magic.

*That ought to teach them to not be so nosey.*

But she refrained although anger pulsed under her skin, her fae nature fighting to punish humans for their hubris and disrespect. Luckily Jay was there to distract her from most of it, she focused on his lessons as she pushed the weight bar up and down in slow controlled motions.

Jay hovered over her, making sure her form was right and ready to pull off the weight if it looked like she struggled to keep going or if it were about to fall on her.

He took advantage of their quasi private moment away from their significant others and when the rest of the class wouldn’t be able to understand them.

“You could have given me a heads up, you know,” he somewhat admonished her. “I was miserable for like three days.”

He didn’t need to fully explain what he meant, she knew right away he was talking about the three days it took Evie to confess her feelings.

“Meh, you needed the lesson in humility. Misery builds character,” she told him sarcastically while still trying to do her exercises.

He rolled his eyes and part of him was amused, he knew he could be the epitome of a cocky jock sometimes.

“But,” she went on, knowing he had been hurting and it wasn’t something she had planned on. “Evie was supposed to tell you on Thursday. I’m not sure what happened but she chickened out. I would have told you Thursday night but when I asked her about it, she begged me to keep quiet another day. She promised that she was going to make it up to you on Homecoming. I told her that the surprise needed to include nudity. She had this stupid sheer white flimsy lacy thing she wanted to wear, I told her it would be wasted on you.”

Jay couldn’t agree more, when it came to Evie being clothed he definitely believed that “less was more.”

“You really are my best friend.”

“Damn straight I am.”

They both laughed and bonded over their memorable and eventful homecomings.
The magic from Mal and Carlos’ night of passion had subsided by the next weekend, the field of indigo and irises had become dormant with fall once again. The Isle Four made camp, taking advantage of the weekend and to give the boys their own Null Rune tattoo.

The magical fire was roaring, keeping them toasty warm as the sun started to set. They had a few rabbits that Carlos had been able to trap roasting, Evie minding the fire and using some field herbs she had gathered before the frost set in.

“Oh that rabbit smells so good,” Jay almost drooled, he couldn’t wait to bite into Evie’s famous roasted rabbit.

Her cooking was one of the scarce good memories they had of the Isle, the Mainland fare was rich and plentiful, but they had missed some of the dishes they had when growing up. While they didn’t have it often, they did have their own version of comfort food.

Since he was so cute and gave her a compliment, Evie broke off a piece of meat for him to taste. He playfully nipped at her fingers as he savored the tidbit she offered, warm happy memories of similar cookouts they would have whenever they had meat to eat flooded his mind.

He gave her a quick kiss before leaving her alone to keep cooking, he also looked forward to the tiny potatoes and other root vegetables they stole from the kitchens. To finish things off, they had a bottle of apple wine they had fermented themselves in a secret distiller not too far from where they were camping. They were lucky that most other students, as well as the adults, had no interest in traveling that far into the woods, and they were essentially isolated and could relax.

They had also nicked several loaves of bread and enjoyed some of the strawberry preserves they had made. Their secret root cellar they had dug out was filled from top to floor with preservatives, vegetables, wine, and dried meats in case they ever needed to make a getaway. It also held bags of money they were able to obtain from selling stolen goods.

It was surprising at how willing other students were to not ask questions for items they wanted. Anything they couldn’t sell on campus, was given to a human groundskeeper who was more than willing to pay and sell outside of Auradon Prep.

They enjoyed camping and being out in nature while they waited for nightfall. They appreciated their time away from Auradon Prep and the new stresses of student life. It was still easier than living on the Isle, but they cherished the break nonetheless.

They spent the hours talking about magic, practicing spells they had advanced to non-verbal hand gestures, and imagining a future outside the Isle and Auradon Prep.

Night finally fell and as they got closer to midnight, Carlos was all but taking a nap as Mal drew the Null Rune onto his skin; the stars twinkling as if giving their blessing. He was completely nude and on his back, his arms crossed behind his head and he lay perfectly still while Mal drew with careful embellishment and in the black/red/white colour scheme he preferred; he could pass it off as some sort of tribal tattoo if anyone had ever asked about it. They figured in the unlikely event anyone ever saw that all four of them had matching ink, their cover story was that it was some sort of graffiti symbol from the Isle.

“You know you guys don’t need to get this done,” Mal tried to tell them again when she was done and satisfied with the design. “Both Evie and I have it, it should be enough to cover us safely. The
Sealing Spell burns like hades.”

Her boyfriend grabbed her hand and kissed her knuckles,

“We know. But it’s not fair to leave you solely responsible for birth control. We should do our share.”

With anyone else, most girls would have thought their boyfriend wanting birth control for devious reasons, but with Jay and Carlos the girls knew they were being genuine. She sighed, falling in love with him just a little more than she was yesterday and gave him a chaste kiss; her forehead touching his.

“OK Jay, you’re up,” Mal commanded and he started to disrobe in obedience and took Carlos’ place on the blanket.

“You can just make mine black. I don’t need all those fancy colours,” he told her as he laid down.

“No even the dark red and gold?”

Jay just rolled his eyes, he didn’t see the need to make it so complicated.

“But the gold actually shimmers and I stole them just for you,” Mal wasn’t pouting but it was close.

He rolled his eyes again and gave a dramatic head loll, but part of him was flattered.

“Fine, make it all pretty.”

Mal did a little bounce in place as she was always happy to have free artistic reign. Respecting that he didn’t want something elaborate, she kept it simpler and more straight lines rather than the calligraphy she did for herself and the others. When she was done, his lines were stark and bold, almost savage; more akin to his personality.

She was quite proud of her work and pleased they trusted her to do such delicate rune work on their skin. They would have these tattoos for several years, it should be something they liked.

Jay looked down and he could admit it was rather wicked and cool looking, he knew Mal would do an excellent job.

“OK, stand up,” she gently pat his thigh and he stood next to Carlos. Both naked as the day they were born and Mal extinguished the magical fire so the only light for them to see by was from the stars.

Evie stood to the side, arms around herself trying to keep warm now that the fire was out. Mal tried to make it quick so they wouldn’t freeze to death; she knew exactly how cold it was to stand naked in late October, it was even colder in early November.

She did think it a bit odd that Carlos seemed immune to the frigid temperature, their breaths visible in the air and Jay’s skin was covered in goosebumps and his teeth started to chatter.

Her boyfriend stood there, relaxed and comfortable as if it were a spring day.

She recalled him telling her that he was probably used to it because of all the times Cruella made him sleep in her coat closet with only a dirty mattress, if he were lucky, and he couldn’t even use the coats for warmth.

She was reminded of something, something about the cold. Something about it and Carlos, a
connection she was certain she knew but it wasn’t coming to her.

She shook her head, she’d figure it out later she needed to concentrate on powering the runes.

She lay her palms on their stomachs. Although a somewhat intimate area, neither Carlos nor Evie felt any stirring of jealousy; even with the latter’s previous suspicion. This was a powerful moment and made them all closer for it. Mal concentrated and willed her energy to power the runes.

Both boys felt a tingle where the design was and the rune glowed green with her magic. They felt the power surge through their blood and they were almost giddy with the magic high.

“Enjoy that while you can,” she warned. “You guys better lay down for the next part.”

They swallowed hard, not looking forward to the sealing spell. Both girls warned them repeatedly that it hurt, burned like fire and neither of them wanted to feel the pain. But they agreed that it wouldn’t be fair to the girls to let them take lone responsibility for birth control, not to mention to bear that pain by themselves.

It was also pragmatic, more protection was always better. While Auradon all but outlawed magic, there were still magical areas, objects, and people that could mess with spells. During her research Mal had come across mention of an Enchanted Lake on school property. It was listed as an amenity of the school’s. Its water had the ability to break any spell, which the school boasted that if there were ever an errant spell cast by some evil villain then no one had to worry. If either girl had swum in its waters, they would have inadvertently broken the rune enchantment and they wouldn’t know until she or Evie became pregnant.

So it was sensible for all four of them to be tattooed.

The boys laid down on either side of Mal as she kept kneeling. She had reignited the fire so they were at least warm. Evie came over and offered them both a thick stick.

“A bite? Really?” Jay asked, starting to lose his nerve.

Evie only nodded her head, her eyes darting down in guilt.

Not having any other choice, they both took a stick and placed it in their mouths. Mal did not look happy to be doing the next spell, Jay reached out to Carlos’ hand and held it tight.

They both felt better to have each other, going through the same experience.

*From what I have created, let nothing tear asunder.*

Mal’s voice turned a deep ethereal vibrato, green light and smoke emitted from her hands and again her magic lit their rune designs. Instead of a heady rush of magic, slowly the magic made its way through every inch of the tattoo and started to burn as if she were branding them with a hot fire poker.

Neither boy could refrain from the pained screams that ripped from their mouths, the sound only muffled because of their bites. Their clasped hands squeezing to the point of pain but it paled in comparison to what was being seared onto their stomachs, their veins popping out and muscles strained. Mal wished she could stop but stopping then would mean they would have to start again. Her magic was almost through the entire design and she willed her power to go through quickly.

Evie huddled closer to the fire as the wind picked up, the gale almost howling in pain with the boys and stinging her face. The air was ice cold, much colder for November, and even the magical fire
was having a hard time keeping her warm.

Mal remained locked and ignored the glacial wind, intent to only have to make them go through this pain once; her eyes glowing a fiery green in her determination.

It was finally done and the sealing spell was complete, the boys had tears streaming down their eyes and their breathing labored. Jay didn’t want to move but he could hear Carlos almost wheezing as if he was struggling to breath.

Mal recognized that he was having the beginnings of a panic attack.

“Jay, move away from him.”

Although that felt counter-intuitive and his first instinct was to protect his friend, he listened to Mal and dragged himself away. The pain of the tattoo still too fresh and it hurt to move too much.

“Carlos, you’re safe. You’re not trapped anywhere. You’re safe,” his girlfriend reminded him as his mind tried to trick him into thinking he was somewhere else. Somewhere on the Isle where he couldn’t escape.

The pain of the rune wasn’t the same as the pain of being caught in a bear trap, but it triggered those memories nonetheless.

Mal made exaggerated deep breaths so he could hear her.

“Breath with me Carlos, we’re all here with you. We’re all here to help you. You’re not alone.”

The more she kept talking, the more he realized he wasn’t in the woods on the Isle, trapped and alone. He had people to help him. If he were ensnared, then they would open the device that clamped down on his leg and he wouldn’t be losing so much blood.

There was no blood and he wasn’t going to die scared and alone.

He had friends and they were there to help. He focused on her breathing, pushing out all other thoughts and memories. He breathed along with her and it was the only thing that stopped him from passing out.

Several long moments passed before his breathing returned to normal and he could think straight. He hated seeing how worried his friends were for him, but they all kept quiet and waited for him to indicate that he was ready to move.

Carlos took one last deep breath and he made himself stand up. He was a little shaky on his feet but he managed to find his balance. Jay had followed suit and Evie was ready with their clothes. They dressed in silence and Mal busied herself with tending to a magical fire that would burn regardless of how much wood there was or what she did, but she couldn’t just sit there and do nothing. Although she wanted to hug him close and never let go, pepper him with kisses and promise she’d never hurt him like that again and apologize profusely; she knew that was the exact opposite of what he needed at the moment. She learned her lesson years ago that her instinct to coddle him was more detrimental to him than helpful. He needed breathing room and space and she’d let him have that.

It was nearing 2:00 in the morning, the rune was now permanently etched into their skin and all four should be well protected against siring or conceiving a child. Evie had an ointment of calendula, comfrey, and lavender to soothe the burn. Jay patiently kept still as she applied the balm; he kept from wincing as he knew she was trying to be as gentle as possible.
She simply gave the jar to Carlos as he wasn’t ready to be touched yet.

The mood was rather somber, and even though the ritual was successful it was lost with the shadow life from the Isle had cast upon them. They all decided it was time to call it a night. They put out the file and gathered their things, they walked back to the dorm in silence and even though Carlos hadn’t said anything, Mal knew that night she would not join him in the boys’ room. Jay also respected his space and the three went to the girl’s room.

As Carlos carefully undressed, paying special attention not to disturb his tattoo, he hated that he got that way and berated himself for acting so hysterical. It was rare that Mal would ever sleep in her assigned room those days, but he just couldn’t be around people at the moment. He needed space to make sure he didn’t get overwhelmed or come back to the feeling of being trapped.

He knew Mal understood and it’s why she backed off and didn’t press him. But it still made him feel guilty to push her away. He just had to remind himself that it wouldn’t be forever and she understood. While others may find her abrupt and tactless, it was comforting to him. If she had really minded or was tired of it, she wouldn’t hesitate to tell him so and cut him loose. The fact she bore his need for space patiently just showed how much she loved him.

That’s what he had to keep reminding himself over and over again.

Even Beezy seemed to sense his need to be alone and didn’t come to his bed like he usually would, opting to lay at the foot of Jay’s bed that night.

Carlos pulled the covers off his bed, even bedsheets and comforters were too stifling and he laid down, staring at the ceiling and hoping he could find rest that night. He tried to think of anything other than being stranded in the woods, surrounded by dark imposing trees and struggling to open a bear trap and free his leg. Echoes of pain ran up and down his right calf, wondering what had saved him from not only bleeding out but any other complications he could have faced such as infection.

He wondered if he’d ever be truly free from the ghosts of the Isle of the Lost.

Carlos managed to fall into a dreamless sleep, thankful for small divine favors and he had felt better. He met his friends in the mess hall for breakfast, all willing to pretend last night’s episode didn’t happen unless he wanted to talk about it (he never did) and get on with their lives.

There were small hints they were worried about him, such as Mal’s extra tight hug and repeated professions of her love and that she was sorry that the spell had hurt so much; completely leaving out his panic attack and focusing on the pain. Jay had given him a light punch in the arm but his smile didn’t reach his eyes. Evie had shoved food towards him, not paying any attention to quantity and even if he were starving, there would be no way for him to finish it all by himself.

He was grateful that none of them would pry, even if he wanted to talk about it he had no idea how to articulate why he had those episodes and what, if anything, they could have done to help beyond what they already did.

They were all broken children from the Isle and there wasn’t anything to make that go away. So instead they talked about the coming school week and how much homework they should expect.

Ignoring their personal troubles was easier on the Isle. Survival trumped everything, it was easy to disregard their demons when they were worried about making it to the next week or even the next day.
In Auradon, worrying about school and grades paled in comparison and it was that much harder to simply ignore their past. But none of them knew what else to do as it was all they had ever known.

It took a little over a week for Carlos to completely come back to his usual self. He was happy to continue fiddling with computer hardware his class let him have while he learned more advanced lessons. His professor was surprised he had such a strong foundation, as most assumed the Isle was little more than a primitive tech-less wasteland.

He had to keep reminding them that mad scientists, some with more than one advanced degree, also inhabited the Isle and decided to teach in order to fill their days. Most of his knowledge of computers was on technology decades old but he had a solid foundation and he was eager to learn.

The staff was doubly impressed when he was able to take the most cutting edge 3D printer and made improvements.

None of them wanted to admit that the inventor of the 3D printer was currently banished to the Isle, they preferred to forget that much of the technology they enjoyed currently was rooted in villainy.

Their moral outrage only extended to what was convenient to them.

Carlos had tutored under him directly and was already familiar with how it worked. He tried not to beam with pride when he was asked to work on special projects. Word got out that he had a modified printer and for some reason Chad Charming became obsessed with it.

Luckily it only took one rather aggressive confrontation of Carlos throwing him out of his room for the Charming scion to get the hint that he was not welcome uninvited. He thought the lesser prince ought to consider himself lucky that Mal wasn’t there as he was certain his girlfriend would have had no problem resorting to curses to keep the prince out. Carlos didn’t even want to think what would have happened to Chad if he had caught him and Mal in a compromising position.

Although he had the tattoo for over a week, he wasn’t ready to be intimate again until then. Mal wasn’t one to talk about her feelings, so he wasn’t sure what was going through her mind but she had not once reproached him nor had she initiated any intimate contact. He had appreciated that but part of him worried if it was some sign of indifference.

When he invited her to the room that night, he found he had nothing to worry about. When he kissed her and she enthusiastically kissed him back, he let her hands roam where ever she wanted them to; both were touched starved as he took the time he needed to recover.

As they lay together, enjoying the closeness and he wondered why he needed time away from this. He felt love, not entrapment when she cuddled to him and she lay her head on his chest.

Still, whatever he went through it was over and they could enjoy the fruit of their pain and he was just as content as he was when they first made love in the field of indigo and violets.

“I’m sorry about this week,” he told her as he laced his hand in hers, breaking the peaceful silence and unable to pretend that week never happened.

She turned her head and rested her chin on his chest, blew the hair that had covered her eyes and looked straight at him.

“You have nothing to be sorry about.”
She wished she were more articulate, to be able to tell him that what they had was far more than just sex and she could go weeks or however long it took for him to be OK. She didn’t have the words, tender thoughts and feelings were not what she grew up learning. So she nuzzled into him and squeezed him close, hoping he understood that she was there for him no matter what.

He wished he could tell her that those simple words were more than enough, that simply by being there for him and waiting for him while he worked through the garbage the Isle left him with was more than he ever thought anyone would grant him, much less the heiress of the Isle. He hated that he got that way, he wished he could be as strong as she was.

But all he could do was bring their interlaced hands to his lips and kiss her knuckles, pulling her closer to make up for all the contact he denied her that week.

They were with each other and safe, that’s what mattered.

---

The tattoos granted them an intoxicating independence they had never known before, even more than when they first left the Isle. They had each grown up knowing that loving each other freely could prove fatal. The infant mortality rate was only challenged by the fatal maternity rate.

For being an uptight private school, the students were left largely alone and with their years of experience sneaking around, the Isle Four could get away with whatever they wanted it seemed.

That new freedom was heady and made them think of nothing else, and for the first time in their lives they were just teenagers in love and didn’t have to worry of the consequences.

They were away from their parents, they didn’t have to worry about food, and they now didn’t have to worry about unwanted children. What else mattered besides each other?

Each sat in class, distracted for when their next break could be and when they could again be with the love of their life. Up until then, they always made an effort to appear engaged and respectful, knowing that eyes were constantly on them and most assuming they’d fail.

After being there for several months, they had proven they were just as smart, if not smarter, than most of their peers. So they thought they could relax a bit and let their mind wander.

They had all figured out that lunch time was the best time to sneak into unused rooms or hidden supply closets for quick rendezvous. The thrill of breaking the rules and not getting caught made the sex all the better.

Every time they met in 6th period study hall, Mal and Jay couldn’t help but giggle for ten minutes – baffling the monitor that wondered what was so funny.

The best friends had an unspoken, as Carlos and Evie would murder them, competition of who could have the most sex in the most places.

At first, Jay was winning because he had access to the theater and all its back rooms. Evie also had a flair for wearing the costumes and “acting out” parts of the play with their added risqué additions.

Mal soon caught up when she found out Carlos had a fondness for playing “Professor and Student” in the computer lab. It also extended to any classroom they had access to.

Carlos also had a fondness for:
Mal caught onto a theme with Carlos and she was more than happy to sport her tight French braids or severely pulled back hair bun to make his fantasies come true. Evie didn’t ask many questions when Mal asked for “smart” business wear. She didn’t know if her designer friend knew it was for “acting” with Carlos or if she thought Mal was preparing for an occasion where she’d have to look professional. Either way, she had plenty of outfits to play out whatever fantasy her boyfriend wanted.

Students and adults all noticed there was some sort of shift to the Isle Four, no one could fail to see they were all that more relaxed and happy. Even Mal, the resident Ice Queen was smiling more than ever.

Their good mood seemed to be contagious and most others could feel joy radiating off the four and it made them happy too.

Most assumed they were finally fitting and settling in, of course they were – who in Auradon wasn’t happy?

Only a few observant band members knew better.

“I know they’re fucking. No one is that happy to be here. They must have figured out a way to sneak in condoms or birth control. We need to find out and get in on it,” Addison conspired with Doug.

“Pffft…good one,” he snorted, thinking she must have been joking. “Oh, you’re serious,” when she just frowned at him.

“And who exactly is going to broach the subject with them?” he asked skeptically, no way in any hell would he even think of asking Mal about her sex life. He felt he knew Carlos the least, and Evie was out of the question as he’d probably die of embarrassment asking such a beautiful girl about birth control. Jay was his most likely candidate, but the Isle Four were always together. He couldn’t think of a time when they could approach him alone.

That deflated Addison’s idea, knowing that was the fatal flaw in their plan for all the reasons Doug was thinking. All they could do was look on with envy and awe.

The Villain Children’s fun had only lasted a couple weeks. Unfortunately they could only daydream and choose sex over studying for so long before it caught up with them.

The Auradon Lit professor had almost apologetically placed Mal’s quiz on her desk, wondering what happened when she was usually such a good student.

The D- was a bright blood red and almost mocked her for her pervious happiness. The Isle Heiress could only close her eyes and berate herself, crumbling the offending test as she gently hit her head. She knew full well why she got such a bad grade and couldn’t believe she had been so careless. Looking over to Jay, it was clear to her that he didn’t do so great either.

It was all the more irritating when students around her started to whisper, all speculating what happened or sneering that it was just a matter of time.

Mal couldn’t help the green glow of her eyes, infuriated at the situation and it was enough to shut the class up.
At lunch, they met up with Evie who also had her fair share of poor tests.

“Where’s Carlos?” Mal asked, wondering why he wasn’t there to meet them.

“I don’t know. We both almost failed the last Calc tests and I haven’t seen him since.”

“Shit.”

Out of all of them, Carlos would have been the one to take bad grades the hardest. He was seen as the shining academic star alongside Evie, both wanted so badly to show the school they weren’t Isle trash.

All three rushed to the dorms, hoping he was studying so another incident wouldn’t happen or simply moping about. Mal started to worry when it looked like the goblin crew had come through and done a particularly good job at cleaning every inch of the place and Carlos nowhere in sight.

“Maybe he’s in the field, get some space,” Jay suggested, knowing how claustrophobic his friend got when he was in duress.

“No, I know where he is. Get back to lunch, and if I’m not back by dinner just go on without us.”

Jay and Evie didn’t argue, but both looked worried and wanted to help. Mal left without another word and they followed her orders.

It didn’t take long for her to find a goblin. They were unobtrusive entities within the school, employed because there were so many of them and most wanted to fade into the background of Auradon after the defeat of Maleficent. It seemed most students treated them as invisible servants and probably never even talked to one.

Most goblins were only three feet tall with green mottled skin, sharp fangs, and hognosed. Auradon Prep tried to make them seem more domesticated by giving them servant uniforms. They wore little black and white tuxes that Mal thought was ridiculous but the attire made them seem harmless.

“Mavard,” she called out when she saw a familiar goblin. The creature immediately stopped what he was doing and stood at attention. He looked at her wearily, knowing who she was and whose daughter she was. While he would have preferred not to be caught talking to the daughter of Maleficent, his training didn’t allow him to ignore a student, even if that student was a child of a villain he used to serve.

Mal was one of the few people in all of Auradon Prep, however, that ever treated him and the other goblins as if they were sentient creatures deserving respect and not just mindless domestics. This wasn’t new treatment nor was it limited to the school; it was one of many reasons why the goblins joined Maleficent’s side. Normally their conversations were restricted to small talk and pleasantries, maybe a request for extra bedding or cleaning; they both knew that people would get suspicious if they dallied too long.

“Where do you do laundry?”

It was an odd question, but he was aware of why she was asking.

“Please follow me,” Mavard said solemnly and started to walk, Mal following silently. They left the castle and winded down a narrow path just outside the dorms, well-worn but only traveled by goblin.

She wasn’t sure why, but she had figured there would have been laundry facilities somewhere in the castle; but it seemed that Auradon Prep didn’t want any of the help’s work to be anywhere near their
chargers. The goblins were to be as unseen and inconspicuous as possible.

*No wonder all the students think all the cleaning is done by magic.*

Mal scoffed at her thought, she didn’t understand why the students at Auradon Prep were so oblivious of those who helped them live basically with every aspect of their life. If there were no goblins, she was certain the entire school would crumble into chaos soon after.

He led her to a simple tan building, the air filled with the sound of commercial dryers constantly tumbling. She walked into a humid and hot room, the whirring of the machines louder and the smell of laundry soap and dryer sheets filled her nose. There were strings upon strings of delicate items air drying; the hissing of steam irons to get the perfect crease in the pants and skirt pleats, there was a small path besides piles and piles of perfectly folded uniforms and items yet to be washed.

It reminded her of the brothel, the laundry a herculean task that would never be finished; just permanent piles and piles that never went away. She made her way through the heated room, taking off her blazer and rolling up her sleeves to try to get more comfortable.

She finally found Carlos in the back, with the vats of steaming water to clean clothes that were too delicate to wash in the machines and had to be done by hand. Carlos was stripped down to his white undershirt and khakis, sweating bullets as he stirred the laundry with a large wooden paddle.

His hair curling in the heat and humidity, his brow furrowed and utterly focused on the task at hand.

Suddenly she was back on the Isle, waiting for Carlos to finish his chores and having to listen to Cruella’s shrill voice telling him to hurry up and then her dumping even more on him to do.

*Why would he come back here?*

She wondered how long he had been there, must have been since that morning from the state of his hands: knuckles white from gripping the paddle so hard, cracked and starting to bleed from the harsh chemicals and hot water.

She was certain that he knew she was there, it wasn’t like she was trying to hide. But he made no move to acknowledge her presence and she got the distinct feeling he wanted to be alone.

Normally she would give him his space, but this wasn’t a panic attack where he needed space. He was overworking himself and at some point, the goblins or even teachers would step in after they finally noticed his absence; she couldn’t risk an adult seeing him in such a condition. They’d either butt into their business and given Carlos’ state, who knew how the magical teen would lash out.

“Carlos,” she tried to get his attention. “Carlos,” she tried again, louder, when he just kept stirring the pot. “You need to stop…we have to get back to school. The teachers are probably mad that we’re missing classes.”

She did her best to reason with him, but it seemed he was stubbornly determined to just keep doing laundry.

“Please Carlos,” she tried softer, thinking of all the ways she could get through to him. “You’re hurting yourself, you don’t need to do this.”

Still, no matter what she said or in what tone, he was just stirring the pot and ignoring her.

Mal was not known for her patience, growing up on the Isle and being groomed to be the next Leader, she was not used to just being ignored and it started to grate on her. She tried a few more
times to reason with him and he still acted as if she wasn’t there.

She finally lost her patience.

With the flick of her wrists and precise finger movements, she had magically stayed his hands and she made the paddle disappear.

Carlos knew what he was doing was harmful, his hands had been cramping and his skin had started to crack and peel from the almost boiling water and harsh detergent the goblins used. But he was angry and lost, the first bad grade he had ever gotten and he didn’t know what else to do. On the Isle, his mother would have him doing chores from dawn to dusk, sometimes even through the night in order to get everything neat and tidy.

*Cleaning is all you’re good for.*

The cold voice would repeat over and over again in his head. The failed test had proven that he wasn’t meant for school, that it was a waste of time and he should get back to what he knew he couldn’t mess up.

Mal was his girlfriend, but the voice told him it was only a matter of time before she saw how worthless he was. In Auradon, she would have no need for him; soon she’d find someone worthier of her time and love.

He knew Ben was attracted to her. Even without his keen senses, he saw the longing looks the Crown Prince gave the fae when she wasn’t looking. He knew others could see it too, Audrey wasn’t completely paranoid and others had gossiped about it as well; all the late nights they spent on the Isle program, he wasn’t surprised the future King held feelings for Mal.

So many people could see it, why would Mal stay with him when she could be a Queen?

An ugly anger had started to grow in the pit of his stomach. He wished she would just stop pretending and leave him alone. He didn’t know how long she would keep trying, but it broke at what little patience he had when she wouldn’t get the hint to leave him be.

When she used magic to restrain him and to disappear the paddle, he couldn’t hold it in any longer.

The anger, disappointment, fear, and sense of worthlessness all came pouring out of him and he couldn’t stop it.

“We do not use magic against each other!” he growled out, his eyes a deep crimson and his hair all wild. His anger was enough to break him out of her magical hold and she stepped back, surprised he was able to do so and that her normally sweet Carlos was angry enough to yell at her.

“You cannot just use magic on me whenever you feel ignored. It’s called taking a hint! I don’t want to talk to you. I don’t want to be around you. You can’t just show up and think you make everything better. Being together too much is what got us in this mess!”

Mal stayed still, not making a move while he vented out his anger and frustration. Each point he made felt like a red hot needle being stabbed into her heart. She wanted to yell back, she wanted to tell him it’s not her fault, or at least not just her fault, that they got the bad grades. He wasn’t exactly refusing her advances or suggesting they ought to study. Perhaps she knew she would have been stronger, but all she wanted to do was be with him. To be together in all the ways they were denied on the Isle. She wanted to yell at him to stop being so irrational and that it was just one failed test. One bad test wasn’t going to end their year at Auradon Prep. She wanted to scream that she was just trying to help and was doing her best.
But yelling back was not something she had ever grown up doing, lest she get more cuts down her back or something worse. So she stood motionless and looked down, waiting for it to be over.

Carlos wanted to tear his heart out, hating how cold and still Mal had gotten, how she couldn’t meet his eyes. He knew she was just trying to help and neither of them how to do that. He didn’t even know what he needed help with. He wished he were the type to know when he had done something wrong and just stop and apologize, but his blood ran hot and angry.

Seeing how he hurt her, made him even angrier. He wasn’t even sure to who the anger was even directed; to himself for reacting in such a way or to her, for not fighting back and telling him he was a waste of time and not worth all this effort which the voice told him she had to be thinking.

The air grew thick and started to crackle with power, their hurt and anger causing a magical maelstrom. Through his haze of anger, he knew he couldn’t use magic against her. No matter how angry he got, he couldn’t cross that line. He would also never raise a hand to her either, that’s not who he was.

But the fury had to go somewhere, so he decided to take it out on the laundry room.

The laundry vat was well over a hundred pounds filled with hot water and clothes. Carlos turned it over as if it weighed nothing. Anything in his way was fair game to his rage. Tables and benches were tossed into walls and shattered into splinters, water had soaked the floor and he left destruction in his wake.

Soon there was nothing left to break and he stood alone, breathing heavily and seeing the damage he had done.

All the anger had left him and all he was left with was shame and guilt. He looked down, his hands had turned to claws, bleeding with cuts and splinters from his rampage. He looked over, Mal was still there, calm as ever as she waited for him to come back to himself; the only proof of her inner turmoil were the tears that gathered in her eyes but she refused to let fall lest she show any weakness.

The fight had gone from him, he was exhausted and ashamed of his behavior. He stumbled backwards until he hit the wall, sliding down to the ground and he put his head in his hands.

“I’m sorry,” he said brokenly, tears starting to run down his face and once they started, he couldn’t get them to stop.

Mal finally moved from her spot, knowing whatever was in his system he had purged. She approached him, timidly hover her hand over him; wanting to comfort him but unsure if he would welcome her touch.

This was so different than anything they had gone through before. This wasn’t a panic attack, this was something alien.

When he looked up from behind his hands, he saw that she was afraid to touch him; he wondered if she was afraid that he would ever take his anger out on her and he hated himself all the more because of that.

So he gently reached out, hoping she wouldn’t recoil from his touch and especially since his hands had not gone back to normal. He brushed his tongue against his teeth and could feel the elongated fangs.

*I’m a monster.*
He didn’t understand how she was still there, anyone else would have run a long time ago and he wouldn’t have blamed them.

But she was still there, she was trying to get through to him but neither knew how to do that.

She let him take her hand and she embraced him, hoping the closeness would calm him down. She let him cry, wanting him to expel whatever demon he was fighting and she would stay with him until it did.

“Sometimes I hear her voice in my head,” he tried to explain to her after a while and unsure of how much time had past, wanting her to know why all of this had happened.

He didn’t need to explain who the “her” was, Mal knew Cruella’s evilness sometimes haunted him just like Maleficent’s had to her.

“I keep hearing her tell me that school is a waste of time…that sooner or later they’re all going to realize that I don’t belong here…I’m just good for menial housework.”

“It’s just one test,” Mal tried to rationalize for him, speaking gently. It seemed so simple and obvious to her, but if he needed to be told then she would do it. “We have plenty of extra credit to cover it. Our average grade is still an A…I’m sure the professors will have even more, so it’ll be like it never happened.”

Carlos listened and he could see the logic. He knew the math, he could figure it out quickly that she was right, it was just one test.

But that oily and malevolent voice that wouldn’t leave him alone said otherwise and it poisoned his every thought. That this was just the first of many tests he would fail. He’d fail because he was weak, lazy, and useless.

The voice that haunted him, telling him he wasn’t worthy of his place at the school. That he wasn’t worthy of Mal. That he wasn’t worthy of the friendship Evie and Jay gave him. He was only good for cleaning and he’d be lucky if Auradon Prep allowed him to do the laundry or clean the dorms. The voice tried to convince him even then he might not be worth that as there were countless goblins to do the job.

That voice usually overwhelmed him and he believed it for so long, but then he heard Mal’s voice pierce through the echo of doubt.

“It’ll be ok, we’ll study more. We can ask for more extra credit. We just got carried away because of the tattoos. But we learned our lesson, we can do better.”

He trusted Mal, she was always so confident and sure. If she said it would be ok, he started to believe her over Cruella’s voice.

They stayed like that for a while, Carlos needed the reassurance and contact and Mal would be there to give it to him. She eyed the startled goblins, she worried that they would report them.

With a green flamed hand, she released her magic to put right all that Carlos had broken. Soon enough, everything flew to their proper place and rebuilt itself. The water flowed back into the vat as it stood pristinely where it used to. The clothes where hung back and everything looked as it should.

No one would be able to tell that anything happened. She caught Mavard’s eye, an unspoken agreement passed between them. He would not report them for the destruction, nor would he or any goblin report that she could wield magic.
Mavard still had respect for the former Protector of the Moor. Although he was on the losing side, he didn’t think it was the wrong one. Clearly Maleficent’s daughter was cut from a different cloth. The Great Dragon of Auroria would not have ever shown any type of compassion, he was certain that if young Carlos had such an episode front of Maleficent, he would have been turned into a crow or some other type of creature post haste.

He wanted to see how Mal would do in Auradon. He thought she would go far and would be a sight to see.

Once Carlos was finally calm and ready to go back to school, he apologized to the goblins and promised he would never do such a thing again. They readily accepted his apology, part of them irritated at the humans that taught them. Clearly the teens were magical and needed tutelage on how to control it. But with Auradon’s de facto illegalization of magic, they were left to learn on their own. The servants knew it was not totally the teens’ fault that things got out of control, it was in a young one’s nature.

Mal looked Carlos over, making sure all his unknown magical heritage was gone from sight. He still looked a bit worse for wear, tired and exhausted but utterly human. After she was done with her inspection, he pulled her close and kissed her. He had put his forehead against hers and told her, “I love you.”

“I love you too,” she replied and kissed him again.

They made their way back and noticed how late it had gotten; they could catch the tail end of dinner, hoping there was still hot food but would eat whatever was left.

He was grateful to Jay and Evie who had told him they told his teachers and Coach that he had gotten sick.

Mal tried to keep a neutral face, not wanting to worry Carlos but she knew they needed help when they had started to eat. She realized that she was not enough to help him fight his demons. She was certain she was not anyone to help others, growing up on the same Isle with different but similar evil.

Carlos needed more than her to help him, she just wasn’t sure what it was or how to get it.

Dr. Mulan Li had fought the Huns and won. She had been in the heart of battle and faced off Shan Yu with his hellish black and yellow eyes. It took a lot to scare her.

There was something rather intense about fae eyes, especially if they were on a teen girl who clearly didn’t want to be there. Dr. Li wouldn’t say she was scared per se, but there was something about Mal’s eyes that felt as if the girl was looking into her mind and soul.

It didn’t help that while Mal had asked for the appointment, the teen was not cooperative to talking. She had seen her fair share of disgruntled teens in her tenure as a school counselor. She had an abundance of experience with attitude raising a teen boy and a teen girl.

She had wanted the Isle Four to visit her more often, but she couldn’t force them to see her if there was no reason to justify it. Every teacher said they were all doing well and behavior wise, they acted perfectly with a few close calls here and there with the fae girl almost losing her temper. Even in those instances, where reports have her eyes glowing a hellish fire green, one of the other Isle teens was able to calm her down enough and walk away from the situation.
All four teens were largely independent and didn’t seem to want nor need adult guidance.

A sadness rippled through her when she thought it might be because they were never truly children, having to grow up quickly in order to deal with life on the Isle.

There was at least a bad couple of weeks at the beginning of the month, their grades had slipped and their teachers were concerned. But whatever it was, it was fleeting because they had each done enough extra credit work beforehand to keep their GPA up and by most accounts they had all recuperated.

They even volunteered to do even more extra credit to get back the cushion they had beforehand, Mulan had learned.

The counselor wondered what caused the dip, no teacher could account for it and Lonnie didn’t hear any rumors of anything upsetting enough to affect their grades. Dr. Li figured everyone was entitled to have a bad week or two; they were still doing far better than anyone would have thought given that the teens were dropped into a completely different environment.

But given that the fae was in her office, perhaps it was just more than a one off.

“So what exactly is ‘therapy’ for?” Mal finally spoke after an awkward silence, getting to the point of why she was there.

From her tone and raised eyebrow, Dr. Li could feel the skepticism radiate off the teen; plus her emphasis on the word “therapy” left no room for doubt that she thought it was some made up term.

Ouch

She had people doubt in her profession before, but some undefinable trait about Mal just made her opinion hurt that much more.

“Well, ‘therapy’ is a very broad term. There are many types of therapy for different kinds of issues, for different kind of people. What I do is help guide students through their class choices and figure out what type of future they want. I’m also here for any everyday stresses they may have and how to deal with those stresses in healthy and productive ways. I can also intercede on their behalf and mediate between them and their parents if there is any tension or disagreement of where their future is going.”

“So what if our ‘stresses’ aren’t ‘everyday’ type of things?”

It had been painfully obvious to Mal that what stressed them out and what stressed Auradonians out were radically different.

“Well, if it’s beyond my field, then I can also refer students to specialists.”

“And they help how exactly?”

Mal didn’t mean to sound disdainful or sarcastic, that was her natural intonation for things she didn’t understand and was overall distrustful about. She had first researched in the library about ways to help Carlos. It led to the psychiatry and self-help section, the more she read the more she couldn’t understand it. Therapy in general sounded, to her, self-centered and self-absorbent. She didn’t understand how talking about themselves and their life helped with anything.

Eventually she figured she needed someone in the field to explain it to her, and that’s how she found herself in Dr. Li’s office.
“One way is through psychotherapy, also called talk therapy. A student can express their fears or problems in a safe environment and without judgement. We have patient-doctor privilege, so unless you were in immediate danger of hurting yourself or others, then anything said to me is confidential.”

Mal didn’t believe that for a second but she continued to listen. Dr. Li went on about what therapy could potentially entail and what options there were to students. Her mind started to wander, the more Dr. Li talked, the more she didn’t believe her. Nothing like that was ever on the island. Some of the mad scientists talked of mental health. Explained to them what panic attacks were, mentioned anxiety. They never mentioned there was help for any of it.

The fae looked towards the row of books in the shelves along the walls, nothing seemed to belong to a set. All the books were of different size and width, she itched to look closer.

She wondered if maybe she could just read Dr. Li’s books instead of having to come to her.

“Mal, you’ve been quiet. Do you have any other questions? Or any thoughts?”

Mal looked at her with the same intensity as before, wondering if anything the human counselor said was true and could even help.

“It all sounds like medically approved narcissism,” she admitted bluntly. “So you’re telling me that students come here, literally talk about themselves for an hour, and that somehow helps them? It sounds like it’s a major contributor of why so many of them think the world not only cares about every minutia of their day but that the world is there to serve them.”

_Damn this girl is cynical. Although not surprising, coming from the Isle and its harsh life, I wouldn’t be surprised that therapy sounds indulgent._

Dr. Li knew Mal was going to be a hard nut to crack. But the fact the girl came to her, and not the other way around, made her hope that the fae was open to getting help.

“It can certainly seem that way. But that would be something I could, or someone else, help them work through. If a student had come to believe that, it would probably interfere in their life in a negative way. Not many people would allow that kind of behavior to continue with repercussions.”

“What about the royals that come to the school?”

_Touché_

“That I would think is something beyond just therapy. Now I can’t tell you who does or does not come to me, but would you not agree that royals have certain prerogatives innate in the social structure that would lend itself to that kind of behavior and not simply talking to one person who is a sympathetic ear?”

“I guess…” Mal didn’t know much about royal life, other than most were stuck up jerks to her and her friends. She could admit that she had seen teachers and other students, not Dr. Li necessarily, who fawned over the royals and that’s where the future kings and queens of Auradon got their sense of superiority.

“And it’s more than just letting them vent or talk about their feelings. It’s about exploring why they may be feeling a certain way. Or trying to figure out why they acted in such a way. It’s not only being compassionate and empathetic, it’s about finding a better way to deal with things than they have before.”

That struck a nerve within Mal. Thinking about all the ways they “dealt” with having to live on the
Isle. Those ways were no longer working, and she could sense that Auradon was so fundamentally different, that she didn’t want those ways to work anymore. She thought about all the ways she and the others had prepared for winter, even though they were in a school that fed them plenty.

She thought about all the stuff she and Jay had stolen and bartered to get money, in case they had to run off. She knew logically that they took the risk of being expelled simply for stealing. So stealing to prepare for having to leave was in itself would cause expulsion, so it was rather counterproductive.

When they first got there, it was never a question that they’d steal. They just knew it was something they had to do. Stealing was a natural instinct, it was as easy as breathing. That was the only way to survive on the Isle. The strong stole from the weak, and they would get to live another day. That’s just how life worked.

The longer they stayed and wanted to stay in Auradon, all those natural instincts didn’t feel so natural anymore.

So what were they left with? She wasn’t sure. It sounded like talking to Dr. Li was the way to find out, but still part of her didn’t trust any adult in Auradon.

Then she thought of Carlos and all the garbage Cruella instilled in him. It’s why she even came to Dr. Li in the first place.

“So how do you get people to go to therapy?”

Dr. Li thought that was an interesting turn of events.

*So she’s not here for herself, that much is clear.*

“Unless they are in danger of hurting themselves or others, we don’t ‘get’ people to come to therapy. They have to go themselves.”

For a second, Mal thought of a compulsion potion; forcing Carlos to go for his own good. But that impulse was shaken off immediately. She would never use magic against him, or any of the others, in such a way. It would violate the trust they had in each other in such a way that they’d never forgive her and she wouldn’t blame them.

“But what if they really need it?” Mal pressed on, thinking Dr. Li would know a way to at least get Carlos into one session. She had an almost impossible time making the appointment, the idea of therapy so foreign to her as she knew it’d be foreign to the rest.

She still wasn’t sure if she really believed in it, but she’d do anything for Carlos.

Dr. Li could read between the lines and figured that Mal wanted one of the others to go to a counselor. She figured something had happened, something that caused the bad week and Mal was clearly the leader of the Isle Four.

So Dr. Li would use that to her advantage.

“Perhaps they do, but we can’t force them unless we have just cause to…sometimes we get scared to ask for help. It’s hard to make yourself vulnerable and admit when life gets overwhelming and that we can’t do it all by ourselves. We also get the impression that perhaps we’re the only one going through it, and if everyone else is working just fine, then they should be too. They feel as if asking for help is a sign of weakness or that we’re lacking something. But maybe if they had someone they trusted and respected to lead by example, then they wouldn’t be so afraid.
Mal understood what the doctor was hinting at, and she meant it when she thought she’d do anything for Carlos.

“So tell me more about doctor-patient confidentiality…”

Later in the day, Mal joined the others for dinner. It seemed like another typical night, everyone had caught up on their homework and the one bad grade was just a memory. Each had enough extra credit where the test basically didn’t happen. Their next tests were their usual A’s, so the teachers had not mentioned it either.

“So I was thinking next week we could make a Target run. With Tourney and homework, I think we have next Wednesday free. Is that ok with you guys?” Evie asked them as she tried to fit in a store trip to get toiletries and other stuff they may want.

“I can’t do Wednesday, I have an appointment with Dr. Li after school,” Mal said casually as if it were just another school activity.

She remained cool and ate her dinner as the three friends looked quizzically at her, unsure of what she just said.

“Why are you seeing Dr. Li?” Carlos asked gently, wondering why she would see the counselor.

“Well,” she started and swallowed, hoping to buy a few seconds to get her courage together. “…I’ve been having a hard time keeping my temper in check with some of the other assholes here and just need some help to work through that. Plus, I think I could use some help with balancing school and…personal life. We have so much going on. The books in the library said that seeing the school counselor could help with all that. I figured since it’s free, might as well.”

Mal wasn’t sure what they thought as they all remained silent, but it seemed as if they were at least thinking of it too.

“Plus I feel like I just don’t get so much of what Auradonians do and why, maybe she can help me figure out why they’re all so stupid.”

That last part was meant to be sarcastic but the blue witch caught onto the idea.

“Oh, like anthropology,” Evie inferred, and Mal didn’t correct her. If her friend could make therapy sound normalized and more appealing, then she’d let her. “I think that could be helpful…”

The blue haired witch went on to expound upon the potential advantages of going to counseling, Mal agreed and acted as if it were not a big deal. She needed help, she was getting it, there wasn’t anything wrong with it.

Simple.

That night in bed, Mal and Carlos snuggled and waited to fall asleep.

“Is everything alright?” he asked, wanting to make sure everything was OK.

“Yeah,” she knew he was referencing the counseling. “I just need some help…being in Auradon. It’s so different from the Isle, and I’m having a hard time with a few things…like not punching Audrey in the face.”

They both smirked at the joke, but Carlos contemplated his girlfriend seeking help. He couldn’t help but be surprised, thinking she had everything under control.
But if she didn’t, then she was the type to do something about getting it fixed.

Evie and Jay were also on board, they had already talked about making appointments to see Dr. Li themselves.

*If going to counseling is a way to help her...then maybe I could try it too.*

He knew that he wasn’t handling being in Auradon all that well. He also knew he was going to have bad days like he had been having. He didn’t want to be carted off back to the Isle because he couldn’t handle being free.

He would never see her as anything other than fierce and strong, and if she could admit she needed help, then maybe it wouldn’t be so bad if he needed it too.

Perhaps it was providence that had Mal ask for Dr. Li’s help because the next day she had finally lost enough of her temper that she had twisted a boy’s wrist to the point of injury for mishandling a book. If she had waited, she would have been forced to see Dr. Li anyway.

It was a beautiful summer day and Crown Prince Ben wanted to enjoy the warm weather at the lake. Auradon Prep had an Olympic sized pool, but that was reserved for the swim team; the beach was crowded and sandy. He always preferred the Enchanted Lake. It was more than just magical, it was peaceful and secluded.

He thought it was a perfect place to take Mal for a first date. He had laid a spread of all her favorite foods at the ruins of the temple that had stood there centuries ago, she appreciated that he had taken the time and was observant enough to know what she always reached for during meal times. Of course there was a massive bowl of summer ripe strawberries, and a few new things she could try.

Strawberry donuts were a new love affair he had introduced her to. He loved to watch her try and enjoy new things, how her eyes would widen in glee or how she was unafraid to show joy in food. He found excuses to touch her such as wiping off a smudge of sweet jam that lingered on her lips.

He thought her enchanting when she blushed at the contact and let him linger longer than necessary. He smiled as he licked the jam off his finger, never taking his eyes off her and winking flirtatiously.

“So is this your first date?” he asked, he wasn’t sure why but he was invested in the answer.

“Hmmm...We don’t really date much on the island. It’s more like...gang activity.”

Something about her not having a boyfriend on the Isle, sent a sweet thrill through him.

“So what about you? Did you date much before me?”

“Not really, there was Audrey but it was more because I thought that was what I was supposed to do. I mean she was nice...,” he paused as Mal gave him an incredulous look. “…to me...and a good girlfriend. But I just never felt with her what I feel with you.”

She blushed prettily at his confession, happy that he felt the same way she did. Then a doubtful cast shadowed her face.

“And what will your parents say when you tell them you’re dating the daughter of the Mistress of Evil?”
He hated how downcast she seemed, she knew what others said behind her back and he thought about all the unfair things his own father had warned him about when he decreed the Villain Kids would come to Auradon.

He brought her hand to his heart and with his other hand, gently raised her chin so she would meet his eyes.

“Your mother might be the Mistress of Evil and I’ve got the poster parents for goodness. But we’re not automatically like them. We get to choose who we’re gonna be. And right now, and ever since I met you, I look into your eyes and I can tell you’re not evil. And I feel it here,” he pressed her hand harder into his chest, right above his heart.

She smiled sweetly at him, so touched that he could see past her legacy of evil and had such faith in her. She moved forward to kiss him, he felt warm and happy when he was with her.

They broke and just smiled at each other, enjoying the beautiful day and a perfect first date.

“Let’s go for a swim,” he impulsively suggested.

“Hmm? What? Uh…right now?” she asked, not so confident.

“Yeah, right now,” he wasn’t sure why but it seemed like the best idea at the moment, despite the fact neither had swimwear.

“I think I’m just gonna stay here.”

“No, no, no. Come on,” he needled. “Can you not swim?” he asked when it seemed she really didn’t want to go into the water.

“No.”

“You lived on an island,” he pointed out incredulous.

“Yeah, with a barrier around it,” she reminded him. He felt a little dumb for not remembering.

“Well, let me teach you. The water isn’t that deep and it’s such a nice day.”

Still, she looked hesitant as the water was always a forbidden area.

“I promise I won’t let you come to harm.”

He gave her wide puppy eyes and a charming smile that she couldn’t resist.

“Fine, but if I drown I will haunt you and this lake forever.”

He laughed at the thought of ghost Mal scaring off students from the lake, part of him rather liked the idea of having her around forever even if it were as a ghost. But as she started to take off her dress so she was down to her bra and panties, he very much preferred her alive.

He followed suit and undressed, ready to get into the water.

“Are those little crowns on your shorts?” she was amused at his choice of underwear.

“Maybe,” he replied cheekily. With a wink, “whoa! Ha-ha!” he jumped right into the water. He swam a few feet away. “Come in Mal, the water is perfect.”
Still weary of the water, she trusted Ben and took a tentative step into the lake. Once she felt the water was indeed a tepid temperature, she ventured further in. Ben swam towards her, holding onto her as she fully came into the water. He taught her how to tread water and then helped her float onto her back.

The water was rather nice and she felt safe with the Crown Prince. She had mastered floating and treading, and she knew where the shallow parts were so she wanted to take a break and stand. Still holding onto Ben as they swam through the lake, she stopped at a shallow end where she could stand head above water if she were on her tip toes. He was rather tall, so he stood comfortably and almost towered above her. She looked at him coyly and he let her pull him closer.

There was something about her smile that made his heart thunder inside his chest, he couldn’t help but feel that inviting her to Auradon was part of fate.

He knew he had been there before, with a girl with green eyes and lilac hair. That was how the story went, him and a beautiful girl by the lake.

He did not resist when she pulled him in for a kiss, deeper and more intense than any they shared so far. Wearing so little and with such privacy, the kiss felt intimate and carnal. He knew he should stop, it was only their first date and he was raised a gentleman. But he couldn’t resist and didn’t want to stop. His hands roamed every curve he had desired since he laid eyes on her. He wasn’t sure where the rest of their clothes went, but he suddenly found himself nude and achingly hard against her.

“Mal…” he sighed against her lips, giving a cursory resistance, but he knew it would not be heeded.

“It’s OK,” she assured him as she rubbed against him and wrapped her legs around his waist, the water giving her buoyancy. He had never been with a girl in such a way, he wasn’t sure what to do but did what came natural to him.

Staring deep into her jade and gold eyes, almost glowing with her desire for him. He entered her, hot wet and perfect.

“Ben,” she sighed into his ear.

Crown Prince Ben woke with a shock, blinking away the last vestiges of sleep. As he got his bearings, he found he was not at the Enchanted Lake on a perfect summer day but in his massive royal suite; it was November and definitely too cold to go swimming.

He also remembered that Mal absolutely had been dating on the island, and continued to date Carlos as he went over each moment of his dream. Most of it had faded away when he fully woke, he could only recall bits and pieces and nothing else.

He lifted his blanket to find that his shorts, the same blue and gold ones from his dream, were cooling and sticky and had soaked through to his sheets. He plopped his arm down and sighed in frustration. He threw the covers off and pulled the soiled linens off his bed and placed them in the laundry hamper. It wasn’t the first time such a thing had happened, so the goblins had provided him with extra bedding in case.

“I’m so glad we have goblins and not gossipy humans,” he mumbled to himself as he changed out of his dirtied shorts and cleaned himself, he then put on a fresh pair of simple black ones.

He saw from his antique clock that was was only 4:40am and he didn’t have to be up for several hours. He went back to bed to try to get more sleep, but tossed and turned, trying to find a comfortable
position. However, it was his mind that was abuzz and no position on his bed would be able to alleviate that.

He couldn’t keep from thinking of the dream at the Enchanted Lake. It wasn’t the first such a dream where he was with Mal and what ended up happening. He also had dreams of her at a gazebo in the castle gardens with all this favorite foods that she lovingly made for him. Then there was one where they were at Cotillion, where she wore a deep purple and black formal dress; one fit for a princess and she wore his signet ring.

He ignored what wearing his ring meant, and refused to think of Audrey whom he had been dating for almost a year and how she did not have that ring.

He tried not to think of what it meant that he had no intention of giving her that ring anytime soon.

He felt guilty for dreaming of a girl that was not his girlfriend, more so because of the nature the dream had taken. He knew that such fantasies were normal. He had “the talk” with his father about his changing body and how nocturnal emissions and the dreams that caused them were just nature’s way of telling him he was a man grown.

But he couldn’t deny that there was a reoccurring theme to his dreams. That Mal was the star of them as of late, and besides the sex there was one thing they all had in common: they were dating.

He had to remind himself that she was perfectly happy with Carlos and it was just…physical. It couldn’t be anything else.

Mal is a beautiful girl, it’s normal to…have those kind of dreams. I’m sure this will pass.

That’s what he told himself over and over again, he only hoped that he didn’t turn beet red when he met with her later that day to brainstorm over more ways to get his program off the ground.

Ben was a perfect gentleman, through and through. When he met with Mal after school, he was certain there was no indication of what kind of dream he had of her the night before.

Bringing strawberry jam donuts was just a courtesy, they worked late hours and sometimes they just needed the snacks.

It had nothing to do with his dream, it was just coincidence that they were in the mix box he ordered.

It helped that Evie was also there and both girls enjoyed the sweets, not just Mal.

He thought perhaps having Evie there would break up some of the more salacious rumors he knew was being said behind his back about him and the fae girl.

The rumors were annoying on so many levels. They were unfair aspersions on not only his character, but Mal’s. Neither of them had ever acted in such a way for others to speculate they would cheat on their significant others. Even if Mal weren’t dating Carlos, Ben was not the type to be unfaithful and it incensed him that others would think he would be so callous or insensitive.

He could admit there was a physical attraction on his part, but that didn’t mean he was some cad that would totally disregard his girlfriend’s feelings and disrespect her in such a way. Although Chad was his best friend and had been since they were in diapers, he could admit his friend was a rake and would never want him dating a sister if he had one or any female relative of his. The Charming prince was the exact type of guy the rumors were about and was overall a creep in terms of boyfriends. But Ben wasn’t Chad and would never want to be him. It was even more infuriating when Audrey would make those implications. The fae had always kept a respectful distance and, to
his disappointment and would vehemently deny if asked, was more or less indifferent to his presence.

Getting to know the Isle teen, he also knew that if the attraction was mutual that he knew she wouldn’t be the type to cheat, much less tolerate being “the other woman.” Not to be narcissistic, but he thought that both he and Mal were exemplary partners and it wasn’t fair for either of them to be painted as these uncaring scoundrels that had no control over their libidos.

He specifically avoided any thought of an instance where if Mal were single and interested that perhaps Audrey would have a legitimate fear of their relationship ending.

But that wasn’t the case so he thought it ultimately didn’t matter.

He only hoped the rumors wouldn’t then morph to include Evie in some scandalous threesome.

Ben was happy to find the blue haired Isle teen was a refreshing addition to their weekly meetings. She brought a softness to Mal’s harsh utilitarian mentality.

“I do think that inviting younger children would be a better way to go,” Evie agreed with Mal’s plan. “Most of our age group had dropped out of school and started work on their parents’ farms. I really don’t know how well they’d fit in.”

That was the lie they both came up with, if any villain child Ben mentioned wasn’t in school or if they weren’t sure what happened to them, the go to excuse would be “They work on their parents’ farm.”

It wasn’t a total lie; most were pulled out of Dragon Hall because their parents needed help to grow the scant food that did grow on the island or whatever legitimate trade there was to be had on the Isle. They just would lump them all together instead of parsing out the ones who started to learn how to be good henchmen or less savory trades.

“And I think since we have the experience of being here and from the Island, maybe we could act as mentors to any new children?” Evie went on to suggest.

“That’s a great idea,” Ben enthused honestly, he had struggled to try to be welcoming and have others welcome the Isle Four. But most of his fellow classmates were still scared or indifferent. His own schedule had always been full with his own school activities, homework, or princely duties. Most days he felt that he had abandoned them with no real help, but thankfully they all seem to be acclimating well.

Mal sort of hated the idea, mostly because she had no desire to “mentor” children from the Isle; a good portion of them being brats and her preferred method of dealing with them was to growl at them until they went away.

But she deferred to Evie and Ben to decide on what was suitable for once the children were on Auradonian soil, and just smiled and nodded. She was certain any child she was stuck with, she could fob off onto Evie or Carlos.

“So, is there anyone in mind for who to invite? Unfortunately we are still woefully limited in space. I know Mal suggested someone younger, around ten. And someone from a lesser known villain, maybe nobles that were banished for crimes against the crown rather than world domination. At least if they are noble, they will have some connection to Auradonian culture that way. Maybe even try to get someone who had an artistic talent, as they’re seen as ‘softer’ and can endear themselves to the public,” Ben started to rattle off more descriptions as he looked over previous notes.

Evie’s eyes widened as he described someone that was near and dear to her heart, she looked to Mal
who looked her dead in the eye and basically told her that her description was by design and not just thought up randomly during a meeting.

“Evie was actually a…babysitter,” Mal had to think of the Auradonian term, “on the Isle. She actually knows most of the kids best. So I think she should come up with a list of candidates.”

Mal left out that the children Evie watched were offspring of whores, the few who were popular enough that the customers didn’t mind that they had birthed babes.

“Great, we can put the list in front of the council and we can start working on getting them to Auradon,” Ben went on oblivious as to the inner machinations of the fae and how he was being manipulated.

Evie had to control herself, otherwise she might cry in happiness and relief that Mal laid the grown work to get a child she had considered her little sister to Auradon. So many ideas of what to do and what to show her once she was rescued from the Isle flittered through Evie’s head, so glad she was part of these meetings.

“I know we don’t want to raise taxes,” Evie started another idea; she knew the basics of taxation. They had it on the Isle, at least a version of it. Maleficent demanded tribute for her “protection” and that essentially was a public service that the rest of the islanders had to pay. While in Maleficent’s case, if she wanted more tribute then there was nothing anyone could do but pay, in Auradon the citizens had the right to complain and would. “But maybe instead of taxes to raise funds, maybe we can do a charity banquet? I’ve seen them on RBN, charge people for a seat and they get to show off that not only were they invited but their wealth with grand dresses and jewelry.”

Ben started to write down the idea, wishing he had thought of it earlier. His mother threw all kinds of charity balls and banquets for libraries. He knew Audrey’s family threw them for hospitals. He was certain people would want another excuse to give their money away to a good cause.

“Make sure Charming and Li go, that should be enough celebrity and royals to have those noble lemmings come running,” Mal said snidely, cynical that anyone did anything for charity.

It was all a big show to rub it in everyone’s faces that not only where they wealthy enough to afford sumptuous dresses and jewels, but had even more to give away.

It all made her rather ill that while Auradon threw “charity events” so they could congratulate each other for being such good people, children literally starved across the bay.

“Mal, don’t be grumpy. You’re going and you’re wearing one of those grand poofy dresses and you’ll like it.” Evie chided her friend.

Mal threw a face and slumped over in defeat, not looking forward to having to dress up like a doll.

Ben couldn’t help but chuckle, it was so amazing to see the supposed fearsome fae girl reduced to pouting. He saw them as two normal best friends, bickering.

He wished others could see this side of them.

Mal felt like a hostage when Evie and the Crown Prince would not shut up about what kind of charity they wanted to throw. She couldn’t believe all that went into it; choosing a theme, a dress code, a venue, a caterer, seating charts…the list went on and on.

And it wasn’t even the real event yet! They were just shooting back ideas because this was their warped sense of fun.
“Wow, Evie. It’s so great to have some new fresh ideas come to these meetings,” Ben complimented her. It was so nice to see her smile in thanks, whereas Mal normally rolled her eyes at any compliment and brushed him off. “There was one idea that I flew by Mal, but maybe you would like it…”

“No,” Mal interrupted him, not letting him finish as it was an idea that he brought up at every meeting.

“I’m just saying that doing an interview would endear you guys to Auradon. If people really got to know you and see that you’re normal teenagers, and not these fearsome villains in training…”

“That’s not going to happen. They have the documentary, that’s more than enough to show what it was like.”

Ben grew frustrated at her stubbornness, why couldn’t she see that it was a good idea? Why should only small children from the Isle be given the benefit of the doubt? He wanted others to see the good in them that he saw, but that would be impossible if they all kept hidden away from the world at Auradon Prep.

He tried to turn to Evie for help, thinking the easier going girl could convince her friend.

But it wasn’t the same situation where Evie would just tell Mal to relax or stop being cynical with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes. Mal’s demeanor had turned hard and from Evie’s tense shoulders, she was not about to chide or go against her friend on this one.

“I don’t think it’s a good idea Ben…we…we’re not exactly doe eyed children that could change their minds…they’ve made up their minds a long time ago, I don’t see a point,” Evie said quietly, suddenly becoming insecure and uncertain.

Ben sighed, knowing he was defeated again but he wouldn’t give up. People would see past their parentage and he’d figure out a way to convince them.

They wrapped up the meeting, Ben going towards his suite and Evie and Mal walking towards their room.

“I know you’d probably love to do an interview, but we can’t risk them asking questions about our life on the Isle,” Mal wanted to explain to Evie why she shut down the idea. “We’re taking a risk as it is to bring others over. If Auradon finds out…”

Evie ended Mal’s train of thought when she pulled her friend into a tight hug. The fae was surprised but returned the embrace.

“I know you put the idea of children into Ben’s head to help Dizzy,” Evie said into her ear. “I won’t ever be able to thank you enough for that.”

“I know she’s your sister,” Mal said back, thinking it was no big deal. Dizzy Tremaine wasn’t Evie’s blood sister, but she was aware of the special bond between the two and Cinderella’s step-niece was one of the few Isle children she could tolerate. While Dizzy was too young to bring to the warehouse, Evie would regale the young girl with descriptions of the amazing dresses and the grand events she saw on television. The little girl had a knack for creating beautiful accessories from the metal scraps Carlos gave to her and other items Jay stole and wouldn’t sell. Evie and Dizzy would spend hours playing dress up and fantasizing about the life of a princess in Auradon.

Mal was certain their room would be even more cluttered with fabrics and other haberdasheries than it always was once Dizzy came to Auradon. She could see her future filled with having to give an
opinion on color schemes and wearing prototype accessories.

If Mal didn’t practically live with Carlos, she might be irritated.

“And I know that you have our safety in mind…an interview could be dangerous. And I’ll make sure to choose children of loyal henchmen…children that knows it’s better to keep quiet and appreciate their chances rather than tell what we had to do on the Isle to survive.”

Mal then squeezed her tight, glad she understood.

“Just don’t stick me with Calvin Frollo if this mentoring idea becomes an actual thing…I hate that kid.”

Evie let out some nervous laughter, recalling all the times the child in question would pester Mal and the fae refraining from doing anything other than growl or hiss at him since there were a few lines even the daughter of Maleficent would not cross.

“I promise.”

The two broke apart and headed back to their dorms.

---

King Adam nursed a tumbler of scotch, the finest Ghàidhealtachd had to offer. A gift from King Fergus and Queen Elinor during the last Highland Games that he only indulged in when he was particularly stressed.

He waited in his private study, the one most didn’t know about as he only ever entertained those he did not want anyone, even his Queen, to see.

The study was more for show, it was one room among dozens in the palace.

Despite its seldom use and even redundancy, it still had every luxury his station demanded. The carpets were imported from Agrabah, the bookshelves lined with first editions; the leather binding well-oiled and pristine, the gold leaf shown as bright as it had when first laid.

The globe that held his hidden stash of scotch was made from the finest marble Westerly had to offer.

The ornate desk was hewn from rare magical trees in Sherwood Forest.

All the opulence only a handful had seen, even fewer had even physically stepped in. Still, it had its rare use when he made an important appointment.

His special guest had rushed into the office as a nameless servant allowed him in and disappeared just as quickly, the guest wasted no time in showing his discontent,

“Do you want to tell me why I’m getting invitations to Auradon Prep’s Winter Recital?” Cecil de Vil all but spat out with no intention for even basic pleasantries.

King Adam of House Bourbon did not appreciate the tone, he was used to deference no matter whom he was receiving. He also looked with disdain on how the other man was dressed: a tacky garish orange sports jacket over a green shirt and purple pants which stood out even more against his dark skin. His black and platinum hair was pulled back in a strict ponytail, showing a deep widow’s peak. His gaudy look complete with a goatee, a lone white stripe in the middle of pitch black hair. The King tried not to gag on whatever cheap cologne the man used and surrounded him like a fog.
Everything about him just screamed nouveau riche commoner.

Given the nature of their meeting, he was willing to forgive de Vil’s rudeness this once.

“Probably because your nephew attends,” Kind Adam replied dryly.

Cecil sneered at the King’s condescending tone, not willing to be kowtowed.

“Nephew,” he scoffed harshly, the word like poison in his mouth. “He’s nothing but my sister’s bastard. He should never have been born, much less be allowed to carry the de Vil name. I can’t believe that weak sniveling idiot of a husband who took our name, followed her to the Isle just to become a cuckold.”

Growing up wealthy meant nothing in Auradon if one didn’t hold a title. Cecil had fought his entire life to bring prestige to the de Vil name, hating that a baseborn bastard was parading around in the most exclusive school Auradon had to offer with his family’s name and reminding everyone of its common origin.

The rumors that the boy was part fairkind or some other magical Creature made it all the more unbearable.

“You are free to contest his name in court. Although I doubt you’d get anywhere. Common law doesn’t differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate issue, does it?”

And that was the dilemma at hand, Carlos was Cruella’s rightful heir regardless of the nature of his birth. Only royals enjoyed the prerogative to disinherit natural children.

Cecil also didn’t want to risk taking Carlos to court, it may remind too many people that Cruella was once an extremely wealthy woman, an heiress to a lucrative merchant legacy that spanned generations and head of a vast fashion empire, an empire that Cecil currently controlled.

“I wasn’t even aware Carlos even knew about you to invite you to the Winter Recital.”

“He didn’t. This is a formal royal invitation. Your son is dabbling in affairs he has no right to be in.”

Adam couldn’t argue with that, his son had a talent for meddling into matters he clearly wasn’t ready for.

“He has a tender heart. The news stations are all over it, the Good Crown Prince Ben. It’s a phase,” he tried to placate the de Vil patriarch. Certainly all their hard work would not be torn asunder by a mere boy, there was no use in getting so worked up over nothing.

“This ‘phase’ could cost us everything,” the man was on the verge of hysterics, his arms flailing about with emotions he couldn’t keep to himself.

It was only years of practiced diplomacy that restrained Adam from rolling his eyes, he thought Cecil was being over dramatic.

“de Vil, it’s just the two of us here. There’s no need for the theatrics. Have a drink,” the King told him dismissively, clearly over dealing with his hysteria.

“Need I remind you whose campaign contributions funded your war against the fae? That it was de Vil money that made you king of all eighteen kingdoms,” the CEO of House de Vil growled, losing patience with the king’s cavalier attitude and almost stomped his foot in petulance.
“It’s just an invitation, you are more than free to ignore it. I’m sure my son was merely extending it as a formality as Carlos’ few living family in Auradon.”

“Your soft hearted brat and his decree!” Cecil yelled, pacing about the room. “I’m already fielding petitions from nosey family members who want to meet the little half-breed. Luckily I’ve convinced them that he wants nothing to do with us, hates us for leaving him on the Isle. I barely convinced them I had no idea Cruella even had a child. He was supposed to die in infancy, if the Isle didn’t kill them surely my evil harpy of a sister would have ignored him to death. My idiot cousin P.H. will not let the issue go. Malevola at least feels guilty enough to believe he wants nothing to do with them. Ivy was too young, she’s living the high life in Westerly and could not care less. I will not have decades of hard work and everything I’ve built destroyed because your son decides he wants to play Patron Saint of Isle Trash.”

The mention of his son being derided had King Adam growling and he slammed down his tumbler on the massive desk, the sound of glass almost breaking and splashing liquor on such expensive furniture, making the CEO jump.

“You will remember whose house you’re in, Mr. de Vil,” Adam stressed to remind Cecil he was nothing more than a commoner with no title and no one to use such familiarity. “You will not speak of my son in such a way or in such a tone. He is still your Crown Prince and will be your future King.”

“Of course Your Majesty, but need I remind you that without my help, you would not be King and your son no Crown Prince of all 18 Kingdoms? And who continues to support your kingship and any anti-fae or anti-magic law you wished passed? It’s not cheap nor is it easy to keep lesser royals and nobles from appealing to fae favor and help their families via magic. Or to distract them from how expensive it is to hire actual workers rather than rely on magic? I’m sure if the de Vil well ran dry, well you’d find much more magic in your kingdom than any formally cursed royal would wish to have,” Cecil spat back, not going to allow even a king to speak to him in such a way.

Cecil had gone too far, mentioning magic and how many lesser kings and queens would welcome the unregulated use of magic to prop up their rules, perhaps to gain their independence? Adam would not live in a land where fae or enchantresses could freely wield their magic to curse humans as they saw fit or on their whims.

There would be no Beast again.

“Need I remind you who helped you gain control of said money you keep bringing up?” King Adam growled inhumanely, eyes turning golden with his barely concealed anger; two could play at the game Cecil wished to play.

“Hmm? Who banished Cruella to an Isle made for villains for the mere crime of conspiracy and reckless driving? Cruella never actually stole those animals. It was only with the recommendation of a doctor that I hired diagnose her with bi polar depression and schizophrenia. I’m sure if we were to revisit her condition, with new advancements in medicine and therapy, perhaps she would deserve a second chance in Auradon and could manage her disease. I’m sure His Royal Highness would be all too pleased to give her that second chance and maybe even pardon her, as I’m sure any barrister today would consider it far too harsh a punishment for the crimes actually committed. I’m sure I can scrounge up the humility to admit I was wrong for such a low level villain. Also, without my help you’d still be a bumbling sycophant on Cruella’s board of trustees and begging for scraps. Let’s also not forget who put you forward as executor of her trust, a position that could have gone to any one of your many insipid relatives. Malevola, Coup, P.H., even Ivy who is now of age; all who were closer to her and have stocks in House de Vil. Trustee is not some for life position. You are
“easily replaced.”

Cecil refrained from retorting, seeing as how he clearly pushed too far and King Adam’s threat all too real.

“And lets talk about ‘your’ money. How much of it was gained from Cruella’s massive trust? How many businesses did you start? How many estates and how much property have you bought? All supposedly on behalf of the beneficiary, Cruella? And if Carlos was so inclined to research his family tree, how much of that wealth is rightfully his? As successor trustee, you only get a stipend to manage her trust. Whatever money or investments are made from your management, that’s still hers is it not? I can’t quite remember, perhaps I need a barrister to remind me.”

The two men stared at each, knowing each of their fate was entwined together and it was in everyone’s best interest that they remain allies. While Adam could make threats, it would be an absolute disaster if anyone found out his hand in Cruella’s fate, and he knew the slimly weasel in front of him would sing like a canary if caught.

Adam’s entire reign would be put into question. He could not only lose all eighteen kingdoms, he had doubts he could manage to hold onto his own by birthright. He knew that the Charmings were always itching to expand and never quite on board with Unification. They were certainly too pro-fae for his liking. Nadine FéeMarraine installed as headmistress to a school he founded was proof of the Charming’s influence. The Dornröschens were opportunists; although he helped them keep their ancestral seat, they would not hesitate to take back their full crown.

He didn’t even want to think of what his Queen and son would think of the lengths he went to secure the crowns on their heads; how far he was willing to go to protect them from the vindictiveness of an Enchantress or errant fae that felt they had the right to curse those who had wronged them, real or imagined.

No one really thought too hard on the de Vil money. All the public and shareholders knew was that it was a successful business. They were all too happy to forget who started it all, the woman banished and left to languish on an island full of criminals. The money kept rolling in regardless.

No one asked about Carlos’ inheritance, and the boy certainly hadn’t; it was best for everyone if no one ever did.

It would be better for everyone if Carlos remained in the dark and simply was grateful to be in Auradon, which is exactly what both men thought should be the case.

“Listen,” Adam tried to reason with the other man after he calmed down. “It would help neither of us if Carlos got curious about his mother’s money. He didn’t send you an invite, and I doubt Ben had told him he invited you since you will clearly give some convenient excuse to not attend to spare the brat’s feelings. It’s been decades since the Dalmatian incident, barely anyone even really remembers Cruella. They certainly don’t know about her trust or the inner workings of a vast corporation. And even if Carlos did manage to find you and figure out the trust, I doubt the board would approve a minor to take over. The shareholders certainly wouldn’t want a teenager in charge, even if he had been raised properly in Auradon. They especially wouldn’t want some mangy Isle bastard. And still, even if he pressed for his rightful inheritance, any suit would be tied up in court for years. He doesn’t have the money to hire an attorney to even think of going against House de Vil and their army of lawyers. You’d also have the full support of House Bourbon as well. P.H. will soon give up, I’ll throw a grant or two his way for whatever silly invention he’s working on. I’ll have Hershey develop some new candy or whatever. He’ll forget all about the illegitimate spawn of his cousin soon enough.”
Cecil relaxed, while he thought Adam pompous, it was still better to have royal favor than it was to not.

“Then I think we understand each other your Majesty. I will see myself out.”

King Adam waved him off, acting as if the whole meeting was a waste of his time and everything was still the status quo.

Cecil huffed, still angry and rattled and walked himself out of the palace.

He didn’t believe on trusting anyone besides himself. King Adam may think the little bastard would simply never question his inheritance, Cecil was determined that he would never get the chance.

As he started to pull out of the drive way, he got on his phone,

“Alexa, get me the head coach of Sherwood Forest High School Preparatory College.”

Chapter End Notes

Cliff hanger! Dunn, dunn dunn dunn. Plot twist too! I want people to talk about this sooo badly, I'm nerding out over my own writing and I'm not afraid to say it!

Second half I really hope will be no more than a week away, but aiming for weekend. Wish me luck! lol

echomoon: as you read, we should be worried about what a lot of people are going to do. lol
Starting the last weeks of November, Auradon Prep was in a flurry of activity. The school was preparing for Winter Recital, a time where parents visited and could see their children’s achievement in the arts.

The tourney team had made it to the semi-finals, the talk of Auradon had their odds at winning the championship that year.

The Isle Four had seemingly found a balance between school and their personal lives. The poor test score was a distant memory and they looked forward to a long winter break.

Auradon Prep took the last week of December off until the last week of January. The Four looked forward to an empty campus, they’d have much more free time to be together and to practice magic; which had been put on the back burner for the sake of their academic studies.

Jay and Carlos geared up for Tourney practice, both had been running plays as either a charger or a defender; their method of switching out when needed was a successful tactic and the coach was running them through the plays at both positions.

Both teens made sure they had their bands on them, the girls were in the dorms or library studying and doing homework; the almost winter air too cold to watch from the stands any longer.

“Jay, Carlos, please stay behind,” Coach Jenkins asked them as the team had prepared to leave for the field.

They looked at each other, wondering why they would be asked to stay behind. Neither knew, they then looked to their teammates who seemed just as clueless.
“See you guys on the field,” Ben told them, trying to be encouraging; he figured it wasn’t anything too serious otherwise he should have heard about it beforehand.

They both nodded to the Crown Prince, hoping they would see them soon on the field and that whatever the Coach wanted was a trifling matter not to get anxious over.

Still, they were weary of adults in Auradon. Most had still looked at them with suspicion, thinking it was just a matter of time before they had broken the rules and proved unworthy of their place. Things had gotten better since joining the team and winning games, although both saw it for the farce it was. It shouldn’t matter if they were good at sports and brought glory to the school. They shouldn’t have to be school champions just to get a baseline of respect that other students got from just existing.

“Boys, sit,” Coach directed them and their anxiety started to rise. They obeyed and waited for him to speak.

“There’s no easy way to put this so I’ll be blunt. Sherwood Forest has filed a complaint with the UKSAA: The United Kingdom’s Student Athletic Association. They are accusing us of using players with ‘unfair magical advantage.’”

Coach had all but spit the last part of, infuriated that anyone would accuse him or his players of cheating.

It took a few minutes for the news to sink in, they were unsure of what that meant and what it had to do with them. Slowly they realized that the other school was accusing them of cheating, essentially. That their athletic ability was somehow tainted because of their magical heritage. They remained silent, what could they do? They would readily admit, even if it wasn’t common knowledge, that they had at least one magical parent. It was no secret that Jafar had turned djinn and retained his magical status although his powers bound. Before that, he was a powerful sorcerer. Everyone knew Carlos was not Fisher de Vil’s son, but the progeny of some unknown violent magical being. He had heard students tittering and gossiping, all speculating what his inheritance was. He didn’t know who exactly had leaked that information as he had only told the school doctor, but it was never something he would ever deny.

Mal had been researching but still, nothing had come of it yet.

They couldn’t very well tell the coach that they had never used magic on the field and took measures to prevent it, both wanting to win on their own merit.

All they had was their word that their athletic abilities were their own, and not products of unnatural enchantments.

But what good was the word of an Isle child? The offspring of villains?

In Auradon, they were guilty until they could prove themselves innocent.

“Are we kicked off the team?” Carlos asked lowly, all but resigned to his fate. He put his hand over Jay’s, the other teen fuming and trying to keep his anger and disappointment in. Everything they had done, all that they had worked for was for naught with a few words. The long haired teen had keep his bearings, glad to have Carlos with him otherwise he might have punched a locker by then.

“No, at least not yet and not if I can help it. You are suspended from the team for now, but we have called an emergency arbitration. We have an appointment with the representatives from Sherwood and the UKSAA’s Arbitrator on Saturday. Until then, you will see the school’s legal rep.”

“What for?” Carlos asked, wondering why they would need legal counsel.
“As part of the process, Sherwood and the Arbitrator will probably ask you uncomfortable questions about your heritage, abilities and…your family. We don’t want you to go in blind and unprepared, so the rep will go over some questions they are likely to ask and coach you through how to answer.”

Coach went over a few more things, such as when to meet the rep and how they aren’t to talk to the team.

Over the week, they went through several meetings with the rep; told to be honest but to only answer the question asked and no more.

“Let them work for the information they want.”

Thankfully they had professional business suits made by Evie already. They were already bespoke and fit perfectly, they lacked all the typical flair of her designs but that’s what they wanted. They wanted to look serious and not like they were trying to win a fashion show.

“It was smart of Mal to ask for these last month, we did end up needing them,” Evie commented as she fixed Carlos’ tie and made sure everything was impeccable.

“Right, I knew we’d need something plainer…foresight,” Mal mumbled from behind her as she also got ready for the arbitration.

Carlos remained silent as he blushed, hoping Evie didn’t notice and ask why. He didn’t think he could answer her and get rid of his flush if his quasi sister found out exactly why Mal had wanted the suits.

He also had to remind himself that they were wearing the suits for a real purpose and not for fun.

Jay noticed Carlos’ shifty eyes and looked at him suspiciously, he had an inkling of why and under normal circumstances would have asked loudly and obnoxiously, but with a hard look from Mal he shut up instantly and thought to save it for after the meeting.

While Evie and Carlos were distracted with going over prep questions, Jay smiled at Mal and raised his hand for a high-five.

She huffed and rolled her eyes, but then thought about it and decided she deserved one and their hands met mid-air to congratulate her on her sexual exploits to which Jay was extremely proud to call her his best friend.

Both made sure neither their significant others saw what transpired as they knew both of them would be scolded.

Coach Jenkins waited for the boys outside the castle dorms, pleased to see they were punctual as they walked out. He nodded his approval of their wardrobe choices, perfectly acceptable for the situation. He was a little less pleased by the presence of the girls. They weren’t on the team and it was supposed to be a closed arbitration. But neither boy would budge and Headmistress FéeMarraine agreed that the girls wouldn’t be a distraction. If anything, they helped calm the boys down and without parents Coach could see that they needed someone familiar with them.

Besides holding hands, none of the teens were doing anything untoward or inappropriate, so he let it slide. He had made sure to let the girls know they were not to interfere in the arbitration, and to not speak unless asked a direct question which should not be the case.

Jenkins made the mistake of looking the fae directly in the eyes. It was only for a second, but those intense soul searing eyes ran a chill through his body. He knew it was only an old wives’ tale, but he
couldn’t help but worry for a second that the girl might make some unholy deal to spare the boys from the whole mess or curse him for failing to protect them from the malice of other adults.

He didn’t know how else to describe Ms. Lefay other than as hawkish. She was short and slim, but she looked ready for battle and could stand up against full grown adults twice her size. He had never come across any teen that didn’t at least have some fearful respect for adults.

Although her cheekbones and ears were not as sharp as he had seen in pictures of full blooded fae, they were still higher and pointer than a regular human’s. She was just enough fae to be a daunting and unnerving beauty.

*Gods, I hope I’m not ever on her bad side.*

Jenkins had to remind himself that Dr. FéMarraine had assured him that the accusations from Sherwood were baseless; that with no magical training, none of them would be able to cheat as Sherwood accused. Even if they had powers and used them to cheat on the field, she would have noticed and stopped it immediately. Any powers that manifested, which they hadn’t during games she repeatedly said, would be accidental.

Homecoming dance aside, none of them had shown any unintentional magic other than a few glowing eyes when they were upset; which weren’t even bouts of magic, just something fae did by nature.

He subconsciously inched towards the star fae, knowing that if the four teens were magical and got violent, they would not be able to go against a fully grown and studied fae adult.

The Isle teens were surprised to see Headmistress FéMarraine there. She wore her usual lavender suit sans the large ornamental bow. As always, she had a smile on her face and spoke as if they weren’t about to be put on the stand for simply being born by magical parents.

“Morning everyone,” she said in her usual sing song cadence and took a moment to observe them. “You all look so smart in your suits.”

“Thank you Headmistress,” Mal spoke for them. “Evie made them.”

The magical history teacher gushed over the blue haired girl’s talent.

The Four were even more surprised when the tourney team showed up to wish them luck.

“We know you guys aren’t cheaters,” Chad said, speaking as if the whole thing was stupid and beneath them. “Those asshats are just angry we made it to the semi-finals, and will kick their ass at championship.”

“Hemmm, hemmm,” Professor FéMarraine cleared her throat, letting the Cinderellaberg heir know his language was not becoming of a student of Auradon Prep, much less a prince. There was no real heat, and she was glad that the students were so supportive of their teammates.

The other team members all agreed.

“You guys have nothing to worry about,” Lonnie encouraged. “Chad’s right, this is some pathetic attempt to knock us out of the championship and get revenge for Homecoming. Sherwood always plays dirty.”

“You guys will be fine, I’m sure this will all be sorted out,” Ben also gave encouragement. He wished he could go, as Crown Prince of Auradon City he was technically their guardian. But the
legal reps thought his presence would give Sherwood cause to say they were being biased; they had to appear as neutral as possible.

Neither Isle boy knew what to say, but both were touched at the solidarity. They nodded their thanks and even clasped hands with a few that offered theirs in unity.

A limo similar to the one that picked them up from the Isle pulled up to the driveway, sans the Auradon standard. When the teens and their adult guardians all got in, they saw that it was empty of all the sweets and confections Ben had previously provided. Again, Mal was in the front seat to avoid her motion sickness, she forewent any medication as she wanted to be fully awake to be there for her friends.

The ride was tense and silent, Headmistress FéeMarraine tried to make small talk but the rest were too nervous to partake. The ride into the city seemed to take twice as long as any of them could remember.

Although they wished the ride would be over with, when they got to their destination they weren’t ready to get out. They were let out in front of a towering sky scraper, all straining their necks to try to see to the top. They had never seen such a tall building, all glass and metal and more imposing than any turret from a castle they had ever seen.

Mal took note of the placard on the outside of the building, burnished brass against a black background:

Hautecourt, Szalinski, & Matthews LLP

It all eerily reminded her of Auradon Prep, everything so formal and staunch.

The legal reps from Auradon Prep were outside the building, waiting to usher them inside. Besides a few different color schemes, it seemed there was some sort of uniform for going to a legal office; business suits in tame colors. Mal took note that many of the females working in the office also sported tight buns or braids that kept their hair out of their faces. All of them walking so tall and confident, their heels clicking with their every step as they strode assertively to their destination.

Mal felt a certain kinship to this new environment. She certainly was interested in the rows of books that lined the waiting room. She didn’t really hear the assistant telling them to wait and that they would be shown the room momentarily. She went to peruse the shelves, and continued to do so when no one tried to stop her.

She felt like she was in a more crowded and brighter library, Auradon at large seemed to have a penchant for marble and dark wood furniture; all materials used to show off wealth and intimidate.

The books were all leather bound and deep forest green, the letters gilded. She tilted her head to read softly out loud,

“United Kingdom Codes.”

She found it fascinating that they would put rules and laws into books. On the Isle, the law was whatever Maleficent said it was, and it could change on her whim. In Auradon, the law was written down. It was the same for everyone and people could point to it if ever challenged.

Whether or not the law was the same for everyone in practice was a different matter, but she could respect the idea behind writing them down.

She stopped at one particular volume. She wasn’t sure why, but that green book among many looked
Before she could pull the tome from its place, the assistant had told them their conference room was ready. Her interest in the book was immediately forgotten as nerves started to set in. She grabbed Carlos’ hand and gave it a reassuring squeeze, that while she was relegated to a seat behind him, she was there for him.

The boys, the legal reps, Coach Jenkins, and Professor Féemarraine were sat at a long mahogany conference table. A bronze and black carafe filled with water sat in the middle, plastic cups beside it. The table was lined with rows of black swivel chairs, along the wall were similar stationary chairs. The girls were guided to sit there, both wishing they could sit next to their boyfriends but they were barely allowed to attend at all so they kept quiet.

Next the Sherwood Forest group came in. Mal didn’t recognize any of them, but Coach Jenkins had called at least one of them Coach Miller, and he had introduced the others as their own legal representatives.

Mal couldn’t help but notice that there wasn’t a fae or magical person among them. She internally scoffed, wondering how they were going to comment on the boys’ magical heritage with no one familiar with magic.

The adults exchanged pleasantries, although their tone was tense and formal.

Jay and Carlos refused to be made small, they looked directly into the eyes of the Sherwood coaches and reps even as they looked them up and down.

The group then stood at attention when an older man had come into the room. He wore a pristine navy blue business suit with matching tie and carried a leather folder.

“Good morning ladies and gentlemen, I am Gerald Ducksworth – senior counsel – and I will be arbitrating this process. You will address me as ‘Arbitrator.’”

Everyone had responded respectfully, the Auradon Prep team introduced themselves and the boys.

The Sherwood Forest team did the same.

“All right, let’s sit down,” the Arbitrator commanded.

The Arbitrator had taken a seat at the head of the table, and opened his folder and went over some notes. Behind him a discreet woman with what looked to be an odd keyboard started to set up a computer.

“Arbitrator, I am ready,” she said softly to him and he nodded his acknowledgement.

“Please let the record show that we are here today to discuss a grievance involving magical students playing in the UKSAA sanctioned sport of tourney, is that right?”

“Yes,” the Sherwood rep had succintly responded.

The other counsel had also agreed.
“Alright, so what is the issue?”

“Arbitrator, we are here because we suspect that given students Jay al-Jina and Carlos de Vil’s peculiar heritage, that it is unfair to have them play with the normal…”

“I must interject, Arbitrator. Can counsel please refrain from referring to non-magical students as ‘normal,’ it’s prejudicial,” Ms. Hogarth, the Auradon Prep counsel interrupted him.

“I agree, sustained.” Mr. Ducksworth immediately conceded.

“My apologies,” Although everyone doubted Mr. Labarthe, Sherwood Forest’s rep’s sincerity. “Non-magical students. We are simply asking that the playing field remain fair and not allow any school, not just Auradon Prep, to have the advantage of magically endowed players on their roster.”

“Auradon Prep, your response?”

“First off, we’d like to point out that it’s not illegal, in Auradon or in any USKAA bylaws, to have magical parents. Secondly, the students in question have never used magic as they grew up on the Isle of the Lost. An island that is surrounded by a barrier that binds magic of any sort. We have an expert on magic and magic use ready to testify that not only have these players, or any student at Auradon Prep, never used magic during an event, but could not even if they wanted to,” Ms. Hogarth motioned towards Dr. FéeMarraine.

“And you are? Please state your full name and credentials.” the Arbitrator asked to get it on record.

“I am Doctor Nadine FéeMarraine. I have a triple MagD in magical history, magical theory, and phosphotransfiguration from the Merlin Institute of Magic. I teach magical history as well as magical safety at Auradon Preparatory, and have been there the past ten years and have been headmistress the past four. I am a member of the Royal Order of Benevolent Fae. I also have a license for benign magical use in case of emergencies and teaching purposes.”

“Does Sherwood wish to raise a Daubert motion?”

“No, Arbitrator.”

“Alright, this process accepts Dr. FéeMarraine’s expert testimony should the need arise. Mr. Labarthe, the floor is yours.”

“Thank you Arbitrator. While Ms. Hogarth is correct that there is no UKSAA by-law preventing a student with magical inheritance from playing, Rule 7, section 2, subparagraph B—however— does state they must disclose the name and magical status of their parents.”

“It’s no secret who their parents are, I would say it’s rather notorious,” Ms. Hogarth responded.

“Yes, one parent of each is…infamous in Auradon. But last I checked, it generally takes at least two to create a child…unless I am unaware of some fae or wizardry asexual reproduction? Which is what neither Misters al-Jina nor de Vil have claimed to be descended from.”

If looks could kill, Mal was certain the normally perky and happy professor FéeMarraine would have slaughtered him.

“So,” ignoring the death glares, “lets start with Jay ibn Jafar al-Jina, number 8 on the roster. Is Mr. al-Jina present?”

“Yes, I am Jay al-Jina,” Jay volunteered after his legal rep had motioned for him to speak.
“On your behalf, Coach Jenkins had disclosed your magical parent as Jafar ibn Mustara al-Vazier, is that correct?”

“Yes,” Jay answered succinctly as he was coached to do.

“Now the paperwork states that Mr. al-Vazier’s magical status is as a desert sorcerer. A rather powerful one, was he not? First and only one to be able to combine lithomancy, the divination through precious gems including diamonds and amathomancy, divination through sand. Combined with the energy of a lightning bolt, with a storm creating apparatus he invited himself, he was able to divine with absolute pinpoint accuracy the Cave of Wonders, a cave no other person—magical or not—has been able to relocate.”

“We all know the story of Sultana Jasmine and Prince Consort Aladdin, what is the question?” Ms. Hogarth asked.

“I’m laying the foundation that Mr. al-Jina comes from a rather impressive legacy. I find it hard to believe Mr. al-Vizier had passed on nothing to his son, magic barrier or not.”

Jay was ready to state that Jafar had done no such thing. Whatever magic prowess Jafar had in Agrabah, he had never taught his son as he was too busy either drinking or trying to find a magic lamp.

But the Auradon Prep counsel was not having it.

“Arbitrator, knowing magic is not the same as practicing magic. Even if Mr. al-Vizier had taught his son, which are not admitting he did, then it wouldn’t matter because he could not practice magic on the Isle. The scant months these children have been in Auradon would not be enough time to ably wield any kind of magic. And even in the event they somehow were able to learn and practice magic enough to be even close to be competent, there has been no sign or proof of any magic was used on the field.”

“I would like to point out that Sherwood has not accused anyone of purposefully wielding magic, but our case is about unfair magical advantage, which I am trying to lay the foundation for.”

“Ms. Hogarth, I think we have patiently dealt with your interruptions. Please refrain and let counsel finish,” Ducksworth admonished.

Ms. Hogarth wanted to argue but was too professional and yielded.

Mr. Labarthe had made a few notes, and looked over some already made.

“Lets move on. While the paperwork states Mr. al-Vizier’s status as a sorcerer, it does not indicate his status as a genie or djinn, that’s a rather gross omission, don’t you think? To not disclose that a parent had, and I quote, ‘phenomenal cosmic power?’”

“As we know from the public records,” Ms. Hogarth answered since Jay had no idea there was paperwork involved in the first place, “Sultana Jasmine and Prince Consort Aladdin had defeated Jafar by stealing his lamp and using a wish to cause him to fall into a deep sleep then a second to free him from his djinn shackles. Mr. al-Vizier no longer wields the power of The Wish, and therefore has no ‘phenomenal cosmic powers.’”

“But being a djinn is inheritable is it not? There is another student at Auradon Prep, a Ms. Jordan ibnat Nasi Al Algrab? Her status is listed as freed djinn. And her and her famous father’s magical status is officially recorded as ‘semi-phenomenal, sort of cosmic’ power.”
“Mr. al-Jina during a routine physical was noted to not have djinn shackles, and therefore showed no signs of the djinn heritage. Furthermore, Mr. al-Vizier’s djinn status was from a wish, not inherited.”

“Which there is nothing to say it’s still not inheritable.”

“There is also nothing to say it is. Magical inheritance is complex, and a scanty studied field of research. We, as well as Sherwood, cannot say with any authority how natural born djinn traits are inherited, much less those acquired by wish. We can only go by what we do know and observe, which is that Mr. al-Jina has no shackles and therefore does not wield the power of The Wish.”

“Mr. al-Jina, did you ever have djinn shackles?”

“No.”

“Could it still be possible that you could still inherit these ‘djinn shackles?”

“Objection, speculative.”

“Surely he knows something about his own heritage?”

“A heritage no one can affirm with certainty.”

“Sustained.”

Mr. Labarthe took a second to rethink,

“In your opinion, could you still inherit the shackles?”

“Objection, again speculative.”

“I’m merely asking his opinion, not to give a factual answer. There have been plenty of studies that indicate magical children can feel their impending magic, I’m sure Dr. FéeMarraine can attest?”

The court looked towards the professor and once she was given permission from their attorney to answer,

“Yes, there have been cases where magical children knew when they were coming into their magical heritage.”

“All right, overruled, Mr. al-Jina may give his opinion.”

“I don’t know,” Jay answered after pretending to contemplate it, it worked as no one seemed to question his ignorance.

It wasn’t the answer Mr. Labarthe was hoping for, but he went on.

“Your mother was not listed, what can you tell us about her?”

“Her name was Xia, was a former concubine of Shan Yu’s, and died of childbed fever.”

They had gone over this question in prep, so Jay was ready for it and said the answers without tripping.

The Sherwood counsel and Arbitrator Ducksworth were visibly shocked, not expecting that answer at all.
Well that explains his features and why he doesn’t look Agrabi.

“I’m sorry for your loss,” he said as an automatic pleasantry but went on. “Is there anything you could tell us about her status?”

“No. I don’t know anything else about her.”

“Nothing?” he found it hard to believe a boy would know nothing of his own mother, even if she had died when he was born.

“All I know is that she died, a friend of hers dropped me off to Jafar, claimed I was his, and he raised me ever since.”

“Dropped you off? Why was her husband not with her?”

“Jafar wasn’t her husband. She was working and gave birth in a brothel.”

Mr. Labarthe took vigorous notes, not prepared for that answer either. Now he had to wonder if Jay had any magical status at all.

“Do you have reason to doubt that Mr. al-Vizier is your father?”

Mr. Labarthe cursed the Isle’s lack of records, he felt completely blindsided and hoped that the boy wasn’t completely human.

Jay just shrugged his shoulders.

“Mr. al-Jina, please answer out loud as the transcriber cannot pick up your shrugging,” the Arbitrator said gently and hated attorneys like Mr. Labarthe for making such a spectacle.

“The Isle doesn’t have any paternity tests and she was a whore…but I doubt Jafar would simply take the woman who dropped me off’s word for it. I assumed there was something about me that convinced him I was his son…I’m told I have his eyes, in color if not in shape.”

He knew of other attributes he had that linked him to Jafar but he wasn’t about to admit to them.

Ms. Hogarth wondered if they could get a DNA test done, figuring it may be well worth following up on Jay’s paternity. If Jafar wasn’t his father, then he may not have any magical heritage at all would have to be allowed to play.

“And your mother’s eyes?” Mr. Labarthe asked, trying to still connect Jay to a potentially magical second parent.

“I was told they were the amber gold and black of her people.”

“Yes,” Mr. Labarthe recalled his own knowledge of Northern Wei and lands beyond. “The Liè Yīng Jingshén of the Huns, the so called ‘falcon spirited.’ They have the ability of warging, putting their conciseness into falcons?”

“I don’t know. I wasn’t raised by them.”

Mr. Labarthe could tell Ducksworth was losing patience and probably about to chide him for his line of questioning and so let it go.

“Thank you, that is all Mr. al-Jina. Mr. Carlos Oscar de Vil, number 10 on the roster. Are you present?”
“Yes.”

“Yes.”

“Yes.”

“Yes.”

Mr. Labarthe noted that Carlos was better prepped to give as little answer as possible, not volunteering anything beyond exactly what was asked.

“Yes.”

“I cannot speak to Cruella’s family, but as far as I am aware she is fully human.”

He wondered why the boy referred to his mother by her first name and referred to them as “her family” but not his own.

“No.”

“I do not know.”

Labarthe wondered if Cruella had resorted to prostitution and weighed his options of going down that route. He was certain the optics weren’t great, he didn’t need to come off as a stereotypical unfeeling lawyer who would ask a seventeen year old if his mother was a whore and Ducksworth had already shown dismay at the line of questioning.

On the other, he was trying to discredit both teens.

“Why do you not know who your father is?”

“No, sustained. And I will further say that line of questioning in general is not relevant, considered them asked and answered.

Labarthe considered himself properly chided and warned, went on.
“What is the magical status of your biological father?”

“I do not know.”

He wondered if the boy was lying and tried to think of ways to trap him into admitting his magical status.

“Mr. de Vil’s paperwork lists that he has an unidentified magical parent of unknown status, is that still the case?” he directed it to Coach Jenkins and Dr. FéeMarraine.

“That is correct,” Dr. FéeMarraine answered, although uncomfortable with the thought but refusing to answer further.

“Mr. de Vil has been reported to have ‘red glowing eyes’ during matches, this has been reported in papers and on the news…”

“Yes, but glowing eyes is not a sign of wielding magic. It’s a sign of heightened emotion in fairkind or Creature biology…much like how humans’ skin turn red when embarrassed. Car…Mr. de Vil was probably just excited about the game.”

“And you have no clue as to what he is?”

“Watch your tone,” Coach Jenkins growled out, not going to let this sleazy lawyer talk about one of his players as if he were some dog or thing. He ignored Ms. Hogarth’s attempts to get him to calm down and not speak again out of turn, he would not tolerate such disrespect.

Mr. Labarthe’s first instinct was to say something cutting or smart, but then he caught the eye of the little fae girl who had been sitting silently behind the rest. His blood almost froze in his veins, how cold she looked at him.

Clearly she did not appreciate it his tone either, and from his research he could figure that the girl was the daughter of Maleficent. His gut told him she was not a magical being he wanted to cross and relented.

“My apologies, I did not mean offense,” and this time they believed his contrition. “What I meant was that it is fully unknown Mr. de Vil’s status, is it not?”

“Correct.”

“You as a fae and expert in magic, have no clue and cannot let the UKSAA know which is written in the by-laws?”

He wondered if he could get them on violating the disclosure rule, if not unfair magical advantage.

“While I am in an expert in magic, the different fae families and clans, that information is a bit…scattered and incomplete. But we disclosed what we knew and there is nothing in the by-laws that defines how in depth or accurate we must be.”

She was trying her hardest not to admit that most fairkind had retreated to their own kingdoms and shut off from the human realm after the Fae Wars or that Auradon Prep’s paperwork was woefully inadequate to the point of potentially not adhering to the by-laws. The few fae that remained, they were notoriously tight lipped and refused to submit to any kind of research or testing. There just simply was no information to go on.

“I’m not expecting you to be an expert in all the fairkind types there may be, but as someone close to
the Crown and as the one who was the driving factor in creating the Isle of the Lost, was there no
census taken? I mean…there was a finite amount of people banished, could we not figure it out by
process of elimination?”

Dr. FéeMarraine swallowed hard, feeling Carlos’ eyes on her as he wanted answers as badly if not
more so than the Sherwood counsel.

“When the villains were gathered up, the Rounders,” the name of those who were assigned to hunt
and catch villains and their henchmen, “were also given free rein to capture any malevolent entity:
human, fae, Creature, or otherwise that had been terrorizing towns and villages. This may have
included malicious forest spirits, lesser fae such as brownies and trolls, and potentially unknown
beings never recorded before . . . they were not required to submit an itemized list of those they
captured.”

This was as close as she was going to get to admitting how little oversight there was in creating the
Isle of the Lost and those they captured on record.

Mr. Labarthe refrained from asking too much about the Crown’s policy on rounding up and exiling
the villains. Not only was it not on point, but he didn’t need it to get out he was some villain
sympathizer. As far as he was concerned, they could round up all magical beings—benign or
malicious—and exile them from Auradon no questions asked.

“So, it is completely unknown who Mr. de Vil’s father is much less his magical status…and there is
no guess?”

“The features Mr. de Vil has shown, matches no known fairkind or magical Creature on record.”

“But clearly he is not fully human?”

“Correct.”

Not the explicit admittance he wanted but it would be good enough as they have on record that
Carlos was something; an unknown magical something, but magical nonetheless.

“Thank you Mr. de Vil, that will be the only questions I have for you. Arbitrator, Sherwood’s
complaint is about unfair magical advantage. While we respect and can accept that these boys are not
cheating via wielding magic, their nature gives them an unfair advantage over the human players
who make up the UKSAA. While the by-laws allow for students with disclosed magical status, the
truth of the matter is that fae and magical Creatures are rare. Mr. al-Jina and Mr. de Vil are literally
the only ones with magical status in the entire association and the first ones ever to join. The spirit of
the by-law is to make sure there is a fair and even playing field. Clearly both boys have a physical
advantage due to their magic…”

“Objection Arbitrator, counsel is making a conclusion not based in facts.”

Hogarth still struggled with whether or not to put Jay’s lineage into question. They could at least save
one of the boys from being kicked off the team if it were possible to prove that he had no magical
parent, much less any magical status.

She eventually decided against it as it would be unlikely that Jafar would willingly submit to testing
and she did not want to put that strain on the teen.

“I ask for some leeway here, Arbitrator,” Labarthe had pleaded. “This was an emergency arbitration
requested by Auradon Prep, we did not have the time, and Auradon Prep apparently does not have
the facts anyway, to do full fact finding. And a full investigation would take longer than what is left of the season, potentially causing any defense to be moot as the boys would never get a chance to get back on the team. They are seniors and assuming they graduate, they would be outside the UKSAA jurisdiction. We are asking you to make a decision based on the facts that are in front of us and what you can observe.”

“He has a point counsel, you can try to refute what he puts forth but that would require further expert testimony that I don’t think Dr. FéeMarraine can attest to. You both have already stated that the boys couldn’t do magic and Sherwood has not asserted that they have. Dr. FéeMarraine has not stated if any magical heritage would not affect their physical abilities to the point of unfair advantage. By both your own admissions, fae or magical Creature lineage and hereditary traits has a lack of study. I will sustain your objection if you wish, but know we would probably have to stay the proceedings and continue their suspension until we can get these answers.”

“We’d like to make it a standing objection but would like to proceed,” Ms. Hogarth asserted, allowing the proceedings to continue but that her objection still stood.

“Alright, Mr. Labarthe…go on.”

“Thank you Arbitrator. We are asking you as to expedite a decision and not drag this out, we feel all you need to do is simply look at these boys. Mr. al-Jina is clearly physically imposing. With any other player and the lack of records, we would have at the very least contested his age. He is built like he could be in his early twenties. He’s bigger and stronger than what I’ve seen some college tourney players be. It has been remarked by many other coaches just how quick Mr. de Vil is. Again, he’s out pacing even collegiate level tourney players. Mr. al-Jina and Mr. de Vil have a magical heritage and magical status,” Labarthe had decided to pretend Jay’s paternity was not in question and assumed Jafar was his father. Even if Jay had no djinn heritage, he was still the son of a sorcerer and that was inheritable; by law, all children of witches, wizards, warlocks, and sorcerers were given magical status even if they never went on to practice magic.

“While we do not know for sure what their magical heritages are, from the record we can say they are much heartier and physically well-endowed than any human ever would be given the circumstances.”

“What record and circumstances are you speaking of? You have stated Sherwood had no time to do much fact finding. Besides the disclosures of magical status and sign off of their doctor to play at all, you wouldn’t have had time to adhere to HIPPA,” Ducksworth asked.

“I am talking about Isle of the Lost, Found; the documentary that observed life on the Isle. Including its lack of food and health resources. Have you seen this documentary?”

Mr. Labarthe asked and had a copy in his possession if the Arbitrator had not.

“I have.”

“Objection, best evidence?”

“Arbitrator, I would say the video falls under Rule 902 as self-authenticating unless Auradon Prep is asserting that the location is not the Isle of the Lost.”

“We would object under the fact that it’s a highly edited documentary meant to sell copies. If not, then we would move that it’s more prejudicial than probative under Rule 403. Again, edited and there have been no rebuttals or differing viewpoints.”
“I am more than willing to question Mr. al-Jina and Mr. de Vil as former residents as to the authenticity and fair portrayal of the documentary.”

“I’m going to overrule the objection. Not only to expedite proceedings but I believe I am capable of differentiating between an accurate portrayal or a sensationalized biopic.”

Hogarth let it go as she knew neither boy had been prepped for such testimony and given their struck looks, were not willing to give one.

“I would say the documentary is a fair portrayal of the poverty and almost famine they face on a yearly basis. By all accounts, those children are emaciated and would never pass a physical exam in order to play any sport, much less such a physically demanding one such as tourney. I would submit into evidence affidavits from several nutritionists and child development…”

“Oh, this is the first time we’re even hearing of this type of evidence. The rules of evidentiary procedure are still in effect despite the time constraints.”

“Sustained, counselor I don’t want any more of these surprises. We’ve seen the documentary as it is open to the public, expert opinions of nutritionists and specialists without opportunity of voir dire are not. Get on with it.”

“Alright, Arbitrator. We are saying that their magical heritage is what saved them from being as sickly as they could have been; and with their time in Auradon allowed them to heal and grow stronger than any human could have, we do not have access to those specific facts but they would be requested in the course of discovery; they are also clearly far more advanced than any norm…non-magical player reasons previously stated. That is the unfair magical advantage that they have. Even if we cannot prove right here and now because of the expedited nature of emergency arbitration, we believe our argument is at least persuasive enough to warrant full discovery, which Sherwood is willing to petition for. We have video of their games if you would like to see examples.”

“I would, I assume Auradon Prep has no objection since they should have knowledge of how their own players have performed?”

“No objection,” although Hogarth wanted to grind her teeth in aggravation.

With a laptop, everyone was shown several clips of the Knight’s games, some with Sherwood and some of others.

Ducksworth had to admit both boys were mighty fine players and perhaps their abilities were a bit beyond normal human capabilities. He certainly couldn’t remember seeing such talent at such a young age. He also took note that this season was the first time these boys have played at all, and agreed that Sherwood’s argument was persuasive.

“We have nothing further Arbitrator,” once the video was done.

“Auradon Prep? Is there anything further?”

Hogarth was about to ask for a short recess to get their bearings and try to see what their next move could be, but Coach Jenkins had come forward.

“I would like to say something, Arbitrator.”

He stood firmly and ignored Ms. Hogarth imploring him to not talk.

“You may, but be warned that it looks like it’s against your counsel’s advice.”
“I understand that and it’s not any legal argument. I just want to say that these boys are hard workers. Hardest I have ever seen. They come to every practice, willing to follow orders and put in effort and commitment I have never seen any other player before them. Not only do they excel on the field but off. Their grades are more than exemplary and beyond what’s required to stay on the team. That takes a dedication and self-discipline I wish I had myself, even today. I played tourney too, in high school and college and I can admit was never more than a C student. These boys are not only getting A’s, they’re getting A’s in advance classes. They are from the Isle, a harsh place that I wouldn’t wish on my worst enemy. But they’re strong, not because of magic but because they’re survivors. It’s not right or fair for them to dismiss their talent and hard work as something as ignoble as ‘that’s how they were born, so it’s easier for them.’”

“I wish for the record to show that no one is attacking their character. We simply want a fair game, and they have a clear unfair magical advantage,” Labarthe asserted.

“Unfair magical advantage,” Coach Jenkins scoffed out. “If you’re saying simply having a magical parent is ‘unfair magical advantage,’ then fine. I don’t see how it’s any different than having two athletic parents, in both instances physical advantage is inherited naturally. But I can and will accept the Arbitrator’s decision if that’s what he comes to. But while we’re talking about ‘magical advantages,’ lets talk about Fairy Godparents.”

That got everyone’s attention, wondering where he was going.

“If simply having magical parents, which no one can control, is unfair. Then surely having blessings from a fairy, a being of magic made flesh and their blessings completely voluntary, is also unfair. Now, I’m not royal nor have I ever caught the attention of fairkind. I never got fae blessing, and I don’t know any non-royal or non-noble that has. But last I recalled, the royals and the nobility enjoy christenings. These christenings are usually broadcast over RBN. Grand affairs, feasts and ruffled dresses for days. The tradition is to eat off of gold plates and cutlery. During these christenings, fairies come and give their blessings to the new children. Lesser nobles usually one, maybe two Fairy Godparents. Royals have had up to twelve if I’m recalling correctly. I believe these blessings are usually called “gifts.” Girls are given grace, beauty, singing ability, guaranteed wealth, all depending on how many fairies they can get to come. Boys are given wisdom, justice, courage, and what else? Dr. FéeMarraine, could you please remind me the other popular ‘gifts’ are for boys.”

“Strength and stamina,” she gladly told him, figuring where he was going and it was exactly what she herself and Merryweather had given to prince Chad Charming.

“Strength and stamina, that’s right. Now back in the day, princes and boys were expected to be knights. Chivalrous and strong, fight evil and all that. These days, wisdom – which some might call foresight, in combination with strength and stamina might be called athletic prowess. You certainly need to be able to predict plays and make quick decisions. I would say that requires wisdom or foresight. You definitely need strength and stamina to be able to keep up and win. So if magical heritage would give these boys a heartiness that no human ever could have, I’m assuming you mean naturally, then certainly it can be said the same for any royal or noble who has had fae blessings. Who’s to say what they’d be good at or what they’d be like or be able to survive if they had not been blessed. And if we’re not sure, I’m certain it’s ‘persuasive enough to warrant full discovery.’”

The entire Sherwood group had remained silent as their words were used against them in an unforeseen way and Mal would say that they had lost quite a bit of their color.

“And Arbitrator, please know that I am a big believer in fairness. So if I have to, I will pull prince Chad, the three sons of dukes, and the one daughter of an earl off my team as I would never want to put anyone on the field with unfair magical advantage, even if that means it would knock my team
out of the season.”

“And say, doesn’t the honorable Robin Loxley IV go to Sherwood, third son of the Archduke of Loxley? And is on the tourney team?” Hogarth asked Labarthe, playing along.

The attorney was too shocked to say anything, the whole ordeal had gotten vastly out of control.

“And the sons of the Dukes of Nottingham, Yorkshire, and Viscount Beauchamp of Barnsdale on the team?” she went on when he didn’t answer. “As a big tourney fan myself I’m rather familiar with the rosters, doesn’t every team in the UKSAA have at least some nobles on them, if not royal?”

It was rhetorical; they all knew the answer was yes. If the nobility was pulled from tourney, and potentially every UKSAA sanctioned team, then no school would be able to compete as they wouldn’t have enough players. Only Crown Prince Ben had never received fae gifts as King Adam’s disdain of magic extended to Fairy Godparents.

Who knew what kind of precedent they would be setting, would professional teams have to answer for this as well?

“And in the spirit of fairness, I’m assuming this would extend to all teams and all sports, not just Auradon Prep and tourney. Isn’t that what you said at the beginning Mr. Labarthe? That you want it to be fair for everyone? I’m sure there will be plenty of people who are upset. But as you wish for things to be fair, I’m sure you would rather stand for what’s right even if you stand alone against your booster club, the parents in the nobility, parents of commoner children who depend on the sport for a scholarship, sponsors, the school’s founding family…”

“Alright,” Ducksworth intervened, feeling that Coach Jenkins had made his point and was just mocking Sherwood now. “Let’s take an hour for lunch…I assume you all have phone calls to make,” he tried not to laugh but he was certain Sherwood would be licking their wounds that evening.

Sherwood had hastily made their way out of the conference and building, all on their phones as they left.

The firm had in house caterers and the Auradon Prep group was invited to eat with them.

Mal had an eerie sense of déjà vu, the private law firm seemed almost like a boarding school. She could overhear some small talk of the attorneys around them, speaking of cots and showers available to those who had stayed late enough where going home wasn’t worth the trip.

As she got food, they told her that caterers were hired to serve breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The employees basically lived in the building.

It unsettled her that the firm would volunteer to fulfill all their employees’ needs at the expense of them never leaving and working around the clock. But there were so many people there, perhaps it was all worth it. None of them looked or acted as if they were prisoners, but Mal thought it odd nonetheless.

The teens were still too nervous to talk much, they were also afraid to accidentally reveal anything. All four much too cautious to even do a simple rune to make their conversations private less professor FéeMarraine see or notice; the star fae had gone on record defending them, stating that they couldn’t possibly know how to wield magic. It was to their benefit to keep her ignorant of their true knowledge of the arcane arts. There was no way for her to know that Maleficent had taught Mal magic she could not wield since she was a young girl.
She was just glad that Jay was able to lie so easily, living on the Isle had at least taught them that. None of the adults seemed to be able to pick up on any half-truth or straight lie.

The Sherwood legal team requested and was granted a private room to converse, once the legal assistant closed the door, Coach Miller let his ire be known.

“What the hell was all of that?”

“It seems their Coach has a bit more integrity than we anticipated,” Labarthe admitted sardonically.

“You told me this would be an open and shut case. No one wants those…freaks on the field. It’s cheating! How can they just scoop up players from that hellhole and have them play?”

“Please calm down, Mr. Miller. This is a private room, not sound proof.”

The Sherwood Coach only stared hard at him, wanting to know how everything had gone so wrong.

“We’re going to have to dismiss our complaint, unless you want to explain to the Archduke of Loxley why his son is suddenly pulled from the team?”

“Can they really pull out the royals? I mean…they’re royal. So what if they have fae blessings? Royals since time immemorial have always had it,” asked the secondary legal counsel, one who had remained quiet while Labarthe had taken the lead.

“Perhaps not. I have no idea if those blessings make them magical by extension but that’s not a question I want the courts to decide. You’d have every alt-right purist calling for royal blood if they even got a whiff of the idea that they had magic. You know commoners would probably welcome a chance to knock some of the royal and noble competition out of their way.”

“So what? This was all a complete waste of time?” Coach angrily asked.

“Not completely. We got on tape them admitting the de Vil kid has an unknown magical parent. I’m sure there will be plenty of people who wouldn’t want him near their normal children.”

“They’re underage, these proceedings will be under seal until they graduate.”

“Their records, sure. But ours?” Labarthe looked to his second chair and without a word, produce what looked to be a normal pen. With a click, the room filled with the voice of Mr. Ducksworth,

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, I am Gerald Ducksworth – senior counsel – and I will be arbitrating this process. You will address me as Arbitrator…

He clicked the pen again and the room went silent.

“Even if we can’t get the UKSAA to ban them, I’m certain once this news gets out in the paper that they might get rid of themselves when faced with the harpies of One Million Moms.”

The Coach wasn’t happy, it didn’t seem like a good enough plan. How could they depend on some radical fringe group to take care of it? But it was all they got.

“So, I will make a few calls. You all grab some lunch.”

The others had obeyed and left Mr. Labarthe alone, he quickly took out his phone and dialed a number.

“We’re going to have to dismiss the complaint…” he waited for the person on the other end to stop
whining. “Don’t worry, we got what we need to...sway public opinion, which can be a much harsher court...”

There was still half an hour before they were due back, Mal took advantage of their free time by pulling the book that she had showed interest in earlier and started to read. The others had opted to fiddle with their phones, Mal wasn’t even sure where hers was.

Ms. Hogarth had talked to Coach Jenkins and Dr. FéeMaraine, all three were rather optimistic with how things went although the attorney would have preferred that she had forewarning of the speech. But it seemed it would work out, even the Arbitrator had given indication that Sherwood would cave.

No one, even herself, really expected that Coach Jenkins would have the courage to not only bring up Auradon Royalty’s worst kept secret of using magic to their benefit but at the same time all but banish it in every other aspect of life, but to threaten to use the precedence they would create by applying it to everyone equally. She had no doubt that the Sherwood team had thought they could knock out their competition and retain their own roster. She hated that they had faith in their anti-magic bias, she was also ashamed she hadn’t thought of bringing up Fairy Godparents because it hadn’t occurred to her to think of it as unfair magical advantage.

Those born with magic were seen as different, humans—royalty and the nobility—who obtained blessings were still seen as fully human with no magical status at all. Colleges and corporations always head hunted those with blessing, fae or Creatures were discriminated against. It may be technically against the law to do so, but people always found loopholes or simply covered their tracts enough.

She was glad the boys had done so well under questioning, it couldn’t be easy to admit and talk about their dysfunctional family life in front of strangers. It was made even worse when they truthfully couldn’t tell much about their non-famous parents as they were either dead or completely unknown.

She felt the worst for Carlos, as not only was his father unknown but during preparation he revealed that Cruella had been raped. Hogarth was thankful for small miracles that the line of questioning didn’t come near that topic and Carlos had taken to heart to only answer as succinctly as the question allowed.

She looked towards where the teens were sitting, all lounging in the plush leather chairs of the common area. Three of the four were on their phones, but the purple haired one was actually reading a book. Curiosity got the better of her and she walked over to take a closer look.

Is that a U.K.C. book?

Sensing her presence in her peripheral, Mal looked up and saw their attorney looking at her. Hogarth suppressed a shudder, the fae’s gold and green eyes made her hair stand on end.

“So...some light reading at lunch, huh?” she tried to joke, an awkward laugh escaped her lips but soon died when the fae was unresponsive.

“I have a question,” Mal stated bluntly, ignoring the adult’s attempt at humor.

I’ll answer whatever you want, just stop looking at me.
“Sure, what’s up?”

“This seems to be a lot of trouble for a silly game of students chasing each other around and beating each other with sticks.”

“Hey,” Carlos pipped up, offended his sport was being disparaged so.

Hogarth was impressed by his hearing as he was several seats down and the teen girl had not spoken very loudly. She was even more impressed when the fae had actually smiled apologetically, when so far she had only seen her scowl the entire time.

“I’m sorry, this all seems to be a lot of trouble for a nonprofessional level sport.”

Carlos was satisfied with that answer, winked at her and went back to his phone.

“Well,” the attorney tried to explain in simple terms, “there is a lot of monetary incentives for schools to perform well; sports programs being the biggest draw for funds.”

“Money?”

“Yes. The better a school does in any program, the better chances it can draw in more influential and…wealthy,” she admitted, “parents who want to send their children to the best school they can afford. The bigger and wealthier pool of parents, the more the school could afford to expand or improve their program which in turn attracts more people with more money. There’s also the booster club which is mainly made up of alumni, previous students who want to support their alma mater… the school they went to. So students who go to a well-known school are more likely to get into well-known colleges, then off to better careers. Those previous students want to help current students, so they donate to the school that helped them achieve so much. It’s also good for networking. The alumni in good jobs can help students get internships and jobs. The school then gives preference to children of Alumni for admittance to the school that would lead to better universities and good jobs. It basically becomes self-perpetuating. It’s not just wealthy parents or alumni they want to attract; some schools also can get sponsor deals from commercial companies. Target sponsors Sherwood, obviously, but Auradon Prep has Under Armor, Gatorade, and several local car dealerships. With this money, they can buy better equipment and lure in the best prospects, all to give them an edge.”

“So they’re willing to destroy two teenage players’ potential careers and put into question their future in order to better their own odds of winning and therefore future profits?”

“More or less.”

Hogarth hoped the rumors of fae curses were just that, as she feared the girl would be incensed; not that she would blame her as it was despicable what Sherwood had attempted and would be willing to defend the her court if she lost her temper and did something rash or in violation of regulations against magic use.

But the girl didn’t seem angry, didn’t even seem offended but pensive.

“Interesting,” she talked to herself.

Hogarth wondered what could be interesting but then they were all called back into the conference room.

“Welcome back everyone, please note we are back on record. Sherwood, I assume you have something to say?” Ducksworth started when they were all seated and the transcriber was ready.
Labarthe didn’t particularly like that the Arbitrator was all but pointing out, on record, that he was about to retract his the suit but it was their only recourse.

“In light of the evidence before us and the time litigation would take, Sherwood Forest College Preparatory High School would like to voluntarily dismiss the complaint.”

“Accepted. The complaint is dismissed with prejudice. Good day everyone,” Ducksworth wasted no time in calling an end to arbitration.

Jay and Carlos had let out of relieved breath, glad to still be on the team. Coach Jenkins and Ms. Hogarth had congratulated them for doing so well, all happy that the two wouldn’t be unjustly kicked off the team.

Most people had left, but Mal had lingered behind,

“Gentlemen, I wish to have a word.”

The Sherwood team all looked at each other nervously, wondering what the fae wanted but felt compelled to listen to her.

Carlos and Jay were relieved to have the arbitration behind them. They had no idea that Coach Jenkins had felt so strongly for them, so used to adults either using them or ignoring them. It was the first time they felt an adult was actually on their side.

They were able to join practice again a few days later, everyone glad that they didn’t lose their star players and welcomed them back to the team. The Isle teens didn’t realize how much tourney really meant to them until it was almost taken away.

To some it may be a silly sport, but to them they got a sense of belonging in Auradon; it was something they worked hard on and succeeded, it was something that was all their own.

They were surprised when Coach wanted to speak to them after practice in his office, they hoped it wouldn’t be bad news again.

“Hi boys, sit down,” he motioned them towards the two chairs in front of his desk. His office filled with all sorts of sports equipment as he taught other physical education classes at the school.

They obeyed and remained silent, waiting for him to speak.

“How does it feel to be back on the field?” he started off, trying to ease the tension and let them know they were not in trouble nor were there any other issues.

“It’s good,” Jay spoke on behalf of them both. He wasn’t sure how to articulate how relieved they were and glad to remain on the team. “If Sherwood makes it to the championship, we’d be more than happy to show them just how none magical our skills are.”

That was said with a bit of bite and Coach was glad to hear it, he felt the school deserved to be given the brunt of their frustration. He believed that all competition needed a little heat from a rivalry to really drive the team to succeed.

It would not be forgotten that their rivals had resorted to dirty tricks to try to win.

“I’m glad to hear that. I know it was rough. It wasn’t right nor fair to accuse you boys of cheating or
to dismiss the hard work and effort you’ve put in. I want you to know that I and the school is very much aware of the work and dedication you put into not only this program, but school over all…I know you probably don’t hear it enough, but we’re all very proud of you…all of you.”

It was true, they didn’t hear it at all and they were grateful for the acknowledgment that their efforts were not going unnoticed.

“I also want you boys to know, I am here for you in case you need to…talk to anyone. I know the school counselor can seem…clinical and she’s female. I hope you boys know you can come to me with anything. School, sports…girls.”

They were nodding along in agreement until Coach got to “girls.” Both were confused as to what he was getting at.

At their befuddled faces, he cleared his throat and fortified himself for what might be an embarrassing conversation.

“It’s just that…I know you had some schooling on the Isle, you both are doing exceedingly well with your studies as well as with tourny…but it has come to my attention just how close you are with Ms. Lefay and Ms. Von Weither.”

“They’re our girlfriends,” Carlos clarified, wondering why Coach was bringing them up. He thought it was common knowledge they were dating, ever since homecoming. And yes they probably couldn’t have faced arbitration without them, but again they thought that was obvious.

“Right, and I know they are exemplary young ladies…” Coach coughed, trying to get the words out. “I know you two are good looking boys, athletic and charming. And the girls are very pretty…it’s just that you all have such bright futures ahead of you. You all are so talented and smart, and I would hate any of you to…jeopardize that future. Do you get what I’m saying?”

Both boys shook their head, they had no idea where the conversation was going.

Of course this couldn’t be easy for me.

“I just want you to know that I remember what it’s like to be young and in love, that you may have perfectly natural…urges. You weren’t here for the sexual education classes, and the Isle may have been lacking such education…”

Both boys looked like deer caught in headlights, both afraid they had been found out with mention of urges and sexual education.

Coach took it to mean they were inexperienced and embarrassed.

“I am also a realist. The school’s official policy for students is strict abstinence. But with the internet, I’m sure you could figure a lot on your own. Again, I believe you all have so much potential and bright futures ahead of you. So if you need to talk, I am here. Also…I want you to be careful.”

With that last thought, he opened his desk drawer and pulled out a simple black box with gold holographic lettering.

Condoms.

Coach was giving them condoms.

All the boys could do was stare at the box, wondering if it were some sort of trap. Was he trying to
get them to admit they were doing anything to need condoms? Should they try to deny they even knew what they were?

“Now I don’t want you to think this is some sort of permission to break curfew, or sneak into each other’s’ rooms. The school rules still stand and if officially asked, I did not give you these. I’m also not going to encourage you to do anything. But I know how clever and resourceful teenagers can be when they want something bad enough and I want you to be prepared. All I ask is that you be careful and…discreet.”

The boys finally understood what Coach was ultimately saying. He didn’t want them to accidently sire children, which could upend their current trajectory of finishing school and going off to university. The adult was completely unaware that they had already taken care of that issue, all he knew was that there were strict rules and little to no way for them to obtain these condoms or birth control on their own.

Coach revealed to them that some of the adults weren’t so oblivious to what teens got up to and also wasn’t going to try to strong arm them into the morality restrictions. He acknowledged that there were some things outside of their control, and he’d rather his team be prepared to protect themselves rather than rely on all of them to refrain from sex.

“Ummm, thanks,” Jay said as he reached for the box, accepting the gift and neither admitting or denying that they would make use of them.

Jenkins hummed his acceptance, he figured just as much.

*Boys will be boys after all.*

Carlos and Jay weren’t the only players he had had the talk with. He’s had several with Chad Charming, who thankfully had not sired a child on anyone yet and had the means to purchase his own condoms.

Crown Prince Ben had actually refused them, stating they weren’t needed. For most he would have encouraged him to take them anyway, even if he thought he wouldn’t need them. There were always times when teens changed their minds. But given that Ben’s girlfriend was princess Audrey, he was certain the teen was sincere in not needing them.

“Do you need me to show you how to use them?” he was still unsure what the Isle taught them if anything.

Both boy’s eyebrows shot up, bewildered at the offer.

*I don’t even want to think about what that demonstration entails.*

“No…no thank you…we can figure it out,” Carlos finally stumbled out, blushing tomato red with embarrassment and sort of wanting the earth to swallow him whole.

Coach found it amusing.

“I’m sure you will,” he said with a teasing wink, and recalled his own days as a youth and exactly how quickly he could go through condoms. “Now if you boys need anymore, you just let me know.”

He’d buy out all the Targets in all of Auradon if that meant helping to prevent his star players from ruining their lives.

“Thanks, Coach…” not knowing what else to say.
Jay took and hid the box in his helmet and threw his jersey over it to be extra cautious. They both left the office and headed straight to the dorms.

Mal was surprised, and a little irritated, that there was someone who could have given them condoms when the boys showed them the box.

*I guess not all of the adults are that clueless.*

“So what are we going to do with them?” Carlos asked the others, knowing they didn’t need them but wouldn’t be opposed if Mal wanted a third layer of protection besides both of them having the Null rune. He would follow her lead, whatever she wanted he would do.

But Mal had absolutely no desire to use them, thinking the tattoos were more than enough.

“We’ll sell them to the band,” Mal said without hesitation, thinking it was the obvious course of action. To her, used condoms were just more evidence that could potentially be found. She didn’t need the headache.

“Do you think maybe we ought to pass the good gesture on? Give them out for free?”

His three friends looked at him confused, all wearing frowns of misunderstanding; not certain what he was talking about.

“I mean, we got these for free. They are a needed commodity to avoid disastrous situations; maybe we ought to not take monetary advantage?”

They still didn’t understand. Carlos sighed, not knowing how else to explain it.

“No one does anything for free…” Mal countered, thinking her boyfriend was being sweet but she felt they ought to take advantage of the situation while they had it. “Even the Coach, he may be giving the condoms themselves for free but he’s doing it so his star players wouldn’t get kicked out.”

Carlos could admit that was part of Jenkins’ motivation, but wanted to argue it wasn’t his only.

“And we could always use the money. We don’t have many ways to earn money, we can’t just depend on the Crown’s allowance forever or the few jobs we have going on the side.”

She had a point there, saving money was smart and now they had a much wanted rare good given to them for free. It was pure profit.

“Everyone in the band, and at school, have parents they can fall back on. We don’t. They can afford to shell out a few coins for safe sex. And since we’re trying to wean off stealing, this is a good alternative.”

Mal definitely had a point there. He was glad they had mostly stopped stealing and selling. Evie was making money from her dresses and designs, he was also making cash fixing computers, phones, and other tech.

Mal and Jay were selling reports, which he was certain against the rules. But Mal had said they weren’t full reports but “study aids.” If students chose to bulk them up and turn them in, she wasn’t responsible for that.

Because of her artistic talent, she also had an aptitude for forging signatures. There were apparently quite a few nobles and even royals (Chad Charming) who needed “proof” that their parents were aware of their slipping grades; some commoner students needed “permission” from their parents to
go off campus.

Carlos knew that was definitely against the rules, but it was too lucrative to stop. The students would be just as guilty for accepting their services, so they weren’t in danger of being told on.

Overall they had a pretty good income in addition to what the Crown provided; so once they graduated from Auradon Prep and could no longer depend on Ben, they would have a nice nest egg until they could get their own jobs.

“I do want an external hard drive,” Carlos relented, thinking of what he wanted with the incoming money.

Mal smiled when Carlos saw reason, she didn’t have any clue as to what he wanted was but made sure to put it in the budget whenever they made their next run into town.

Audrey naturally awoke with birds chirping sweetly at her window, greeting her as the new day began. She smiled at her woodland friends as the sun started to peak from the horizon. She leisurely got up and stretched, then sang a few dulcet notes back; the birds hopped from side to side with glee. She bounced out of bed, cheerful and motivated to start her morning routine. She gracefully glided over to the window and opened it so her friends could come in from the cold, each knowing what their princess needed of them to help her with her morning ablutions.

A cheerful blue robin and sparrow grasped a porcelain water jug, hovering over a matching basin on her antique washing stand. When she was ready, they carefully tilted the jug so she could wash her face. A soft fluffy squirrel held an equally fluffy towel for her, rushing off to help in other ways when she took it from him to dry her face.

When the princess walked back to her bed, her helpful animal friends had laid out her workout clothes: matching pink geometric print spandex and t-shirt. A couple of nightingales laid a sweatband on her head as if it were a tiara and Audrey moved to the living room of her apartment suite.

An eager badger was already at the TV and as soon as he saw his princess come into view, he started the work out DVD she currently preferred.

It didn’t take long for her to work up a sweat, she didn’t miss a beat of her cardio routine as her woodland creatures had a water bottle ready for her and for anything else she needed.

After an hour of exercise, she showered and put on makeup expertly, only finished when she felt she was the perfect princess on the outside as she was on the inside. The birds had again laid out several options for her attire,

“You all have the best taste,” she told them appreciatively as she decided what she wanted to wear; they all knew her preferred style and had never let her down.

She decided on a light white cotton dress that had spaghetti straps but was made modest by its delicate white and black lace overlay. She put on simple black open strap high heels and grabbed a coordinating black clutch.

She put on a pristine white wool pea coat to fight against the late November chill and was finally ready to leave.

“Thank you all, you’re the best,” Audrey sang out as she walked out the door, the woodland animals
sighing in contentment and leaving her dorm room the same way they came in.

The campus was quiet as most students were not up that early, especially since it was a Saturday. She didn’t have much time to appreciate the silence as her limo was waiting for her, her personal bodyguard greeted her and her assistant had a steaming coffee and muffin waiting for her.

“Good morning princess, you look lovely today,” Ophelia the assistant said by rote, “You have volunteer service from eight to twelve, lunch with the Archduke of Seabrook’s daughter at twelve-thirty, we made reservations at Lumier’s. I have called ahead to make sure no cocktails will be on the menu, we don’t want to tempt her.”

Audrey grimaced at the thought of dining with the noble’s daughter, wishing the girl’s father wasn’t such good friends with her parents. But she had to play nice and be seen in public with all of her family’s staunchest allies, even when their daughters were embarrassing lushes and almost a decade older than her.

“After lunch you have a dedication ceremony for the new arboretum in Auradon City at two. After that, you have dress fittings for: Winter Recital, Yule Ball, Daughter’s of Auradon Charity Dinner, and Royal Ascot. Then a quick workout with Wilhelm,” Audrey’s personal trainer, “until four, a short interview with RBN…”

“What’s the topic?”

“Royal Winter Fashion and they’ll probably ask about your volunteer work,” Ophelia answered once she looked over her notes in her tablet.

The assistant went over a few micro-appointments of other royal duties and finally ended with,

“And you have dinner reservations at Tianna’s Palace with His Royal Highness.”

Audrey thought about her last “appointment” of the day. It was a regular thing for them to have dates in the city, normally at the latest hot spots, one where it was guaranteed for them to be seen and later on for the news channels to speculate how she was to be the future Lady of the Court.

But she had other plans, ones where she would prefer to have more privacy.

“Cancel that reservation,” the princess said firmly.

Normally Ophelia would obey immediately and not question her princess, but it was rather odd that Audrey would cancel a dinner reservation, particularly one so exclusive.

“Are you not in the mood for creole? There is always Harryhausen’s if you’re in the mood for sushi…”

“No, I want to have a private dinner with Ben, something more intimate…I don’t want to compete with a lot of noise,” she gave as a flimsy excuse but knew no one would question her.

If Ophelia thought it odd that Audrey would turn down an opportunity to show the world she was dating Crown Prince Ben she didn’t show it, she merely tapped on her tablet and did as was asked.

“I sent a message to Cadbury,” Ben’s personal assistant, “to let him know of the change of plans. I’ve also alerted the Auradon Prep chefs and valets to prepare a private dinner in his suite.”

The Auroria heiress nodded her approval, and put on her best smile as she arrived at the hospital. The paparazzi were already swarming her limousine, the camera men keeping a respectful distance
while she got out of the car and her personal body guard was right there to protect her from potential harm.

She made sure to smile brightly and turn her head so the angle was just right for a photo she was certain would make the news in the next few minutes. She and her entourage quickly made their way inside.

Although it was a hospital, where sick people went to convalesce, it was bright and cheery. It was a children’s hospital and Audrey’s favorite place to volunteer. The children were wide awake and all of them greeted her enthusiastically,

“Good morning Princess Audrey.”

“Good morning everyone, I’m so happy to see you.”

A gaggle of them had rushed to her, so glad to see her again. Many of them babbled at the same time, not wasting a moment to tell her all the news of what has happened with their lives since she had seen them last.

“My tooth fell out! My mom said the tooth fairy would know, even if I put it under a hospital pillow instead of my pillow at home. I got a whole dollar!”

“I was able to go on the swings yesterday! I was practically flying.”

“I had a tea party with all my friends, I got to be ‘princess Audrey’…”

She listened avidly to each of their stories of what they’ve done since she last saw them, oooooing and awwwwing at their artwork.

Her favorite part was to gather them all in a cozy den with plush pillows and mats for the children to lay on, she sat with them on the floor and some cuddled with her. She grabbed The Tale of Peter Rabbit as it was next in line to be read, and it was one of her favorites when growing up.

“Once upon a time there were four little Rabbits, and their names were –Flopsy, Mopsy, Cotton-tail, and Peter. They lived with their Mother…”

The kids loved to hear her read, her voice so soothing and relaxing. They loved that a real live princess would come visit them so often and talk and read to them.

The nursing staffed also loved to have princes Audrey come spend time with the children. The body guards and paparazzi were a pain at first, but once the visits became a regular thing and the Crown Prince stepped in to stop the paps’ more invasive behavior, it was smooth sailing.

The paparazzi still came around, but they knew they were not allowed beyond a certain point and most seemed to respect that it was a hospital with sick children.

The children needed the visits as they loved to boast of meeting royalty to anyone who would listen.

Audrey was more than happy to come as she adored children. She saw their happy faces and wished she could take all their sickness away. It seemed all too soon that her visit was over, she apologized to the children when they started to moan that they didn’t want her to leave. But as she got up and hugged as many as she could before she left, she placed a bookmark for where they stopped and promised that she would be back next weekend to read them the rest of the story.

If Audrey was honest with herself, she’d rather stay the rest of the day and cancel the endless amount
of other appointments she had. She didn’t look forward to the dozens of dresses she would have to try on, take pictures of at several different angles, then choose which one she would stand in for hours to pin perfectly to her silhouette. She also didn’t care to have meals with people she didn’t even really know or like. She didn’t want to do a ribbon cutting for another opening for something she wouldn’t remember. She didn’t want to do another work out to keep fit and trim so no one on the gossip channels could find fault with her body.

She would much rather eat chicken nuggets with the children than at a five star restaurant or any other royal event.

Although she knew she was on a tight schedule, she still took the time to embrace each child and promise she’d be back as soon as she could.

She looked almost jealously at the nurses who would take their little hands and lead them away. For a scant second, she wished she was not the princess of Auroria and not the future Queen of Auradon; she wanted to be a regular person whose life revolved around helping and being around children.

In another life, she saw herself wearing scrubs and working at the hospital. Or maybe she could have been a teacher, reading to children on a daily basis sounded like heaven.

But that was not her life and it wasn’t her future. Her future would still involve all sorts of royal events, but maybe with several children no one would blame her for going to fewer.

*I can’t wait to have children…lots of them. I’m sure Ben wouldn’t mind…we’ve both lamented being an only child.*

Besides wearing a grand dress and the Queen’s crown, Audrey saw her future with a happy family and several children, maybe even a dozen. The royal nursery would be filled and the halls echoing with their laughter and cries. She saw them all running around the palace gardens, her mother and grandmother spoiling them with kisses and treats. She saw boys who were chivalrous, kind, and protected their sisters fiercely. She saw girls she could teach to be a princess just like she was: kind to animals and twirling in pink dresses.

They would all protect and love each other against anything that came their way.

Their first son would be King of Auradon, their second would be king of Auroria. Their Princesses would marry into the other royal houses and be queens. The younger brothers could become counselors to their kingly brothers or granted other lands to be lords of their own estates and in their own right.

She saw even further into the future, where she was a grandmother herself and held her first grandson. She and Ben would discuss for hours the most suitable princess for their Prince. She’d be the wife, mother, and grandmother of the Great Kings of the 18 Kingdoms.

That was her happily ever after, and she’d protect that dream at all costs.

Ben was more than happy to have a private dinner with her, somewhere they could converse without prying eyes and just be Audrey and Ben, instead of princess and Crown Prince. Conversation flowed easily enough, he most enjoyed when she would talk about her volunteer work with the children. Hey eyes lit up and he thought it was the only time she ever seemed relaxed and genuinely happy.

Unfortunately that talk only lasted for a few minutes before she started in on all upcoming royal
festivities that never seemed to end to him. He thought all the royal women in his life had to be crazy to stand so still for so long, he hated doing it for a couple suits. He couldn’t imagine doing it for every outfit, which where several per event, and going back again and again.

But he also knew they must have patience of the saints because it wasn’t like any of them had much of a choice, he knew the pressures of appearing royal at all times.

In those later hours, after they had finished dinner and simply talked were his favorite.

He was surprised when Audrey had chosen to stay later than she normally would have, more so when she initiated deeper kisses than she ever had before.

Audrey understood the warnings against being alone with the opposite sex. They were drilled into her head since little before she even hit puberty, they were explained ad nauseam and were lessons well remembered. But a mad idea had formed inside her head, ever since Homecoming. She had started to become more physical with Ben in the hopes to remind him that while they could not fully share their bodies, she had a body that he would wish to be shared with him.

They warned her that men were physical creatures and could be ruled by their desires.

They did not warn her those desires could be inflamed within her too.

At first she started with lingering kisses, something more than just the chaste pecks at the end of dates when he dropped her off at her suite. She found she rather liked the longer hugs and contact, when before all she allowed, as protocol dictated, where short side hugs and where most could see their hands at all times.

She started to take advantage of the adults who left them in peace because they assumed they would never dream of doing anything inappropriate.

The body guards that always followed them were paid to be discreet and unobtrusive, half the time she forgot they were even there. When they were in the safety of their dorms, they retired to the attached galley apartments to their respective suites.

Perhaps she would have been happy to continue to follow royal protocol if not for Mal. Audrey felt the need to remind Ben she would be more than just his future Queen, but his wife and mother of his heirs.

He was surprised at her new forwardness, but he did not admonish her nor did he turn her away. Her plan seemed to be working as he was more likely to keep their dates rather than work late into the night with Mal or on any of his other princely duties.

Although warned to protect her maidenhead at all costs, she didn’t see anything wrong with deeper kisses and letting his hands explore as long as she remained in control and he didn’t explore too much further than was decent. After several dates where she allowed him more and more liberty, she found herself in his apartment and on a couch.

This is fine, we’re not in his bed.

A couch was innocuous and safe, she had been in his apartment before and sat on his furniture dozens of times. It really was no different. She justified her choices as this was the furthest she had ever gone with anyone.

He is to be my future husband, this is fine.
She started to notice new things about Ben she had never noticed before. Like how soft his hair was as her fingers ran through his locks as they continued to kiss. She found she rather liked the rough stubble that grew on his face late in the day. His cologne was warm and spicy, being so close she was able to smell and inhale deeply; she never knew how intoxicating his scent was. A hot feeling started to emerge all throughout her body; she was dizzy with the new feeling but eager for it to continue. Everything felt like it was going in slow motion, but intense; a hum that vibrated through her whole body and electrified her senses. Too distracted by how good everything felt, she didn’t really notice how his hands started to push her body closer to his; even if she did, it had felt amazing and she wanted more of everything that was happening.

It wasn’t until he had pulled her to where she was decidedly unladylike on top of him, her legs obscenely open to him and her skirt hiked up. It was when she felt a hardness underneath her that could only be one thing that she started to pull back from her actions; his mouth suctioning at her neck had momentarily re-distracted her and made her eyes roll to the back of her head.

Anything that feels this amazing can’t be wrong.

If she could pay attention to anything beyond Ben’s mouth on her, she would wonder who was making such scandalous sounds as she had certainly never moaned or whimpered in such a lewd way.

Encouraged by her reactions, his hands then made their way up her skirt and so close to her forbidden area, a place where even she rarely even touched, that she squeaked in alarm and every good feeling came to a halt and she started to panic.

Hearing her in distress, Ben immediately drew back his hands and she had leapt off of him and scurried to the furthest side of the couch from him; all while pulling down her skirt and keeping her hands firmly on her hem as to not allow the clothing to retract.

“I’m sorry,” he instinctively and immediately apologized. He was a little confused as to what happened and slightly dazed from what they were doing, but he instantly stopped any offending action.

She blinked a few times and tried to look at anything but him. Her alarm soon turned to embarrassment. She couldn’t believe she had let it go that far and the undignified sound she had made.

“It’s alright,” she told him quickly, although part of her didn’t feel that way. But she had to let him know it wasn’t something he did, at least not against her will. She was happy that he immediately stopped, she had been warned that if she were indecently alone with a man he could take what he wanted by force. She had also been warned that Ben could ask for access to her body, and as future king she couldn’t very well say so; that’s why it had been drilled into her head not to be alone with him to even give him the idea.

But she knew her Bennie Boo wasn’t like that, and he had proven that by respecting her boundaries even though she had initiated contact.

“I was just surprised…I have never…” she didn’t need to finish that thought, they both knew she was the picture perfect princess, but that didn’t stop the blush that emerged. While normally she prided herself on her purity, talking about it with Ben made her feel insecure and childish.

“No…I know…it’s my fault, I didn’t mean…to scare you,” he tried to be comforting but found himself turning scarlet at trying to tactfully apologize for his hard on and where his hands went.
She thought it was charming and took it as a sign that he was just as inexperienced as she was, relieved that perhaps she didn’t need to worry about Mal after all.

*She’s a tramp, everyone knows about how she disappears with Carlos during breaks and before dinner. Ben wouldn’t want someone so used up and probably has a bastard on the way or soon enough. I don’t know why I was so worried. She’s nothing but a poorly bred half-breed commoner. She could never be a serious contender for Queen.*

The more confident she grew in Ben’s desire for her and their mutual inexperience, the more she thought it was so silly of her to ever think Mal or anyone from the Isle could every really be a threat to their relationship.

Both took a moment to calm down, to let their hearts stop racing. Audrey looked at the clock and it was well past curfew. She really ought to get back, even though she knew that most of the adult hall monitors stopped short of the royal wing.

Most didn’t bother because not only were royals reared to be virtuous, it wasn’t as if the school board would take their words over a prince or princess. No king or queen would hear of their children behavior inappropriately, Chad was living proof of that.

But still, she didn’t want to give anyone a shred of doubt about her virtue.

“I’m going to get going,” she said primly, acting as if it were the end of any other date.

“Right, let me walk you out,” Ben offered courteously.

“No, it’s right,” she assured, her eyes darting quickly to his crotch where it was clearly obvious he was still having…issues.

Part of her preened that she could elicit such a reaction,

*Maybe I’ll have that crown sooner than I thought.*

Although never said outright, she always suspected that most royals married young, their parents’ generation had all married in their mid to late teens, because they couldn’t wait to get into the marriage bed. Part of her thought it was rather ingenious of her to figure that out on her own. Not only would Ben see her as a sexual being, she would hold off any real intimacy until marriage and therefore fan his desire for her.

She bet that if she played it right, she would be engaged by the end of the school year. She kept her demure façade and left, smiling when she was out of his eyesight and planned her next few dates, wondering if she ought to show some bare shoulder with her next outfit.

Once Audrey was gone, Ben groaned in frustration. He had no idea what was going on with her. He could admit he liked her newfound forwardness to a point, he assumed her willingness to be more physical as a sign of her growing trust in him and feelings.

He also knew that he probably shouldn’t have let his hands wander to such an intimate place, but while she was on top of him he thought perhaps it would be welcomed. It was not so he knew for next time to just keep his hands above clothes and wait for her to let him know when he could explore further.

But he knew that time would not come, at least not anytime soon.

His blood ran hot and unfulfilled still. He had been taught to not defile princesses or shame his house
by siring bastards. It was an easy enough role to fulfill as he was under constant watch and until a month or so ago, Audrey had never done anything beyond innocent kisses and hugs.

While he respected her prerogative to only go so far, it didn’t stop him from becoming irritable to be left in such a state time and again. It seemed Audrey was willing to go further and further, his body reacting accordingly but never satisfied. He wasn’t even irritated at her, just at his body for wanting something and being denied, no matter how justified that denial was.

Even so long after Audrey left, he was still hard and wanting. The memory of her above him would not fade. He sighed deeply and decided to take a long shower. If he were a stronger person, it would have been a cold shower. But he felt he deserved a release, one where it would harm no one and given Audrey was his girlfriend and part of the cause of his predicament, it was alright to have her be the star of his fantasies to relieve him of his ache.

He went to his opulent bathroom, which was as big as some of the dorms of the lesser nobility or commoner students. He had a huge porcelain claw foot tub with gold fixtures as the focal point in the middle of the room. He opted for the spa shower with tile imported from Northern Wei and a frameless glass enclosure at the very back. He adjusted the taps to his preferred temperature, the water running and warm steam started to fill the bathroom. He stripped off his clothes, gently placing them into a nearby hamper; being mindful as he slid down his boxers to not accidently rough up his bobbing erection.

***

His underwear was slightly damp from his desire; he again thanked the gods that his laundry was not taken care of by human hands who would then blather. He walked into his shower and sighed in contentment under the warm spray, his hair darkening from a brassy brown to almost chestnut. The water ran in rivulets down his toned chest, he closed his eyes and let his mind wander.

He was back on the couch, with Audrey writhing on top of him. He recalled the sounds of pleasure that escaped from her full lips and how her hips moved by their own volition to create a pleasurable friction against him. He remembered the taste of her skin as he suckled at her neck, wondering how his lovebite would look on her caramel skin; the thrill of such a forbidden act inflaming his desires forward.

He was harder than ever, he reached down to grip his cock and used his other hand to stead himself against the shower wall; the running water proving enough slickness and friction as he pumped up and down, alternating pressure as he liked.

He imagined a moment where Audrey did not want to stop, and he let his hands roam upon the soft skin he had been denied. There, he could explore between her silken thighs and coax even more of the lovely moans from her.

There was something about having Audrey, the always composed princess, lose control with want and desire that made his blood burn. He fantasized that she would let him rip the expensive blouse she wore and every other trappings of their station from her body and smile while he did so. Fully and gloriously naked above him, she would smile wickedly as she eased her way onto his hardness; her feeling tight, wet, and divine.

His hand moved faster and faster, his body tensing with his oncoming euphoria. He saw her bouncing up and down upon him, his teeth sinking into her newly red love bite. But when he removed his mouth from her newly red love bite, her skin was no longer a lovely dark honey but fair like moonlight. Her luscious dark locks had turned to silken plum, and her chocolate
eyes were deep jade.

It was suddenly Mal who had been on top of him, emitting the moans and whimpers he longed to hear from her strawberry lips. There she was, wild and beautiful, his mark upon her skin;

“Your Majesty,” she teased impishly, and rode him with abandon.

“My Queen,” he growled back, claiming her lips with a punishing kiss.

At that thought, he came in hot white spurts against the shower tile; shivering his orgasm and still picturing Mal riding him as he pumped himself until he was fully spent.

***

He leaned against the wall as he felt he couldn’t fully stand on his own, he blinked as the water still ran over him, thankful that there was an unlimited supply of hot water. He kept relaying the fantasy, taking in the gravity of what it meant and berating himself for not controlling himself better.

He knew he should have kept fantasizing about his girlfriend, the one he had been with for almost a year. The one he had a date with not even an hour ago. No matter how much anyone told him what he had done was natural or harmless, he couldn’t help but feel he had been unfaithful; in mind if not in body.

“Shit,” he whispered as he gently hit his head against the tile a few times, hoping that perhaps it would knock some sense into him.

He was in trouble, he couldn’t deny that anymore.

In the middle of next week, he sought out Mal. He wasn’t quite sure where she would be, it wasn’t one of their normal meetings and he could admit to himself that he tried to not see her outside of those.

It was easier on him to distance himself, otherwise whatever it was that was growing inside of him would grow bigger.

But he had gotten an interesting call and he needed to talk to her about it immediately.

He had finally gotten ahold of a teacher who had known where she was, he headed towards the arts building and found her working on a massive wall sized canvas.

He had forgotten why he had come to see her, rendered speechless at the stunning painting she was working on.

It was a lush landscape of a place he had never seen before. Small peaks covered with vines and lone trees jutted from swaths of cerulean water that glittered in the sunlight like jewels. The crests so tall there were wisps of clouds that lazily kept them company. There were so many flowers in shapes and colours he had never seen before, he already wanted them for the gardens at Auradon Prep.

Mal had stood to the side, clothed in sweatpants and a long sleeve Auradon Knights t-shirt that was so paint splattered he was certain even goblin magic would never get the stains out.

“Ben?” she asked quietly when he didn’t speak when he entered the room and just stared at the wall.
“Wow Mal, this is…” he wasn’t even sure what word to use, he felt like his vocabulary was failing him and nothing would do it justice. He had no idea she was so talented, she never mentioned her art outside of small talk of how classes were going.

“Thanks,” she saved him from having to finish his sentence. She knew she probably ought to say more, he was giving her a compliment but conversation was never her strong suit.

“Where is this?”

She just shrugged her shoulders, it wasn’t any place specific. It wasn’t as if she had been to many; the Isle, Auradon Prep, and various parts of Auradon City was the breadth of her travels.

“It’s mostly just dreams I’ve had,” she confessed, it was a place she would go to in her sleep. It was the only time she ever really knew peace on the Isle.

Ben froze at the mention of dreams, wondering if perhaps she had dreamt of him too.

“It’s a beautiful dream,” he said at last, not knowing what else to say.

She just nodded, taking her pallet and adding more details.

“What are you adding?” he knew he should talk about his phone call, but all he wanted was to hear her talk about something she was clearly passionate about.

“Just some details…this cove is filled with diamonds.”

“Diamonds?” he couldn’t help but smile at the thought of a pool filled with gems, he knew so many princesses, and Chad, who would kill to visit such a place.

“Yeah, I don’t know why,” she admitted as she had no love for the gems. Diamonds, rubies, emeralds, these were just rocks to her but she knew they belonged in the inlet and would paint them there.

“The water is pure and fresh, the cove is filled with diamonds, the land is fertile, the mountains are filled with platinum and gold…sometimes I think this is really Evie’s dream land and she wishes for it so hard that I stumble into them while we sleep.”

They both laughed, knowing the blue haired girl’s love for jewelry. He couldn’t speak for a few moments, his heart beating in his chest too quickly when she smiled at him.

“Do you have a showcase?” he asked but knew she must have, there was no way the art teacher would pass up showing off such talent.

She quickly refused to meet his eye and turned to keep painting,

“Yeah, but I’m not doing it,” she mumbled and hoped he would drop the subject.

Unfortunately for Mal, Ben had better hearing than most.

“Why wouldn’t you do it?” he didn’t understand, it was such a great honor.

“Gee, I don’t know,” she started and the sarcasm so thick even he wanted to roll his eyes, “standing around to be judged by people who hate me? Sounds like the best time ever,” her voice taking the high pitch of some of the girls on the cheerleading squad.

“No one hates you,” he insisted, and he believed that. He just felt she and the others were
misunderstood, but there was no real hate there.

_How could anyone hate you?_

She chose not to respond, but it was clear she did not believe him.

“Come on, the others I know have a showcase. Carlos has a solo and Jay has a photography exhibit. I know Evie must be on the short list for one too for the fashion class,” he recalled her creations from homecoming. “You’ve worked so hard, you deserved to be honored.”

Crown Prince Ben didn’t have his own showcase, but as the highest ranking royal and as Prince of Auradon City, he had to make an appearance. It’d be the first time his entire family would be at an event at the same time, his father the founding member of the school and his mother’s patronage of the arts.

He felt it would be good to show his father, and by extension the rest of the kingdom, how well the Isle Four were doing and that they belonged there, not some wretched island to pay for the sins of their parents. He also saw it as another opportunity to try to gain patronage for other Isle children to come to Auradon. There were always an abundance of rich nobles, royals, and even wealthy commoners who wanted to spend their exorbitant fortune on the next big artist.

The Winter Recital Showcase wasn’t just to show off the students’ talents to their parents, it was also to garner potential patrons. There have been students who have been offered scholarships or even commissions. He was confident that Mal could potentially be asked to do a mural for some rec center or even private homes.

He was also fielding offers for Evie to design for big retailers such as Target and Corona Outfitters, it was one thing among many on the next agenda for their weekly meetings.

He could name five noble families off the top of his head who were major donors to all the dance studios across Auradon.

With their grades and talents, basically all four Isle teens could walk onto any university of their choosing.

So it made no sense to Ben while Mal would skip the Winter Recital. Still, she seemed stubborn and unwilling to budge, but he knew her well enough to get her to comply.

“Look, if you don’t go then I’m afraid the others would follow suit. They’ve worked so hard for these showcases, it’d be a shame to have all their work go to waste.”

“What’s the point of going to show off all that work if they’re just going to sneer at us, tell us that we only got showcases because you felt sorry for us or we somehow cheated with magic,” she didn’t deny that the others would probably follow her lead, but perhaps she was shielding them from a future heartache.

Ben winced, acknowledging that there were a few who probably thought as much and thinking back to the Sherwood fiasco. But he also believed those people were few in number, so he continued on,

“You shouldn’t let the possibility of a few assholes stop you from celebrating your talent,” he challenged her, insinuating she was being a coward. “It’s going to be great, people going are celebrating art, not to pick a fight.”

“You severely underestimate people’s propensity to hold a grudge and be spiteful.”
But part of her was starting to waver, Evie was particularly excited and so was Carlos. She wanted to see both of them shine and wondered if she could just hide in the background somewhere and not be noticed.

“Your’e just too cynical. It’s going to be great, and you’re going to have a good time,” he insisted and Mal heard a challenge in his voice. “You’re going to see how awesome the others have done, be first row at all their showcases, they’re going to be front and center at yours. And I’m willing to place a bet on it.”

“Oh really?”

“Yes, really,” he smiled, feeling he was finally getting somewhere. “Name your wager.”

“Cars, for all four of us. Mine will be purple, naturally. You can figure out what the others want.”

Mal could not resist an easy win, how could Ben be so naïve? She almost felt bad for taking advantage of him, but felt it would be a good lesson. She also had no intention of holding it to him either. He clearly would lose and it was the most ridiculous thing she could think of, and knew no way would be honor that deal.

“Damn Lefay, you go big or go home,” he admired and happy he could be so familiar with her, but he would bet whatever it took to get them all to take their rightful place in Auradon.

“When you make it so easy…” she teased.

“Whoa, hold it. What do I get when I win?”

“Right, in the alternate universe where that happens; you can have my first born,” she rolled her eyes as she continued to paint and talk.

“Hmmm…” he pretended to contemplate it, “I don’t think I’m in the market for purple haired freckled babies…” he was able to hide his dismay as her smile more than made up for the thought of her and Carlos lasting that long and having children. “But I think I’ll take that interview you’ve been avoiding.”

“Sure. I’ll have Evie create a dress just for the occasion.”

Ben was saddened that she had agreed to it so easily because she was so convinced that the Winter Recital would end in disaster. But he also knew when to take a win, even if it was small ones.

“I got an interesting call today,” he abruptly changed the subject, remembering why he was there in the first place.

Mal didn’t respond as she wasn’t sure what he was talking about.

“It was from Sherwood, they are very interested in sponsoring a few students for the Isle to Auradon program…they said they’d be willing to offer a ‘sports scholarship.’”

“Oh, that’s good, right?” she was glad her suggestion was taken to heart.

“I’m wondering where they got such an idea.”

“I suggested it to them after arbitration,” she said easily, not thinking it was something she needed to deny.

He didn’t know how he felt about Mal making these kinds of suggestions without his input.
Although he wasn’t all that surprised given her independent nature.

“Mal,” he said gently, wanting to be diplomatic but he felt he had to assert that he was not only her friend but Crown Prince and the Isle to Auradon program was his to lead. “Please consult with me before you make decisions like this.”

“I saw an opportunity and I took it,” she didn’t understand what the issue was, her voice edging on being defensive.

“I get that, and I’m glad to see the initiative and your dedication to this program; but these kind of offers and decisions should be weighed carefully before we commit to them. We can’t just let Sherwood go to the Isle and start perusing the children as if they were at the grocery store.”

Mal reigned in her natural inclination to simply tell him it was too bad, she made a decision and it was clearly getting results. But she hadn’t survived as long as she had by losing her temper or speaking too hastily. She had to remember that she was basically nobody in Auradon, her previous position as heiress apparent to the Leadership of the Isle didn’t mean anything. She couldn’t expect Ben, who was the next King of all 18 Kingdoms plus the Isle, to defer to her in anything.

While it felt unnatural and somewhat grated on her nerves, she capitulated to his authority.

“Alright, so what exactly is wrong?”

Ben was adept to thinking before he spoke and wanted to convey his issues with the plan itself and not that he really thought Mal had a bad idea.

“I question the ethics of allowing schools to choose whom they want to come to Auradon based solely on athletic performance.”

“Ethics?”

He struggled to explain as she looked at him confused, as if she had never heard the term.

“Ethics…moral guidance to making decisions.”

“Oh…” if that was the issue then she had a simple answer. “Sherwood doesn’t have any, so I figure we should take advantage of their greed.”

He was dumbstruck, he had never heard anyone so cavalier about the issue.

“Ms. Hogarth explained to me the monetary incentives for a school winning championships. Sherwood had portrayed a willingness to destroy Jay and Carlos’ potential chances at a future in order to get the edge.”

“I don’t think…”

“Ben, don’t be naive,” she said shortly, irritated that he would think otherwise. “If they had won, Jay and Carlos would have been kicked off the team. It would have set a precedent for anyone to question their integrity and work. We get good grades, who in class would have jumped at the chance to knock us out to place in the top percentile? And not just them, anyone with a magical parent would have been targets.”

“I would have stopped that, we would protect you guys.”

“You can’t protect us forever, and not outside of Auradon City. You’re not going to follow us to
university, and even if you did being Crown Prince or even King wouldn’t stop people from taking advantage of any doubt they can cast on us to make us go away…not everyone is like you Ben, they don’t see us as people. They only see danger and now as competition.”

“Maybe so,” he conceded. “But that doesn’t mean we should let them take advantage of desperate children so they can use them to further their sports program.”

“I don’t see the difference between a ‘sports’ scholarship or an academic one. Either way, they want to attract people they think will benefit their school. Why only do the smart or artistic get to Auradon? Sometimes strength and athletic ability is all some have.”

“Because they deserve more than to just be used as a pawn in some political scheme. There shouldn’t be any kind of contingent ‘scholarship,’ athletic, academic, or for the arts. I didn’t invite you guys here because you’d help to win a championship or gain anything for the arts department. It’s not fair to take advantage of desperate kids and give them ‘scholarships’ while they help earn the school millions, millions they never see. Even if you guys weren’t doing so well, we’d help you catch up or whatever it took to get you settled and happy. It’s not why I started Isle to Auradon.”

“Ben, if you’re waiting for everyone to offer an Isle child a place in their school or money to sponsor them out of the goodness of their heart, you’re going to be waiting forever. The Isle has existed for some twenty odd years, the gods know how long since anyone first found out the villains were having children, or even when they found out how desperate things are there. They don’t care.”

“I care, and I won’t let them be used and later be rejected if it doesn’t work out. These kids deserve a chance to choose their own path and make their own life in Auradon. They shouldn’t have to be pressured to perform for anything.”

“Alright Ben, that’s all well and noble of you. But while you wait for everyone to find their inner hero and pat yourself on the back for being a good guy, children are dying.”

Mal regretting those words as soon as they passed her lips and Ben stilled as if she slapped him. She wished she were better with her words, and although she still felt the truth in what she said; she wished she had chosen a better way to say them or not at all.

Because in the end, Ben was a good guy; probably too good for this world and he had high hopes that everyone was just as good as he was.

“I’m sorry,” she sighed and looked down. “That was really bitchy of me to say…I know you’re just trying to help everyone.”

“But you’re right,” he admitted with a defeated breathe. “Children are suffering, even dying as the slow wheels of bureaucracy turn. Maybe we should just take it as a win, let them offer to let kids in on a ‘scholarship’ and hope for the best.”

“Look, I’m sorry for going behind your back and suggesting it to Sherwood…I should have waited…but they still have to get permission to even get to the Isle right? It’s still under the Crown’s jurisdiction?”

“Yes, it’d be under the King’s authority.”

“Well, it’s not like King Adam is all that eager to let more Isle children to Auradon…that should buy us some time to come up with some contingencies.”

“Contingencies?”
“Yeah, like say they can’t just dump the kids back to the Isle if it turns out they’re not great players. They have to offer them more than just a place at school…some sort of agreement where they are responsible for the kids period…not just if they’re on a team.”

It was rather weak and patchy plan but it was all they had at the moment. And while not ideal, it was a way to get more kids into Auradon. As much as he hated to admit, she was right. People were not as willing to help these children as he had hoped. Time was a factor and they needed to get these kids into Auradon as soon as they could. He needed to come up with a solid plan to deal with Sherwood, and any other school who wanted to follow in their footsteps.

It was so odd and foreign to Mal, to see someone who desperately wanted to help and didn’t want anything in return. Every meeting she has ever had with him, he was always bright eyed and determined. At first, it had annoyed her because for the life of her she could not figure out what his game was. She was so certain that he had wanted something from them, she had waited for months for him to tell them what he expected of them. Perhaps he wanted loyal allies with magic for when he took over. Maybe there had been some sort of scandal that they weren’t privy to because gossip never made it to RBN, only celebrations and other royal propaganda, and needed a feel good story to show he had a heart. But no request ever came, he only asked how she and the others were doing and if they needed anything.

After so long, she finally realized he had done everything he had done because he wanted to help them and no more.

She had always thought that good people were the true fairy tale.

While she always saw people who were out to get something, Ben only saw the good in people; he wanted everyone to be as good as he was and for some inexplicable reason, it made her angry that he was finding out that they weren’t as good as he had hoped.

Before he left to go about his princely duties or whatever he did, Mal stopped him,

“Ben, wait.”

He turned and waited patiently for her to tell him what she wanted, another annoying proof that he was such a good guy. She knew he had an insanely busy schedule, more so than any other student due to his royal status. Despite that, he still made time for her and the other Isle kids.

She really didn’t know how to handle someone who was truly good, at least if he were a villain or run of the mill person then she could fight her way through dealing with them.

Trying to repay kindness, she felt clumsy and slow witted.

But she was determined to try.

“I don’t think we ever thanked you…for rescuing us from the Isle.”

“You don’t have to thank me,” he said sincerely. It was of his opinion that he owned them nothing less, as they shouldn’t have had to endure such horrors to begin with.

“No, we do…I know that you think it’s something that any normal person would do…but it’s not. You’re fighting for kids you don’t know and by all accounts have no responsibility for or duty to. You don’t owe us anything but you’re fighting so hard for us. You’re fighting against you father, other nobles and royals at Auradon…we watch TV Ben, we hear people gossiping and complaining…we know what all that you’re doing and you’re doing it because you’re an actual good person. Not just some puffed up prince whose story is all hyperbole. You’re rare and…special.
No one would have even thought of doing half of what you are doing for us…you saved our…you saved my life.”

Ben stood there, seeing how vulnerable she was as she tried to articulate her appreciation. He felt his heart restrict in his chest, wanting to do so much more because he knew she deserved all of it and more.

She grimaced, thinking that she sounded stupid and inelegant. She wished Evie or Carlos were there, they would have better words, more graceful and refined. She started to twist the paintbrush in her hands, hoping she didn’t sound like a total idiot and she huffed, thinking that she should just get on with it.

She walked quickly to a portfolio a couple desks away, vigorously rubbed her hands on her paint stained jeans to not get anything dirty. After shuffling through a couple pages from a sketch pad she had grabbed the one she was looking for.

Ben never thought he’d ever see Mal look anything other than confident or aloof, but she stood in front of him unsure and almost shy; she even had some trouble meeting his eyes.

“I know you have like royal artists to make your portrait or you only do photography or something…and it’s nowhere near enough to repay you for all that you’ve done and continued to do…but here.”

She handed him an 18” x 24” sketch paper with a breathtaking detailed charcoal portrait of himself. He was wearing his dress uniform, the one he wore to homecoming and most royal ceremonial events. She had captured his easy going smile, something he wished he could have gotten for his own royal portraits but was told was too informal. He also wore the princely royal crown proudly, not as if it held the weight of all of Auradon.

He was no artist by any stretch of the imagination, but he knew from standing for his own and from what others had said; it must have taken her weeks to get this done. And this was all on top of her school work and own art projects.

She had also had done it completely from memory, his heart jumped in his throat thinking that maybe she thinks of him as much as he thinks of her.

It also made his chest fill with pride to see the inscription she put on a decorative scroll at the bottom:

*Ben le Bon et Coeur de Lion*  

He’s never had anyone make anything for him, all gifts were always paid for; even the ones from his close family and friends. While he appreciated any gift he ever got, and he could admit he had never made anything for anyone, he felt that it was the most precious gift he had ever gotten because it was made by her hand and done with her heart.

Mal had made it as a token of her appreciation, something she didn’t have to do and she put her heart and soul into it.

“You don’t have to like put it up anywhere. I know you have official portraits and all that,” she said dismissive of it, wondering if it were a mistake to give a prince something so lowly when he could afford a thousand portraits from people with decades of experience and in whatever medium he wanted.

She needed to put space between them, feeling flustered and out of sorts; she went back to painting her dream landscape and gave him a chance to bow out politely.
“No, this is amazing. I’m going to frame it and make sure it’s given a place of honor in my suite,” he promised.

“OK,” she told him, hoping he didn’t see her face turn red as she could feel herself get warm. Being appreciated by someone other than her friends was new and she had no idea what to do with herself. He did see her blush and he couldn’t help but think it was the cutest thing he had ever witnessed. He would never dream of teasing her, however, and again thanked her for such a thoughtful gift.

“I’ll see you guys at the next meeting,” he said with a light heart and left her to her artwork. He did have another appointment he must get to, but he was happy to have made time for Mal.

Ben wondered why his mother hung around Auradon Prep more often lately. He knew the library on the grounds was her favorite, but it seemed like he saw her far more often than he ever had any previous year he was there.

It was a small curiosity, he eventually brushed it off as her wanting to be closer to him since it was his last year at Auradon Prep. That certainly seemed like the most likely answer.

It was one of his few free afternoons, and he was more than happy to spend time with her. They had gotten a new shipment of books, he had no idea how they would fit them in the already expansive library, but he dutifully helped her take inventory and place them where she dictated they ought to go.

“Ohhh, will you look at these beautiful bookmarks?” the Queen cooed over the dozens spread out over a table.

Ben went to look them over after he had dumped an empty box into recycling.

“Yeah, these are gorgeous,” appreciating the fine detail of various flowers and others with famous literary quotes done in perfect calligraphy. There was something familiar with the handwriting and strokes, he couldn’t place where he had seen them before.

“Where did you get them?” he figured she’d say they were done by a local artisan that she was patronizing and maybe that’s why it seemed familiar.

“From Mal Lefay,” she said without a second thought. “She didn’t even ask for money or anything. She just donated them to the library.”

He had never heard his mother speak with such pride about anybody.

“You know Mal?” he was surprised, he didn’t think the two would have ever crossed paths. It also explained why he recognized the handwriting, the same beautiful script graced a portrait she did for him.

“Oh yes, such a lovely girl. Has the utmost respect for books. She got detention a bit ago because she sprained the wrist of a boy who had dog eared a library book. It was no less than he deserved, desecrating a book like that. It’d be bad enough if he did that to his own private books, but a library book? Royal property to boot? There are some things that are sacrosanct. She donated these book marks so no one would do that again.”

Ben was surprised at the animosity his mother’s tone undertook when describing very slight damage
to a book, but then so much pride for the Moor fae. He also recalled the incident, the Isle girl owning up to it immediately and accepted her punishment of apologizing to the student and detention gracefully.

*If only some royals could do the same.*

Ben thought sardonically, recalling how some of his fellow royals would rather receive worse punishments than to admit they were in the wrong and apologize.

“Oh look at this one, she made it for me, I know it,” Queen Belle interrupted his thoughts as she showed him the bookmark.

*Oh, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!*

*It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night.*

*Like a rich jewel in an Ethiope’s ear,*

*Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear.*

The black ink stark against a blue and gold marble background. He didn’t think he had ever seen such an interesting effect of paint and gold leaf.

“She hates Romeo and Juliet,” she said with far more endearment he thought she’d ever give to someone who disliked her favorite book but she used that reasoning to justify why she thought the bookmark was meant for her.

“Yes, this one is for me. I’m keeping it.” She then sequestered the bookmark in question so it wouldn’t be among the ones free to anyone who wanted one.

He had no idea what was going on.

“And she is so smart. Insightful that one, she really reads the books she’s assigned. And she reads for fun. I don’t think I’ve ever seen another student check out and promptly return books at the rate she does…other than myself and you, of course,” she laughed at her own observation. “She doesn’t just do the bare minimum to get by.”

“Does she come here a lot?” Ben hoped his inquiries were taken as small talk and not his need to know more about Mal.

“Oh yes, she studies here every day. She can’t study in her room because her roommate uses the computer, can’t stand the sound of typing. Says it’s like little knives stabbing her ears. Girl after my own heart,” Belle giggled when Mal described the offending sounds and totally agreed.

“Plus the awful glare and light those horrible things give off, terrible for eyesight. Says just being around them gives her headaches, the poor dear.”

He didn’t think there was anyone else in the world who shared his mother’s hatred of the “demon box” as she often called the device.

Part of Ben was so happy to see that his mother liked Mal. His smile started to fall when he really
thought of why that made him happy. He knew his mother had never talked about Audrey in such
glowing terms or at all unless he brought the princess up.

There was something he wanted to talk about, something that had been on his mind for quite some
time but he wasn’t sure who he could speak so openly to.

“Mom…can I ask you something?” Ben was a bit shy, unsure if his mom was the one to ask but he
wasn’t speaking to his father and felt his mother would be more sympathetic and open.

“Of course dear, what is it?”

It took a few moments for him to find his voice, but he finally asked,

“How did you know you loved pops?”

Belle blinked a few times, surprised at such a serious question and honestly wasn’t quite prepared for
it. She had more or less dreaded the day when her little boy would be old enough to ask about love.
Part of her hated to see her little lion grow up, but she was also so proud of the man he was
becoming.

She swallowed down the disappointment that it was Audrey that captured his heart, but she more
than anyone knew no one could control who they loved.

She would accept the princess for her son’s sake.

She sat them both down at the table, leaving their inventory for another day.

“Well, you and everyone knows the story by heart,” she started off, thinking of the rough start to
meeting Adam. “It certainly did not start in the best circumstances. I was a prisoner, and I certainly
resented that for a good long while…justifiably so.”

Ben didn’t disagree. He didn’t particularly care for his parents’ “fairy tale” but he listened patiently.

“So the first few weeks were the roughest. We were both unsure of what my ‘stay’ at his castle
meant or how it was supposed to work. I don’t think he even knew exactly what he had planned, but
we took that time to get used to the idea that we were stuck with each other. We started a routine. I
mostly stuck to my rooms, he lurked about in his wing. I don’t recall who I complained to, but
someone let him know of my love of books and how bored I was. Your father had introduced me to
his library.”

Belle for a moment was lost in the happy memory, the first time she had ever seen so many books;
her poor small town bookmaker’s collection had seemed so pitiful in comparison.

Ben wasn’t only listening to his mother’s story, but took in how she looked and how clear it was to
anyone watching how much his mother loved his father and how they fell in love.

“Now before you make any jokes about how I fell in love with his library before I fell in love with
him…”

Ben couldn’t help but laugh as it was something that crossed his mind and could easily see how
some would see it that way.

“The library that was originally in the castle and is now student dorms was impressive by anyone’s
standards. But to a girl from a tiny village in the heart of the French country side, I thought I had died
and gone to heaven. The shelves seemed endless and it was literally the most beautiful thing I had
ever seen. I was struck speechless. Now while I joke, that wasn’t the day I fell in love with him. It was the first time I stopped seeing him as the ‘Beast’ and started to see him as Adam. It wasn’t the fact that he had shown me a library, I probably would have found it eventually when I got the courage to explore. But it was the first time I heard him tell a joke. I had asked if he had read all those books, thinking it was impossible because there was so many, and he had answered ‘No, not all of them…some of them are in Greek.’”

Ben thought his mother’s laughter sounded like bells, light and dulcet. Although it was a lame joke, he could clearly picture his father telling it. The thought of him joking around while covered in fur and had horns made it all the more ridiculous.

“After that day, we spent most of our time in the library. I was surprised to learn that he was as a voracious reader as I was. He wasn’t just some spoiled prince who had a library to show off his wealth and had it as mere decoration; he really had read all the books except the ones in Greek as he hadn’t mastered that language yet. Then without any prompting from me, he offered to teach me Latin and German, knowing I would want to read those books as well. So our days filled with reading, learning a new languages, and so many conversations over the books and even about our lives before I came to the castle. Suddenly months had passed and I wouldn’t haven even realized it if not for changing of the seasons. I think I realized I loved him when I recognized he was something I had so desperately wanted all my life …someone I could talk to and understood me.”

Ben thought to all the times he had meetings with Mal, working until midnight because he didn’t realize how much time had passed. He tried to think of any instance like that with Audrey and nothing came to mind. All he could think about where the times they could squeeze each other into their busy schedules, and never deviating beyond the time they allotted for each other.

Dating Audrey was just another appointment on his schedule, if they had time for each other than great. If not, then they tried again later.

He moved his schedule to fit the meeting with Mal in, not the other way around.

“I had lived in the same village all my life up to that point, I could literally narrate the villagers’ routine; they were all so predictable. At nineteen years old, the only thing anyone in town knew about me was that I was beautiful. That’s all they saw, that’s all they cared to know. That’s all they really valued. They thought me as so strange and foreign, my love of books and learning. In their mind, they couldn’t reconcile how someone they thought of as beautiful would want to be learned. As if beauty and intelligence were incompatible states of being. You would have thought I spoke an entirely different language and had just moved there, how strange they thought I was. They couldn’t see past my face. They couldn’t get past my ‘oddness.’ Your father never saw me as odd or strange, or merely just a beautiful face. He saw past the beauty and treated me like an intelligent person. He respected my opinions and thoughts. He remembered my preferences and took out books he thought I would like. He just did all these small little things that let me know that when I talked, he listened. Then one day while playing in the snow, I fully saw how gentle and fun he could be…and I realized there was something there that wasn’t there before. I realized that again when he let me free to go help my father, despite knowing his time for the curse was running out. He had faith that I would keep my word, and even if I didn’t he wouldn’t hold it against me. And I realized it again when he saw that I came back for him and he fought to live rather than just succumbing to the mob; he defeated Gaston and was willing to grant him mercy and banishment instead of death. And I felt it again when instead of granting me royal jewels, a grand parure as was traditional for an engagement gift, he instead granted me the land this library sat on and the best architect the newly united Auradon had known. And again when I presented him with a pregnancy test and said he didn’t care if you were a boy or a girl, he only hoped that you would have my eyes and kind heart. And again when he cried when he first held you and promised to always protect us.”
Belle paused, recalling those days in the castle, falling in love, and the family they created. She looked at Ben and while she didn’t care for Audrey, she could learn to love her if she made Ben feel the way Adam made her feel and could give him a life filled with love and joy of family.

“So there wasn’t just one moment when I realized I was in love with your father. It’s many moments, big and small moments where I fall in love with him again and again.”

It heartened Ben to hear how much his parents loved each other. He so desperately yearned for the same thing. But the more he listened to his mother, the more he saw that he had not felt anything close to that for Audrey.

With his mother being so honest and open, he felt he could be the same way.

“I think…I think I’m in love with someone…someone who isn’t Audrey.”

Belle was taken back, she had no idea Ben had been interested in someone else much less potentially in love with them. She had just assumed things were going well with the Princess of Auroria.

“I haven’t done anything, I wouldn’t do that to Audrey. I know you raised me better than that,” he quickly told her, taking her silence as suspicion.

“No, no, no…I know Ben. I know you would never do that, I was just surprised. I didn’t think there was another princess that caught your eye.” She tried to think of who else Ben had been talking to, trying to remember if he had mentioned anyone in particular.

“She’s not a princess…” he confessed, but had a hard to revealing anymore and his eyes wanting to look anywhere else but into hers or else he would just spill everything at once.

“You know you have free choice of whatever bride you want,” she assured him, thinking he was afraid she and his father would be upset the girl in question wasn’t of royal blood. Adam had been born royal and raised to think royal marriages were a matter of state and not of heart. The only reason he had not been married at the time he was cursed was because his father had died and Adam was enjoying bachelorhood too much to settle down and no one could force it upon him. But he had admitted that if he had not been cursed, he probably would have married a neighboring kingdom’s princess in the next couple of years.

It was odd to think that perhaps if not for the Enchantress, Adam might have been married to a princess of Westerly.

Most of the country was of the same opinion, royals married other royals. Cinderella had been the daughter of a minor noble, but it was close enough for most to forgive or overlook. Belle was not the daughter of anyone other than an inventor; she could not claim any diluted royal or noble blood on the distaff side either. Most brushed off her marriage to Adam, thinking it was a rare exception that would never be repeated and that Ben was to make an advantageous marriage for Auradon and not a love match. There were always alliances with other countries like Maldonia or the Pride Lands, Auradon could always use another trade partner or other such perks of marriage unions. If not, then a match between a lesser princess of Auradon was just as acceptable.

But Belle had no intention of allowing anyone to dictate who her son could marry; Adam was of the same belief. True love trumped everything, and no one could convince her otherwise.

“We would never put ‘princesses on parade’ for you to pick a bride or any other misogynist tradition like that. We would never pressure you to be with anyone you don’t want to be with. The same with someone you do want to be with, we would support you no matter what.”
Ben was afraid she was speaking too soon, but with her soft loving honey brown eyes he felt he
could trust her to at least not freak out or disown him on the spot.

“I think I’m in love with Mal,” he finally admitted, his voice almost breaking but so relieved to have
finally told someone.

Ben was so full of surprises that day, Belle wasn’t sure she could keep up.

“I know I barely know her and I know she is a child of a villain…and she has a boyfriend …there
are just so many things…but I can’t stop thinking about her. She’s smart, fierce, loyal, brave…god
they’re all so brave…pops would freak out if I even mentioned her…he’s already so mad about her
being here…but she’s amazing…it’s so easy to talk to her. She has no expectations of me…she sees
past the crown and sees me… she cares so deeply for her friends…she’s never afraid to be herself or
say what she’s truly feeling…she’s beautiful…my heart just…thunders in my chest whenever I see
her…and I’m just…happy whenever she’s around or after I talk to her…I know I’m being stupid…
there’s Audrey…there’s Carlos…they would be so hurt…I don’t want to hurt anyone…”

“Oh darling,” she sighed and cupped his face. Her little boy was so torn, trying to be a good prince
and son, but fighting conflicting emotions and she hated to see him struggle so.

“You’re not stupid. You’re so young…and I know it’s hard. You’re only human and being torn
doesn’t make you a bad person.”

“Why do I feel like one? At the very least I feel like an idiot. Mal is off limits for so many more
reasons than just being the daughter of one of the most feared villains in all of Auradonian history.
She has a boyfriend she’s clearly in love with. She’s fae, and we both know how pops feels about
magical Beings. She’s only been here four months. She’s not royal, has no idea the multitude of
protocols and etiquette and would probably rather go back to the Isle than adhere to them. Audrey is
beautiful, she’s kind to children and animals, has an impeccable royal lineage, raised to be a queen
since birth…she’s the perfect princess.”

On paper, Audrey was clearly the one he should want. He just wished he felt the same way logic
dictated he ought to. Everything would be so much easier if he did.

But still, he didn’t feel that way about Audrey. He thought of his mother’s love for his father, of all
the great love stories of his parent’s generation. They had fought dragons and curses to be with each
other. Why did he start dating Audrey? Because he couldn’t think of a reason not to? They had been
together for a year and he still was as ambivalent about his feelings about her as he was when they
first started to date.

What kind of love story was that?

“Ben, Audrey is the perfect princess. And she would probably make the perfect Queen…but that
doesn’t mean she is perfect for you. You are so much more than just the future King of Auradon.
You are kind and compassionate, you welcomed in children no one else even thought of. You are
brave, you stand by your convictions; even when it may put you in conflict with your own family
because you know it’s the right thing to do. You are gentle, not wanting to hurt anyone despite your
doubts and feelings. There are so many lesser royals and even commoner men who feel they are
entitled to anything and anyone they want…who would not hesitate to go after what they want, no
matter who is hurt in the process. You are not like that. I am so proud to call you my son.”

She leaned into him, gave him a kiss on his fore head. The simple gesture comforted him and he was
so glad he confided in his mother, needing to hear her reassurances.
“I know you’re conflicted, and I can’t give you any magical answer where it all makes sense, everyone involved ends up happy and unhurt. You’re right, you haven’t known her very long and there are…complications…”

Belle struggled with what to say next. She didn’t care for Audrey, but she would never wish any kind of heartache on the girl. Just from this conversation alone, he had spoken more about his feelings for Mal than he ever had about Audrey in the year he had been dating her. And she could recognize the light in his eyes that shown when he spoke of the fae, a similar one could be seen in his father when he looked at Belle. The Queen was glad there were impediments, however. She told the truth when she said she would support Ben no matter what, but Adam was an entirely different story; not to mention the rest of Auradon. She trusted in her husband’s love for their son, but that did not mean it would not be a rough and bumpy road to acceptance.

Still, Ben had come to her for help about love and while what she had to say wasn’t an easy thing to say, Ben needed some perspective. She turned Ben’s head so that he would face her and look her in the eyes,

“You may not know if you love Mal, but I think you know you don’t love Audrey. And it is not fair to her, to keep pretending that this relationship will go somewhere when it will not.”

There it was, the simple truth he struggled to put into words. Regardless of what he felt for Mal and all the complications that came with her, he knew for sure he didn’t love Audrey. His feelings for Mal were vastly stronger and deeper than anything he had ever felt for the princess and couldn’t compare.

In that, he knew he was not conflicted.

He couldn’t keep stringing Audrey along. It wasn’t right and she didn’t deserve to be lied to.

He nodded his agreement with his mother, she leaned in to kiss him again. She knew it wasn’t easy for anyone, much less a teenage boy, to deal with break ups and relationships. But she knew her son was a good man, and he would do the right thing even if it weren’t the easy or popular thing. And he would do it with as much compassion and as kindly as someone could in that situation.

She dreaded the fallout, knowing the media circus that ensued anytime the royals did anything. She just hoped that the princess could accept the break up with grace and aplomb.

Ben had tried to think of a way to break up with Audrey for a week. He had wracked his brain, thinking of ways to do it with the least amount of drama and hopefully as gentle as he could as to not hurt Audrey beyond ending the relationship.

He had canceled his weekly meeting with the Isle teens, unable to face Mal and his impending break up. He was lucky that Audrey was busy with school and her own royal duties, so he barely saw her that week.

He had tried to ask his mother, but as she had only ever dated his father she had no practical advice as she had no experience in the matter other than harshly rejecting Gaston Chasseur; although that was mostly the hunter’s own fault as he couldn’t take a gentle hint when she had tried that route first.

“I’m sorry I’m not much help, but I will say this: there is no ‘good’ way to break up with someone; especially when she probably doesn’t see it coming. You can’t do this without hurting her. It doesn’t make you a bad guy, but you will be the one to…” she tried to think of any other way to put it other
than “break her heart” as she really didn’t know Audrey well enough to know if the princess truly loved Ben or if she just aimed for the highest crown in the land.

“…you will be the one to end things.”

It was better advice than she thought, at least Ben thought so. He needed to stop trying to figure out ways to somehow make the breakup a “good” thing and just get it over with.

While he agreed with his mother that there was no way to have a “good” break up, he definitely thought some ways where better than others; which was why he would not emulate, or even ask advice of, Chad. The Cinderellaberg prince had never broken up with anyone, for starters. His best friend would simply cheat on girls and when he tired of them, allowed them to catch onto his indiscretions and waited for them to break up with him.

When that had happened between Chad, princess Anxelin (the daughter of Queen Rapunzel and Prince Consort Eugene Fitzherbert of Corona), and several other lesser princesses from across the 18 Kingdoms. It had been a dramatic spectacle in the middle of the mess hall and all anyone could talk about for weeks. The prince had shown to be pretty heartless to the crying girls and it was the first time Ben really questioned why he was friends with him at all.

The prince had later made an apology and promised not to do it again, but Ben had not really seen any change in behavior from Chad. He mostly suspected that Chad had given up the pretense of dating altogether, and had instead just started to casually hook up with anyone who would have him. It was rather unprincely behavior but there wasn’t anyone to tell him so. The rules of chastity were unyielding for princesses, for princes it was mostly a suggestion. Most of the other male royals and nobles acted much the same, some even had a natural child or two running around somewhere.

Ben found it all rather abhorrent and dishonorable but guessed it was still Chad keeping his word, it just didn’t sit well with him and it made him glad he was an only child.

If he had a sister, he wouldn’t want her to be with any of the boys he knew.

Regardless, Ben felt that he was hurting Audrey more if he kept stalling.

So the first weekend in December, he asked Audrey to take a walk with him through the garden. The blue winter roses where in full bloom and were her second favorite flower; there were also several other cold blooming flowers, Auradon Prep one of the few places to house them all in one place. So she was excited to spend the time with him and probably didn’t suspect a thing. Most other students were indoors, enjoying the warmth but she took it as another opportunity to wear the latest outdoor fashions from East Riding.

The only other people around were their respective body guards who always followed them like shadows. Both had grown up with them since they could remember, they had learned to live like they weren’t there; the bodyguards were also paid handsomely and contracted to never reveal anything they would see unless it was problematic and only to their royal parents.

Ben barely listened when she cooed over the beautiful florae, contemplating which she may like for some charity event or another. She also dropped some not so subtle hints about future Auradon Prep dances such as Cotillion and what she’d do as Lady of the Court.

Hearing her make plans for a position as his official future consort, he knew he could no longer hold things off. They had made their way through the maze of flowers and shrubs, and ended up at a secluded gazebo far away from the school and any prying eyes.
“Hey guys, can you please just stand back a bit? I want to talk to Audrey privately,” he asked the
body guards, they obeyed and were a respectful distance away but could still come to their aid if
anything should happen.

If Audrey suspected anything was wrong, she didn’t show it. She merely smiled her perfect princess
smile and took his hands as they sat down on the gazebo bench, facing each other.

For an insane moment, Ben almost wished he was as cavalier about relationships and could take a
page out of Chad’s book. Seeing Audrey smile and knowing he was about to destroy it and probably
make her cry, he could see the appeal of acting like a rouge and letting the girls decide the princes
weren’t worth it instead of being honest.

But he would not be that kind of man and took a deep breath, steeling himself to do the right thing
even if it didn’t feel like it in the moment.

“Audrey,” he started and he kept his hands where they were, in hers. He wanted to try to convey that
he was not simply going to cut off all ties with her. “There has been something on my mind…for a
while and I’ve been trying to think of a time and place to tell you.”

She listened intently, trying to keep her hope in that perhaps he had decided that he wanted to make
her Lady of the Court even earlier than Cotillion. She thought all the small hints and plan to make
him see her as desirable were paying off.

If she had been brought up as anything other than a princess, she was certain she would be shaking
in excitement and a wider smile than was considered acceptable straining her face.

Part of him wanted to die to see the hope in her eyes, he wasn’t for sure what she thought he was
going to say but it clearly wasn’t what he was about to.

This is for the best, I won’t keep lying to her. She will find someone who could love her as she
deserves.

“I want you to know that I hold you in the highest esteem…but I want to break up.”

There, he said it and he couldn’t take it back. He couldn’t change his mind and keep it going. He
kept it simple and to the point, flowery words would not help his cause.

Audrey blinked for several moments, trying to figure out if he had actually said he wanted to break
up or if she was having some sort of auditory hallucination.

“I…I don’t understand,” she said softly, desperately hoping she had misheard him.

“It’s that I’ve been thinking of our relationship and the future, and I do not see an ‘us’ in the future.”

How could that possibly be? She was princess Audrey of Auroria, the second largest kingdom in
Auradon and the only daughter of king Philip and queen Aurora. She was the highest ranking
princess of their generation. She had been raised to be Queen since she was born, how could she not
be the clear choice for his future?

By her confused face, he felt he needed to explain further,

“I have come to realize that…”

She had stopped listening to his words, her own heartache and suspicion had started to become
louder and louder.
He had “come to realize?” What had changed in the past few months that would put their relationship into doubt and would realize anything?

The answer was clear and obvious, she just couldn’t believe she thought Ben would be different.

*Perhaps I had overestimated his character and he clearly could lower himself to slum it with the fae urchin. He’s just another man, future king or not.*

She had been warned again and again, that men would be men and it was her duty to put on a brave face and take it with grace and dignity. It was her own folly to believe in Ben’s sweet smile that he was any different.

“…and I feel…”

“If this is about Mal,” she interrupted him and had to use every ounce of restraint and decorum she had to not spit out the slut’s name in utter derision. “…then I want you to know, that I can deal with it. There’s no need to break up.”

She figured he at least had some sense of decorum and wanted to “play the field” as it were then get back together once he was ready to settle down. She didn’t see the need to play such games.

“Pardon?” Ben asked, his tone immediately going from soft and gentle to hard, hoping that she wasn’t implying what he thought she was implying.

“Listen,” she told him, being as diplomatic as she could without wanting to tear hair out and keep her pride. “I understand that men have…certain needs. Needs I don’t fully understand, but that’s because I’m a lady. But I understand that they’re there. I understand these needs are why I can’t always expect you to keep to the marriage bed, especially before we’re even married. But I won’t throw away our relationship for some…dalliance you wish to have. I trust that you will be discreet, and take care in avoiding…unwanted purple haired accidents. I won’t be the first Queen to deal with mistresses and I won’t be the last. But our future is worth more than a few encounters with some half breed fae whore…”

Audrey had tried to keep her temper in check but the more she thought about Ben sleeping with Mal, the angrier she got.

*How could he want some low born bastard? An evil fairy bastard at that?! After everything I allowed him to do? To go further than is decent? Why am I not enough?*

Although her heartache took the form of anger, Ben’s own rage started to simmer at the top.

“This has nothing to do with Mal and don’t call her that,” Ben started after a few moments of keeping his temper in check, still wanting to break up with her gently though he started to wonder why he even bothered. He dropped her hands and started to scoot back, not wanting to be near her.

*How can she think so lowly of me? She “understands men have needs?” What is that supposed to mean? And how could she be ok with cheating?*

He knew he wasn’t in love with her, but she was proving to him she didn’t love him either. True love was faithful; it was not about allowing one of them to do whatever they wanted and staying with them at all costs.

How could she think it was?

The more she talked, the more he was convinced breaking up was the right thing to do.
The fact he was defending Mal’s honor only proved in her mind that it was the fae’s fault Ben wanted to break up.

“I am not stupid Ben, and neither is everyone else. We can all see the way you look at her and all your late nights trying to help with the ‘program,’” the sarcasm so thick it could be cut with a knife. “So please, just do me a favor, whenever you do start cavorting with the harlot, if you haven’t already, be a little more subtle.”

“That’s enough!” he told her, getting upset enough to stand up and walked a little away from her to get some distance. “She does not deserve you speaking about her like that. She doesn’t deserve any of the nasty bitchy gossip you and the other princesses subject her to. She has never done anything to even suggest that anything inappropriate has ever gone on. And she certainly has never done anything untoward to me. And you know what? I take offense to the suggestion that I would even stoop so low. The fact that you think I would, and that you would be willing to ignore it, just proves that I was right that this relationship has no future.”

What he said stung, how passionately he defended the Isle girl and insinuating Audrey was a bitch for talking to others what they all clearly saw. That he put into question her own feelings for him was beyond the pale.

How could he not see that everything she did, was for them and the future of Auradon?

She refused to cry, she had too much pride. But she was hurt and she wouldn’t let him get away with it.

“No, you’re right. It’s not fair to suggest she would…she’s very much in love with Carlos, it’s evident by all the times they disappear between classes and during lunch. She would never cheat on him.”

Audrey couldn’t have hurt him more, even if she had slapped him.

She thinks of all the hurtful things he had done, seeing him be wounded because of the fact that Mal had loved her boyfriend was the worst.

All the righteous anger that had blossomed inside of him escaped in mere seconds, it was a hard truth to swallow but he knew he needed to know and accept it. He pointedly ignored her insinuation of a more intimate relationship between the fae and her de Vil paramour. He wouldn’t give her the benefit of acknowledging it and it was also none of his business, he thought savagely.

“You’re right,” he said softly, the words bitter and sharp in his mouth. “She loves him deeply. Loves him so much that it literally lifted them off the ground. Theirs is a love to aspire to…and I don’t feel any of that for you.”

He could admit that he wanted to hurt her, and he had succeeded as the tears started to run down her face and her lips started to quake. He wished he could have at least enjoyed that, but he didn’t. He just felt empty and shamed. The situation had brought out the worst in him, this wasn’t who he wanted to be.

“I’m sorry…” he started but he knew he couldn’t take back what he said and how much it hurt. “You deserve to have someone love you that way, someone who thinks you hung the sun and the moon; someone whose kiss could break any curse. That someone isn’t me and I’m sorry, but I won’t hold you back anymore from finding that love,” he tried to salvage the situation as best he could.

She had nothing left to say, how could she defend against his lack of feelings for her? It’d be
different if all he wanted was to sow his wild oats, which she desperately wished now that it was the case. But he didn’t love her, how could she have a happily ever after with him if he didn’t love her?

*I’m a princess, he’s a prince; he was supposed to be my happily ever after...how could this be happening to me?*

After several moments of silence, only the sounds to her tiny hiccups as she tried to control her crying could be heard.

“Let me walk you back,” he offered, every the gentleman and trying to extend the olive branch.

“No...thank you,” she replied politely, prim and dignified. “I need to be alone for a while.”

What anger and sadness she had was gone; in their place was a calm and confident princess that would make Dowager Queen Leah proud.

He nodded, respecting her space and walked away back to the castle with his body guard. Her own, still standing there and looking neutral and ahead; to the casual onlooker, one would never know the princess just had her heart broken from his face.

Eventually, Audrey reigned in her emotions and wiped away her tears with an East Riding embroidered silk handkerchief. She then took out the makeup she never went without and with an expert hand, soon no one would be able to tell she had been crying or heartbroken either.

Even if she would not be the future Queen of Auradon, she was still a princess of Auroria and she would walk proudly and with her head up high to the school. No one would ever see her in a moment of weakness.

She walked with purposeful steps to her dorm, her mind quickly working over the ways she would announce her breakup with Ben and while regrettable, it was a mutual decision that was the best for both of them.

Chapter End Notes

Believe it or not, I had cut this portion out thinking I was splitting a chapter up somewhat evenly but it turns out this got way longer than I thought, because I wanted to get all these ideas and scenes done with all the breadth and emotion I thought it deserved. How is the pacing? Am I doing too much for one chapter or is it good? I could try to break it up more so it's more "readable."

Also, I tried to write Audrey as more complex than "spoiled princess" and I hope I did an ok job. At the very least, I didn't give her that super mean break up of Ben declaring his love for Mal in front of everyone like in the movies. I don't care who you are, that sh!t was harsh.

What do you think of Jay's mom?

I was super hoping my last chapter would get people talking and geeking out, but maybe that means I need to calm my ass down. lol I hope I wasn't off putting to anyone.
Thanks for reading!
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Thank you:
hybrid - I do like giving Carlos a magical aspect, I feel like it makes him more part of the group.

echomoon - Yay! I'm so glad you think so.

cearak - Oh that warms my heart that you read and re-read the story.

warlockinatardis - I was totally going for that. Mal might not definitely know what she wants to do yet, but I can see her as a tough as nails litigator, can't you? I totally love platonic Ben/Mal. And yes, I thought the movie break up was so harsh! How would they react to Ben's feelings indeed. *evil laugh*

Fight_As_One -Yes, it's crazy how bad things can get when the government doesn't care about their citizens. It's rather infuriating, and I hope that comes across in the story. I'm glad you can at least almost feel for Audrey. I hate characters that are just 100% black and white bad or good.

Sharkboy7711 - Thanks! Please see https://archiveofourown.org/works/14806952/chapters/34260164 to get my full answer for the timelines if you haven't already.

OnYonderHill - I'm so glad I could get more people into the Carlos/Mal and Jay/Evie OTP side! Thank you so much for seeing a different side to Audrey, I really wanted to show that she's not just this spoiled brat. And yes, poor Ben. lol

Zania - It definitely tickles me as a writer to give people conflicting emotions to all the characters. lol.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jay was restless, he was having trouble sleeping since arbitration. Whenever he was stressed on the Isle, which was not as often as one would think, he had always retreated to the tallest tower. On the Isle, it was a rickety old building whose use was long since forgotten. Most had avoided it since it was rather unstable and probably about to collapse at any moment.

But at that high tower, it was the clearest view anyone would get of Auradon. He would spend hours just staring at the land so far away, wondering what he would be doing if he ever got a chance to go there. For a few hours, he could just forget he was on the Isle and imagine how his life could be, not what it was.

Sometimes it was the fantasy that got him through the day, the hope that it wouldn’t always be so
Now that he was in Auradon, he spent hours looking towards the Isle from the highest tower of the dorm Castle. He couldn’t see the island as they were too far away, but he knew the general direction. He still enjoyed a relaxing view of the inlet; there were also the gardens and the starry sky he could admire.

While he no longer fantasized he was somewhere else, being high up gave him a different perspective and helped him still his mind to think.

“Hey,” Mal said quietly as she joined him and sat down, she had figured where he’d disappeared to.

“Hey,” he was surprised to see her there. “I thought you were afraid of heights.”

“Why would you think that?”

“You never visited me when I needed time to think on a tower before.”

“I’m not afraid of heights, I am—however—afraid of being on an unstable building that looks like it will fall at any moment.”

“Oh…coward,” he joked.

“So what has you up here at the crack of dawn these days…Evie’s worried,” she didn’t have to say she was worried too, he could tell from the slight tremor in her voice and how she wouldn’t look at him, she also focused on the view.

He thought about it, wondering how to put it into words. He hoped he didn’t worry his girlfriend and best friend too much, but this wasn’t something he was ready to talk to Evie about.

Mal, on the other hand, he could tell anything to.

“I’m just thinking about arbitration…how they asked about my djinn heritage.”

“Yeah?” she asked patiently, wanting him to go on.

“I lied. I straight out lied.”

“You did what you had to do, who knows what Sherwood would have done if they knew you had the potential of a freed genie,” she didn’t understand the issue, they had never had trouble lying to adults before.

“I’m not concerned about lying to Sherwood or any of the adults. I could easily lie to them until I turned blue…figuratively and literally. It’s just…I also lied to Evie and Carlos. They were there too, they think I have no djinn magic in me at all.”

“That’s not such a big lie,” she reasoned. “I mean you got your shackles when you were thirteen and lost them after a day at most…you basically never had djinn magic…it’s not much of a lie. And we can trust them. So it’s not like you can’t tell them if you wanted to.”

“And you never told Carlos? Ever?” he was slightly skeptical the two had any secrets.

“Nah,” she shrugged. “I love him and all but there are some secrets that aren’t mine to tell. And he knows there are a lot of things I had to do on the Isle that I haven’t told him about, at least not in detail. And he’s never really asked. I figure we have an unspoken agreement that there are some things just better not said and to forget them. But either way, they both love you. They’d never tell
anyone if you wanted to tell them.”

“I know they wouldn’t tell anyone, that’s not what I’m worried about.”

“What is it then?”

Jay took a deep breath, needing to gather up the courage to tell her and give voice to his fears.

“What if they end up hating me?” he said so lowly that Mal almost didn’t hear him.

She blinked in confusion as that was the last thing she ever thought Jay would ever worry about.

“What do you mean? It’s Evie and Carlos…”

“It’s just that…OK I got the shackles on my thirteenth birthday, right? The fact they showed up meant that I could wield the power of The Wish. And given that genies have ‘phenomenal, cosmic power,’ I’m pretty sure it meant that The Wish was stronger than the barrier…what if…what if they hate me because I didn’t get them off the Isle when I had the chance? Wishes can recreate timelines, bend reality; with very few exceptions and restrictions I was basically all powerful…we could have escaped four years ago…four years is an eternity on the Isle…gods all the things we had to do to survive those years…”

Jay couldn’t go on as the guilt ate away at him and bubbled to the surface, wondering if he should have done more and prevented so many terrible things from happening to them. Tears of frustration started to drop from his eyes, angry that maybe if he hadn’t been such a coward then they would have been better off.

“Hey,” Mal said intensely to him, getting his attention and making sure he looked her in the eyes. “I don’t think Evie or Carlos could ever hate you, and if they could then the person they really should hate is me. Djinn can’t grant their own wishes. So even if you wanted to just wish us off the Isle, you couldn’t. Do you remember what I said when you showed me the shackles?”

Of course he remembered, Mal was his only friend at the time and the only person he trusted on the Isle to show he came into his djinn heritage.

There was no doubt that Jafar was his father.

He recalled the memory, and suddenly he was in the apartment above Bargain Castle; there was the smell of musty old clothes and dust invading his nose, they were hidden away in Mal’s tiny room and sitting on a worn out mattress on the floor. Maleficent was off collecting tributes and overseeing the donations from the Mainland, she wouldn’t be home for hours.

He was terrified, he knew his father wanted a genie so badly but couldn’t imagine such power in his hands. He wondered if it meant he would start turning blue or red, would he lose his legs? Would he have to live in the lamp? It was so tiny, it fit in the palms of his hands; he couldn’t imagine fitting into it. He rushed right over to Mal, hoping the lamp didn’t suck him in, trapping him until someone found and rubbed it to free him.

What happened if the lamp got lost and he was stuck there for years?

“You told me to show you the lamp, and I gave it to you. It was this shiny new brass lamp with intricate cobra filigree, it looked like it could feed us for months if we could sell it…you took it and told me…you told me ‘you are my friend and you are no one’s slave.’ And then without another thought you wished for my freedom.”
He also remembered how the lamp had sputtered white iridescent smoke and levitated on its own volition. Then it turned from a beautiful newly wrought lamp to a dull beat up thing that could have been found in his father’s shop on any given day. The gold shackles that had shown up on his ankles had fallen away and become just as haggard and useless.

Jay was djinn for less than a day. He showed the cuffs and lamp to his father, said he had found the items in an abandoned house. Jafar had said they were just more junk but they should fetch a few items of food, apples at least--none the wiser.

Jay had no idea where those shackles and lamp ended up; he hoped they were melted down for scrap and he would never see them ever again.

“That’s right. You are my best friend and you are no one’s slave. Not even for Evie and Carlos, not even if it’s just for one second or one wish. Those shackles were a curse and I wasn’t about to risk you spending your life as your father’s or my mother’s or anyone else’s slave, having you do gods knows what and for how long. As harebrained as Jafar got on the Isle, he was not stupid. And he learns from his mistakes. He would have wished for power, gotten himself off the Isle then kept you as his genie, holding onto those last two wishes for as long as possible. That’s assuming my mother didn’t kill him to get to you. The entire Isle would have been in open war to get a wish at any cost and who knows how many would have died. And what would have happened if you got lost? Ten thousand years in a tiny lamp? By yourself? I wasn’t going to allow that to happen to you. And maybe I should have used at least one wish for us…but I didn’t want to risk it. I didn’t want freedom at the cost of your own. And they can hate me for that, but I stand by what I did and I’d do it again.”

Now both friends were crying over the past and wondering about the future. Jay pulled her in for a hug, needing his best friend close. They had been friends for such a long time, they had been through such hell and trials that even Carlos and Evie didn’t know about.

Jay loved Mal. It wasn’t like how he loved Evie. It wasn’t how he loved Carlos. It wasn’t how he loved anyone, but it was a deep and profound love where he would kill and lay down his life for his best friend and he knew she’d do the same for him.

“I don’t think they’d ever hate you,” she said as they calmed down and the moment passed. “Or me…they might be mad at first; wondering of all the possibilities that could have happened, what they could have avoided. They might dream of the instance where things worked out exactly how they wanted it to, how they made the perfect wish where everyone is happy…but I think they would eventually come to realize every story except Aladdin’s that involved a genie ends horribly wrong. Wishes are not gifts, they’re awful traps and tests from whatever malevolent god thought it was a fun idea. I did what I thought was best at the time. Either way, it was never on you or your fault.”

“And it’s not your fault either, I won’t let them hate you,” he promised her and sealed it with a kiss to her temple.

He still didn’t know if he was ready to tell the others, at least not yet; he knew that they deserved the truth. But the time wasn’t then and he’s glad that the four of them were chosen to come to Auradon. He didn’t know what he would have done without those three in his life.

Of all the luxuries Auradon offered, Mal loved coffee the most. It was like drinking liquid happiness and some days it was the only reason she was able to get out of bed and to school. She didn’t understand why everyone decided that 8:00am was the time to start their day; they weren’t farmers that needed to be up from dawn till dusk. Once she got a sip of coffee, however, she discovered how
they were able to do so without going mad.

She wasn’t fond of the syrupy sweet concoctions that most students preferred; to her it was a waste of coffee. Half the time the drinks were more milk and sugar than actual coffee. She preferred hers black and on the rare occasion, a mocha with a hint of bittersweet chocolate.

The fae was surprised when Ms. Charisse had proposed getting out of the library to get a hot cup. She more or less thought the library aide had lived there since she had never seen her outside the building. She knew that was silly, and wasn’t going to turn down a free coffee. From there, it had turned into a regular outing. The school had a small café on the premise, it seemed to cater more towards the faculty than the students, and she later found out that most of her fellow pupils weren’t even allowed to drink coffee. Someone had told her they feared it would stunt their growth.

Mal figured she was as tall as she was going to get, the lack of proper nutrition to blame and the fact her mother was only 4’11” not counting her horns. At 5’2” she had beat the odds and was tall enough in her opinion.

She was used to the odd looks, people always seemed nervous around her. Although it was a different kind of nervous than she was used to; usually most seemed weary that she was always on the verge of doing something evil. Whenever she was with Ms. Charisse, their nervous energy was almost deferential. Mal hadn’t encountered that since the isle. She didn’t know what it was, but most steered clear from them and gave them leeway. They looked at Ms. Charisse oddly, wondering what she was doing there with the fae girl. The library aide paid them no mind and went on ordering their drinks as if they were the only two there.

She was one of the few adults that didn’t treat her as if she were a bomb about to go off at any moment. Even when she was ambivalent or trying to be nice, people always seemed uncomfortable around her.

They liked to talk about books and school. The adult seemed to have a vested interest in Mal’s continued education, the teen wasn’t sure what the Crown had planned as it was never mentioned to her what the plans were for the Four after Auradon Prep.

“Well of course Be…Crown Prince Ben would have that covered. It doesn’t make sense to have you only go to school for one year. And all four of you show so much promise…so I’ve heard. With your grades and extra-curriculars, I’m sure you’d be able to walk onto any school you wanted.”

That’s more or less what all her teachers and Dr. Li as her guidance counselor had told her. That still didn’t give her much direction on her future.

“I know I should be thinking about it. Carlos and Evie bug me all the time to get my applications in…I guess it’s just hard to think that far ahead…on the Isle I could only think in terms of tomorrow, next week, or through the winter at the longest.”

Ms. Charisse’s heart broke at the thought the girl couldn’t think so far into the future because the harsh island life meant she may not even see the next day. She wanted the world for the girl, feeling Mal ought to be looking towards the future with hope and as far as she wanted to. She also knew that the fae was fighting years of survival instinct, it paled in comparison of being in Auradon for a handful of months. She wanted the so called Auradon Dream for her, but maybe that wasn’t for Mal. It could also be just too overwhelming. She herself needed a decade to get used to the idea of being Queen, else she would have married Adam much sooner regardless of the Fae Wars. So she was supportive of whatever Mal wanted to do.

“I know Auradon Prep specializes in getting students ready for college, they do a poor job of actually
giving you your options, in my opinion. It’s OK to not be ready for that kind of step. Some people take what they call a ‘gap’ year. They travel or work, they try to get an idea of where they want their life to go without the stress of school.”

Mal blinked her eyes in surprise, she had no idea not going to college was an option. Ms. Charisse was the first adult to tell her that it was OK if she didn’t go to university. She had worried that she would be rushed into deciding; it was made worse when Carlos and Evie seemed to have the rest of their lives planned out. They had schools and careers they were already so certain they wanted to go into. She worried that maybe she would get left behind because she couldn’t keep up.

On the Isle, she knew she was next in line for Leadership. It’s what her mother prepared her for; it’s what she knew to do. In Auradon, Ben was the future king and she was…nothing. She was just Mal Lefay. She didn’t know what that meant outside the Isle and she felt she had no time to really think about it between school and everything else.

With Ms. Charisse, everything seemed to slow down to a reasonable pace and she could think and talk things out.

“Gap year,” she repeated to herself. She didn’t know if she would do it, but at least it was an option that didn’t make her want to run for the hills.

“It’s something to think about,” Ms. Charisse offered. “I know plenty of people who took a year off and took the time to really think of what they wanted to do. University is such an…investment, it shouldn’t be decided on lightly. I actually took a gap year…several years in fact,” she recalled the tumultuous time between when she met Adam and the ensuing Fae Wars. She wouldn’t admit this to Mal, but instead of going to school she opted to work in all the great libraries across the then independent 18 Kingdoms. She had done all the heavy research on how to fight the faeries and other fairkind. She couldn’t fathom going to school, safely ensconced when there were so many that died in battle.

War stories were not what the young girl needed, and who knew how Mal take the fact that her research was used in the war against her kind.

“I even had a friend who worked as a waitress while she decided what she wanted to do, she lived here and there for months at a time; made her way through the Summerlands and Westerly. Working and traveling, she said she learned more than she ever did in a classroom. She eventually went on to get her degree in marine biology; she fell in love with the beaches in Westerly. She works as a conservationist now.”

It did lift Mal’s spirits to know there were many roads to success or having a happy life. She was rather intrigued with the idea of traveling. She had been literally trapped on the Isle for all of her life, she wondered about all the other kingdoms and if they were as nice as Auradon City. And just because she didn’t go to college right after high school, it didn’t mean she would never go. She didn’t need to simply go to college or marry a prince. There were all sorts of Happily Ever Afters.

Before Mal could reply her thanks, they were interrupted by a familiar voice,

“Hey mom, surprised to see you here,” Ben had come in from the chill, he had a hankering for a hot chocolate that the mess hall just couldn’t make right.

He had always thought of his mother as the picture of poise and grace. Her mouth slightly ajar and her eyes wide, she froze like a deer caught in headlights was a new experience.

“Mom?” Mal asked Ms. Charisse, although she figured out that couldn’t be her name if Ben was her
son.

For a moment she wondered if this was some strange Auradonian custom, where Ben was that familiar with Ms. Charisse and had taken to calling her “mom” in some ironic fashion. Some members of the band had taken to calling Carlos their “son.”

It didn’t seem likely given the age disparity; she couldn’t imagine Ben being so familiar with any of the Auradon Prep staff. So that left that Ms. Carisse was actually Queen Belle.

There was an awkward silence, Ben had come to the conclusion that he had just intruded on something and his mother was desperately trying to explain herself.

“Mal…I meant to tell you, I really did. But I have enjoyed our talks so much and I didn’t want to ruin it by making you feel you had to be so formal…and…”

The fae surprised them both by bursting out into laughter.

“A royal lying about being royal so they can be a regular person. That’s classic. Very Twain of you,” she complimented as she sipped her coffee.

“You’re not mad?” Belle asked hopefully, she was certain Mal would have been angry at being lied to for so long.

“Mad about what?”

“I lied.”

Mal laughed again, she couldn’t believe Auradonians were so silly.

“I come from the Isle. I’ve been lied to plenty. This doesn’t even make the top ten. Besides, it’s my own fault. I probably should have known better, you are the Queen of all of Auradon. Evie was right; I should have watched RBN more. I wonder who else is in disguise. Nick,” she caught the attention of their waiter. “Are you a secret Duke or something?”

Their waiter was confused at the question but decided to play along,

“If I were, I’d be pretending to be the Dust Devil’s physician in charge of their physicals, not a waiter sweetness.”

Belle and Mal’s mouth dropped in faux scandal, the latter knowing the professional tourney team from Agrabah as Jay’s favorite, both laughed at their waiter’s audacity but the Queen was so happy the fae wasn’t mad.

“Ben, your mother and I are having a coffee date.”

He merely smiled, glad they were having a good time and that his mother had taken to her so well.

“Go away,” she expounded when it was clear he wasn’t getting the hint, letting him know he was intruding. Belle smiled so wide that it almost hurt, she was so happy that Mal didn’t seem to mind and had no intention of stopping their chats. She also enjoyed having a female around; raising just one boy had its drawbacks.

“Oh,” he put his hand to his heart as a gesture of exaggerated regret. “Mea culpa, mea culpa, regina mater.”

He laughed and barely dodged his mother’s pinch,
“I’ll leave you two ladies to your coffee date. I’m just popping in for a hot chocolate, I won’t bother you further.”

“Hot chocolate? Get a real drink,” Mal teased him as he got in line. All she got in response was a stuck out tongue and she made an exaggerated confused face in retaliation.

Belle internally gushed at how easy going Ben was around Mal and how they interacted. She certainly never saw him as playful around princess Audrey. While she knew it would be a scandal and utterly complicated, she couldn’t help but think that maybe the fae would be good for her Ben. How could a mother not love anyone who brought a smile like that to her son?

“So how often do you pretend to be common?” Mal asked, couldn’t help but tease her a bit.

“I’d say like…once a week.”

“Are you always a librarian?”

“No, sometimes I’m the proprietor of Auradon’s premier agency for pool boys.”

Mal couldn’t help but snort into her mocha, Belle joining in the laughter.

Jane never thought she would hate anyone, but after being heartbroken at homecoming she had started to hate Mal Lefay.

The half-star fae had run away from the field in tears when she saw Mal and Carlos kiss after the big win. She had such high hopes of congratulating him on such a job well done and maybe even gathering the courage to ask him to dance later on. Everyone was so happy that Auradon Prep had triumphed, no one even noticed her escape; even as she made such a racket in her metal Knight’s mascot uniform. In such dire straits, she had flung off pieces as she made her way from the field to the dorms; she had gotten yelled at later for losing parts of the costume but she didn’t care.

Carlos, the boy she had been crushing on for so long had a girlfriend. And not just any girlfriend, but Maleficent Lefay II. Jane had never felt so foolish, asking the other girl for advice and fae favors.

She had escaped to her mother’s Headmistress cottage on the edge of campus; she couldn’t bear to be around her roommates as they got ready for the dance. It was a small three bedroom house provided by the school to house the headmistress and her family. More often than not she would stay with her parents over the weekend as she wasn’t allowed to go out and the dorms were rather lonely with most upper years away doing fun social activities she wasn’t invited to, Nadine FéeMarraine was always too worried about her precious daughter to ever let her out of her sight.

Jane was so upset and hated her dress so much that she even missed out on the dance. She couldn’t fathom going and looking like a shapeless homely commoner and facing Mal and Carlos making their official debut as a couple. She ended up eating ice cream and watching Love Actually and other romantic comedies all weekend. She felt like she made the right choice when people gushed about the beautiful dresses and suits Evie had made all over social media.

It made her heart ache to see how handsome Carlos was when others had posted on their Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and even Tumblr. It made her physically ill how beautiful Mal was in such a flattering dress and how she was in every picture with him.
It should have been me on his arm.

Her mood made all the worse when everyone talked about how the Isle Four had lifted off the ground during a slow love song. It was something out of her most romantic dreams turned her worst nightmare. Her Facebook feed was literally all about the Isle Four, people couldn’t get enough of gossiping about them. For once it was hushed wistful whispers instead of malicious accusations. So many swooned and cooed over their love. Even her mother sighed about how it was the magic of true love that lifted them that added salt to the wound of her broken heart.

Mal had to have been lying about being able to help me. Clearly she has magic. They probably used magic to make those clothes and to look as nice as they did. How else could islanders know how to do make up and look so nice?

Her mother and the other girls had magic, why could they help others or themselves but never her? A simple beauty spell or glamour would have made all the difference, how was it any different than using a filter on Instagram or Youtube?

It’s not like I want to take over the world or seduce a prince. I just want to look nice without having to go broke. Why should only those with money get to look their best? Why does Mal get to use magic and get away with it?

She spent the weekend ruminating, cursing Mal and betting the other half fae knew exactly who she had a crush on and feigned not having magic and ignorance just to be spiteful. She could all too clearly imagine them all laughing behind her back as she wore childish bows and squeaked whenever Carlos came around.

She cried bitter resentful tears when it seemed no one even noticed she wasn’t at the dance. Her own mother, who was usually so vigilant in knowing where she was at all times was even too distracted to know she didn’t go.

Bitterness turned to hurt when no one asked where she was, some even thought they had seen her at the dance but she knew she wasn’t there. They must have figured she had to have gone as no one could guess why she wouldn’t; none of them ever paid enough attention to her to know if she were around or not.

Gods, it’s like I don’t even exist. I’m not even an afterthought.

She contemplated quitting the mascot role, it was a vain attempt at getting in with the popular crowed and it wasn’t working. But no matter how hurt she was by homecoming, she couldn’t resist the chance to keep seeing Carlos. If she weren’t the Fighting Knight, then she would only see him during the one class and games; at the latter, she’d be in the stands with Mal. At least as the Knight, she was on the field and could get a close look at him during games and practices.

Why would he be with someone like Mal? She’s so evil and mean.

She knew the answer was that the other girl was beautiful. Mal’s fae features were much more pronounced than hers: high cheekbones, wide ethereal eyes, and pouty lips. But that beauty was marred by her constant scowling and clearly malicious nature, she thought. Jane started to find herself being swayed by Audrey’s venomous tales about how Mal had to be evil, a Maleficent in training.

Maybe he’s attracted to power.

That was the only thing she could think of and made sense. It was the only explanation of how a
sweet gentle soul like Carlos would ever be with a vindictive fae like Mal. Perhaps Mal was so powerful on the Isle and Carlos had gone to her for protection; he was clearly too good and nice to have done well on an island full of criminals; she couldn’t blame him for seeking shelter. Mal being so wicked, of course had taken advantage of his vulnerable state and probably coerced him into a relationship.

Well I’m just as much of a fae as she is. I have nice lips and star lit eyes, I am way more shapely. I’m at least a cup size bigger than her, it’s just hidden under the terrible boxy dresses mother makes me wear…I just need to figure out my powers. I’m a star fae, Mal comes from the run of the mill moor fae, a common nature fae. They are not so nearly as powerful. My mother is Nadine FéeMarraine, she wields the silver crystal wand of Yvaine, Queen of the Stars.

She had asked her mother in the past about magic and if she could teach it to her. But all she got was “real magic is in books, and not the spell books” and a really long lecture about how they lived in Auradon and needed to be free of the “crutch of magic.” So while her mother might be a powerful fae, she had other plans for her daughter and it didn’t involve going to the Merlin Institute of Magic.

So Jane turned to the internet, figuring the library of Queen Belle, Queen Consort of King Adam, would not have any magical reference books; the House of Bourbon famous throughout the 18 Kingdoms of being anti-magic.

Over the next month, she had gone through maybe hundreds of forums and chatrooms, looking for people who knew magic and were willing to share their arcane knowledge.

She learned the hard way that just because it rhymed, that didn’t mean it was an actual magical spell. She learned the same thing about Latin; the dead language did not make anything magical by default.

What she also found were a bunch of old perverts with a wing fetish or people who wanted to play at being fae; all they wanted to do was dress up with fake crystal crowns they bought on Etsy, dance naked under the full moon, and talk about their periods. None of their magic was real, it wasn’t until she found the chatroom Stormhold Will Rise Again that she finally found something helpful.

It wasn’t much, the forum mostly talked about channeling their inner power and focusing into their hands. After several sessions of private meditation and giving herself headaches trying to “focus” that she finally got definitive proof she actually had magic.

It was small and almost pitiful, but the tiny white spark she was able to create at her fingertips had given her so much hope.

I am magical!

She felt a little silly for tearing up, but it was definite proof that she was more than just Jane. She was magical and could be powerful. The spark was small, but it was hers and she was determined to grow it.

She found the more she practiced then the more her powers started to strengthen. The small sparks turned into balls of light, with time she was able to hold the light longer and longer. She had even gotten powerful enough that she could no longer practice in her room lest her roommates find her and report her to her mother.

Going to cheer practice was no longer as arduous as her confidence grew that perhaps she could show Carlos he had options in Auradon. He didn’t need to stay with some bully whose power over him no longer mattered. He was safe and didn’t need Mal anymore.
Jane had started to practice magic in the privacy of the dorm gardens. It had started to grow colder, so there were fewer and fewer people out and about to bother her. She found a secluded spot in the fern park; it lacked all the pomp of the areas that were littered with roses, daisies, or any other kind of flower. She wasn’t even sure why Auradon continued to cultivate the area as it was not popular in the least, but she was happy for the privacy.

Transfiguration was trickier than she thought. Her mother made it seem so easy, wave of her wand and she turned a pumpkin into a carriage. Jane did not have the advantage of a wand. She started off small; she tried to make an apple into a cornflower; her favorite blossom. Her first attempts did nothing. Several attempts later…still nothing. When she finally was able to transform the fruit into something, all she got was corn flour. It was messy and she kept sneaking into the kitchens to hide the evidence. She just hoped that the chefs thought they over ordered and not question why there were what seemed to be kilos of the starch.

Progress was still progress, however. She thought that for being self-taught with no wand, she was doing just fine. She figured accuracy would come in time. She still wished that the forums had more spells that worked, but there were a few gems hidden amongst the garbage.

Jane had never been as grateful for her lack of social life before, she had all the time in the world to practice and get better. No one knew she was gone and her mother wouldn’t ask after her most of the time, trusting she would be in her room studying. If pressed then she’d simply say she was in the garden, enjoying the solitude. It wasn’t a lie.

She had been in her spot for weeks without being bothered, she had no idea it would be princess Audrey to be the one to catch her in the act.

Audrey had gathered her best public relations’ team to deal with her break up. They artfully spun a tragic tale where it was a mutual decision on both royals’ parts. Audrey had all her charity and fashion events, Ben had his princely duties. They both had a full course load at school and wanted to focus on their studies as keeping a 4.0 average was important to both of them; education should always come first their spokes people stressed. There was just so much each had to do, that romance just wasn’t a priority of theirs but they had all the love and respect for one another and went their separate ways.

She had thrown herself into helping the hospital, even scheduling a charity event even though her schedule was overburdened as it was to help legitimize the story. Helping children had been her only consolation after the break up, but if she could use it to save face then it was just simply a good idea.

At least Ben had gone along with the excuse, which was no less than what he owed her she thought. She would be humiliated before the court and all of Auradon if it got out that he broke up with her simply because he didn’t “love her.” She still suspected he had feelings for Mal and that was the real impetus for the break up, but he had yet to own up to that; part of her was glad as she didn’t think she would keep a princessly façade going if he had. She knew most didn’t believe the reasons, she could hear the tittering and others reported to her what was being said. She had some loyal friends on and off the cheerleading squad act as her eyes and ears. They had made sure that anyone saying anything differently than what they reported as the cause of the break up would be corrected immediately or would face social banishment.

Of course, part of her had been hoping Ben would come to his senses and call the break up off. She already had lines prepared and memorized for explaining why they’d break up and then get back together so soon.
She would say that while they had planned to focus on school and their royal responsibilities, but they couldn’t deny true love and had gotten back together and would be determined to make it work. She knew everyone would eat that up, particularly the gossip channels. But days had passed and it was almost time for Winter break. It’d be almost a month before school restarted and she would see him again. Her only hope was that they made it to the tourney championship and then the entire tourney and cheer squad would stay on campus for another week.

She didn’t understand why he was being so stubborn.

Mal was still with Carlos, and from all reports she would stay with Carlos. It wasn’t as if Ben had a better option anywhere else. She figured the time spent apart, he would come to realize how much he missed her and would come back. As the days went by and he remained away, her heart broke a little more and more.

It was a rare moment by herself, or at least as much by herself as she could get. Her bodyguard had agreed to stay outside the gates of the garden entrance and she carried a panic button with her in case something happened.

Before she could mentally recite all the reasons why Ben should come back to her, she found herself in a seldom used area of the gardens. It was the fern park, mostly barren from the fall season going into winter. She herself had never really ventured there, finding it too boring to keep her entertained.

But that day, a glowing and pulsating burst had caught her attention. It was an odd occurrence anywhere, but in particular at Auradon Prep as magic was strictly forbidden. Part of her hoped that maybe Mal or the others were doing some illegal magic and she could get them kicked out of school. When she rounded to the source of the light, she was surprised to see Jane there.

The normally shy girl had been sitting on a stone bench; her hands held chest high and she called forth light to her hands.

Jane had what looked to be a live star in her grasp and even Audrey could gasp at the feat. But it didn’t end there, Jane had then held a blue winter rose that she must have snipped on her way to the fern park.

It was a perfect deep almost midnight blue with frost lacing its delicate petals. Jane used her finger to twirl and circle the flower, she mouthed something that Audrey could not hear and before their eyes, the lapis flower had turned to scarlet; the colour so vibrant and rich that queens would wish their daughters had lips such a shade.

It was a promising moment, but Audrey could have done without the clumsy victory dance Jane had done once she noticed her spell worked.

But awkward dance aside, the princess of Auroria had gotten an epiphany.

All the stories ever told, the ones with true love and happily ever after also had magic.

That’s what had to have been missing. That magical spark to help princesses along the way to their true love. Her mother wouldn’t have survived infancy if not for the help of faery godmothers. Cinderella wouldn’t have been able to go to the ball.

She needed a faery godmother…although she already technically had three. Flora, Fauna, and Merryweather were dear friends of the family and she loved them as if they were her own blood. But it was also 2017, perhaps what she needed was not a faery godmother who probably wouldn’t understand her special circumstances, there were no dragons to fight—although that could change if
Mal did go evil, which Audrey still suspected she might—nor would there be any ball she would need a dress to.

She was a princess, she had plenty of dresses and was of course invited to every social event—ball or not—worth going to.

There were also all the annoying edicts of the current reigning King; magic was strictly regulated to the point it was basically outlawed. Besides christenings, Unification Day, and emergencies: magic was banned without a ton of paperwork and there were so few approved reasons to wield it. There was no way she could convince any of her faery godmothers to grant her a boon, the paperwork alone wouldn’t be worth it.

No, she decided. She needed a faery godsister, a bit more direct magic, and someone who wouldn’t care about the laws.

So with that plan in mind, she put on her most congenial smile and stepped into the open area to make herself known.

Perhaps she should have made a bit more noise, as the sudden appearance of someone else had caused Jane to yelp ear piercingly loud and a ball of light had been tossed her way.

“Oh my goodness, princess Audrey, I’m so sorry!” Jane immediately apologized out of habit. She then realized that not only had she been caught doing magic, on school grounds no less, and had hurled a ball of light to Auradon’s highest ranking princess. She wasn’t powerful enough to have done any damage, she was certain it was more scary than actually harmful but that didn’t matter. All the princess had to do was cry “magic” and Jane would probably be expelled before anyone could say “bibbidi bobbidi boo.”

The star fae started to hyperventilate which included several squeaks quickly in succession. Audrey wondered if the other girl was about to pass out.

“Oh no worries Jane, I shouldn’t have snuck up on you like that,” Audrey laughed as if they were old friends who just spooked each other and in no way was the fae breaking the law.

Jane couldn’t remember the last time Audrey ever spoke to her directly. She had always been on the outskirts, one of the distant planets that orbited the sun that was princess Audrey.

She was convinced the only reason why anyone even knew her name was because she was Headmistress FéeMarraine’s daughter. Before she turned invisible to the other students, most had been weary of her company; some afraid that she would snitch to her mother at the slightest infraction. She of course would never do that, once they realized she was no threat they had stopped paying any attention to her at all.

“So magic, it looked beautiful; whatever you were doing.”

“Please don’t tell anyone,” Jane begged, she could not get expelled. Her mother would go ballistic.

“Oh I wouldn’t, why would I?”

Jane frowned in confusion; Audrey acted like she wasn’t aware of King Adam’s many anti-magic laws.

“Because magic is banned?”

“That only really applies to bad faeries,” Audrey claimed and tried to casually assuage her fears, and
to Jane it made sense.

“Like Mal,” Jane had growled out, a light had jumped out and pulsated from her hands with her anger.

*Wow, I didn’t even have to manipulate her to hate Mal. Lucky day.*

“Yes, exactly. Everyone knows that good faeries like you should be able to practice magic all they want. You’d never do anything evil…”

“Like seduce innocent boys.”

*Is she reading my mind?*

“Boys who are too kind and gentle and would never do well on the Isle and had no choice but to seek protection from a manipulative siren,” Jane went on, venting out all her anger.

*OK, maybe she can’t. Who is she talking about?*

“And right. So you have no worries from me, you can trust me. This will be our little secret.”

Jane smiled, part of her glad to have someone else know about her emerging gifts. Not just knew, but approved. She knew her mother would put a stop to it immediately, regardless of the plan to use her powers for good; which of course was the idea.

Audrey looked Jane over, really getting a close view of the quiet girl. She had never really paid all that much attention to her. She knew she was the mascot and the daughter of the Headmistress. Other than that, she was drawing a blank. Jane had never really stood out, despite being fae. She just blended in with everyone so well.

*Mal, Evie, and Carlos could take a few pointers.*

Maybe if they had actually tried to fit in better inside Auradon instead of insisting of being so different, things would have been easier for them.

Up-close, however, Jane was a bit of a mess. Her outfit was so boxy and almost ill-fitting. Audrey knew her uniform was the same and didn’t know how she got away with it; she thought everyone had to have a bespoke uniform; even the Isle rats had flattering cuts.

Her hair was another story. It was clearly a poor and patchy dye job, she had never seen such poor highlights and such an odd colour of brown. It reminded her of swamp water. The style was something she was used to seeing on small children, not a grown teenager.

“How about we go shopping?”

Jane’s eyes widened in excitement, could she truly mean it? She never thought she’d ever get invited to anything by a cheerleader, much less the cheer captain and a princess to boot.

“Wow, I would love to,” she said quickly but then reality set in just as fast. “But I don’t think my mom would…”

“Oh don’t be silly. Tell her you’re going with me. I promise to have you back in plenty of time for curfew and I have body guards, what could possible happen?”

Jane thought she had a point. How could her mom say no when the best security in Auradon was following them around?
Jane met Audrey outside the castle dorm an hour later, her pink Mercedes glittered in the midday sun. She had never seen such an expensive car in person, and certainly not in such a colour.

Audrey smiled as Jane checked out her ride in awe.

“It’s a limited edition colour, made just for me. No one else in all of Auradon has an Aurorian pink car,” she couldn’t help but boast, her wealth always on display and so happy she could give a commoner a little thrill.

“It’s beautiful,” she almost couldn’t hold in her delight and delicately ran her hands over the expensive tan leather interior. Her mother was hesitant to let her go, she had school the next day and a multitude of other worries only her mother thought about, but she had said everything Audrey told her to. She pointed out that they would be perfectly safe and it was princess Audrey. Of course she had to say yes, but Jane had to text her exactly when she left, when she got there, when she was about to leave to come back, and finally when she got back to the dorms.

Jane had no idea what her mother thought would happen, but she was too happy to be going shopping with Audrey to be too annoyed. She even got her mother’s credit card, with a strict $100 spending limit, and buzzed with exhilaration.

At first Jane was confused when they drove past the usual mall she had always gone to with her mother and knew other students frequented. It didn’t become apparent to her where they were going until the streets got noticeably cleaner and every car was just as posh as Audrey’s.

Oh my stars, she’s taking me to Garderobe Drive.

Jane was thankful Audrey had the radio on and was talking the whole way, making small talk about how she couldn’t wait to shop as the half fae was having a slight nervous breakdown and the competing noise had drowned out her smothered squeals.

Garderobe Drive was famous throughout all of Auradon as the premier luxury retail strip. It was about two miles of store after store of haute couture and accessories, she had never heard of anyone other than royalty being able to shop there.

Jane liked to think of herself as rather up to date on the latest fashions, even if she couldn’t afford to wear them, and some of the store names were lost on her as they were too high end to even be mentioned on TV or in magazines.

She felt as lost as she must have looked as the valet gave her an odd stare, as if she must have stowed away and couldn’t possibly be in the right place when Audrey stopped the car in front of a chic store.

Audrey paid no mind to the help as she casually gave away her keys and waited patiently for the black car to drop off the royal’s body guard. Jane hadn’t noticed they had been followed but the behemoth in all black was a stark contrast to the light marble and intricate brick work that made up the fashion mecca.

The man said no words as he placed himself a short distance from Audrey and the princess just started to walk, deciding on what store she wanted to peruse first.

Jane had been aware that the royals all had body guards; it was another thing to experience their constant presence when hanging with Audrey.
But soon the bodyguard was forgotten when she was amongst such wealth and beauty. The first store they entered was pristinely white, it looked like dust would never dare enter for fear of offending the sumptuous merchandise. Jane had only ever been to common stores that held racks and racks of choices; the store had few and each item had its own mannequin to display its splendor.

A horde of well dressed women in black had gathered, all ready and willing to help princess Audrey with her every need. Jane was given a cursory glance by them, deemed unworthy to be spoken to besides the bare minimum that was socially acceptable, and only because was a guest of princess Audrey.

Jane had the distinct feeling that if she had come there by herself, she would have been shown the door. Part of her couldn’t blame them, she clearly was an outsider and overwhelmed.

She was always the outsider. Too fae no matter how much she tried to fit in, too human for her mother to teach her magic and no other fae to talk to regardless. She didn’t count Mal and never would.

Audrey was already bored with the shopping trip, she always had the latest fashions sent to her directly and tailored, and nothing in the shop had anything worth looking at; she doubted the others would as well, but she wasn’t there for herself. She was there to amaze Jane and impress upon the fae the advantages of royal favor.

Her plan was still in its infancy, it was inelegant and rushed but time was of the essence. If she couldn’t win Ben back as soon as possible, then there was always time for Carlos and Mal to break up in the meantime. They may love each other now, but teen love was fleeting not to mention their base blood; everyone knew bastards and the lowborn were prone to infidelity and promiscuity. Everyone knew fae were mercurial, dark fae even more so. As much as Mal may love Carlos, he was no prince and no future king. Who could resist the promise of a crown? It was only a matter of time before the teen dark fae caught wind of Ben’s infatuation; people had tittered about it for months, she wouldn’t be surprised if Mal already knew.

She was certain the purple haired girl was simply biding her time, waiting to ensnare Ben as to not arouse suspicion. The thought haunted Audrey’s dreams, of the time when Mal knew exactly how much power she held over the Bourbon heir and could bring Auradon to its knees.

So while she held no desire for anything in the shop, she put on her brightest smile and cooed at Jane,

“Isn’t everything lovely?”

Jane could only nod, still so in awe. The princess quickly grew impatient as the half-fae seemed content to merely window shop and look at everything as if she were in a museum, happy to only observe but never touch.

The fae felt that “lovely” was too weak a word for what she was looking at. Everything sparkled or shone with divine light, the epitome of wealth and glamor. She wasn’t even sure if the princess was aware that she was introducing her to an entirely new world she never thought she’d ever get to see.

Jane was just happy to be included.

“Why don’t you try something on?” Audrey offered, wondering why they were still just standing there and wanting to move it along.

Jane wasn’t sure if she had heard her right, there was no possible way she could try anything on.
Nothing even had price tags, she took that to mean that if she cared about how much something cost, then she couldn’t afford it.

Jane was half convinced that her $100 limit could probably be found in the couch cushions of the ultra-white suede sofa in the middle of the store. When it seemed that Audrey was sincere, she had to embarrassingly confess,

“Oh no, I couldn’t… I can’t afford anything here… but everything does look gorgeous, I’d be more than happy to just watch you try stuff on.”

“Oh, don’t worry about that. It’s on me,” Audrey easily offered. She was princess of Auroria, money was never an issue. Even if she did need new clothes, her allowance was limitless and it wasn’t as if her parents would check on her purchases. She could more than afford to throw a few off the rack outfits Jane’s way. She was also aware of Jane’s social and economic status, she was going to use it to her advantage.

“Really?” Jane wanted to protest, but there were so many beautiful options that she thought that trying them on couldn’t hurt. She didn’t really expect Audrey to pay for anything.

Jane was still a little jarred at how different this store was from any other she had been in. Normally she would simply grab whatever looked nice off the rack in what she thought was her size and then try a dozen things on, eliminating anything that didn’t fit or looked horrid; her mother had the final say in whatever she bought so half the time even if she thought it was terrible, it was either what her mother approved of or nothing new at all.

There, the store attendants steered her to towards certain items, they could tell from sight alone her size and which silhouettes would look best on her. At first she was startled that she wouldn’t be able to choose whatever she wanted, but once she got into the clothes they suggested she had seen their wisdom.

Most seemed to thaw around her, probably figuring out that she was Audrey’s guest (and not some sort of intern or assistant) and therefore needed to be treated with the same respect as royalty. In the end, they still got commission and didn’t really care to whom the clothes would be bought for.

“You have such a lovely shape, dear. I think you’d just be stunning in a fit and flare,” the dressing assistant said with an Enchancian lisp as she helped Jane into her clothes. The fae was shy at first, not used to undressing in front of anyone but soon grew to appreciate her help as she knew she would have had trouble doing it herself. “And it’s all the rage this season, something flirty and fun, yes?”

Jane nodded, shyly smiling and happy to try on something that actually accentuated her curves.

No wonder all the royals are so confident. Everything fits, looks great, and people aren’t shy about telling them.

Her biggest compliment came from Audrey who did a double take when she walked out.

“Wow, look at you,” she said sincerely surprised at how nice Jane looked. “Why have you been hiding this cute bod of yours?”

The princess didn’t understand Jane. If she had looked so nice this whole time, she probably would have made the cheer squad easily with hard work and been tons more popular. She couldn’t quite remember why she didn’t make the team or if she even had tried out; Jane had always just been the mascot.
Instead of her customary squeak, Jane actually giggled and reveled in the attention.

Audrey came up, agreed with the seamstress that there needed to be a few places pinned and altered but overall it was a particularly charming look on Jane. It was a scarlet cocktail dress with purple flower overlay. It showed much more skin that she was used to, but it was still rather modest as it didn’t show cleavage and wasn’t obscenely tight in other areas.

“You have such a cute waist and such nice proportions…why do you wear such boxy clothes?”

“My mother,” Jane griped and rolled her eyes.

“Ohhh, I completely understand. Some of my uncles are still in the medieval ages and make my cousin dress the same. I don’t know why they think everyone is blind, but it looks too good on you to not get it.”

“Are you sure?” Jane desperately wanted it; it’d be the first haute couture dress she would own, probably ever, but still part of her felt guilt at the expense.

“Oh I insist, it’s what friends do,” she laid down the groundwork that she hoped would pay off later.

Jane’s heart fluttered at the word “friend.” There were plenty of people at Auradon Prep she was friendly with and were just as cordial back to her, but never anyone she was close with.

*Don’t cry, play it cool. Act as if you’ve had friends before Jane.*

She looked back into the mirror and admired the dress that would soon be hers. She would have to wait for alterations, also something Audrey was paying for, but it would be hers.

As gorgeous as the dress was, she couldn’t help but notice it seemed to also accentuate her other less than appealing attributes. Her hair was still atrocious, would anyone even notice the dress? Although Jane kept quiet, Audrey noticed her sudden shift in mood and followed her eyesight and how Jane’s hands nervously fiddled with strands of distressed hair. The fae didn’t want to say anything, not wanting to seem ungrateful and further would never dream of ever asking for more.

“You know what? I think we deserve a spa day at Iliofáneia, my treat of course” Audrey said excitedly as if she had just thought of it out of the blue.

Jane again was gobsmacked, not expecting so much from the princess.

“We all work so hard, and I know you deserve to pamper yourself after so many games in that heavy sweaty costume.”

“I don’t want to be any trouble…”

“Oh no trouble,” she fiddled with a pink sparkling phone, “there it’s done. We can be there in ten minutes.”

Whereas a regular person might be on a waiting list for Iliofáneia for months, Audrey with a few quick texts had managed a same day double appointment.

Although they had only been to one store, the princess felt it was enough to impress Jane and whisked them to the hair salon and day spa.

Again, no matter where princess Audrey went, there were always a cadre of people waiting to trip over themselves in order to cater to her every whim. By association, Jane was given the same
treatment and had never felt so special in her life. People constantly wanted to know if she was comfortable and what she wanted; they offered the stars and moon to her, all to make her happy.

*Oh heavens above, this water is so delicious…this crystal tumbler is worth more than what I get in allowance in a year.*

Jane thought she would be treated to a mani and pedi, maybe even a facial but she was again surprised when she was guided to a styling station and Audrey started to consult with the stylist about hair treatments.

“I think we need to start with a diagnosis and proceed with the recommended Kératase treatment along with a shot of Corona Healing Serum. That should take care of the damage and soften her hair up. Then I think we ought to go darker,” Audrey confidently ordered, used to taking charge and it wasn’t as if Jane had any clue what she was talking about.

“Oh definitely, it would make her eyes just pop,” the stylist agreed, taking Audrey’s lead and not asking for input from Jane. “Copper or caramel highlights?”

“Caramel, we don’t want to be too flashy or aggressive. And lets do 20” extensions and romance curls.”

The stylist smiled and got straight to work, Jane was pretty sure they were speaking another language and everything had gone by so fast she wasn’t sure what Audrey had just ordered them to do to her.

But once the process got started and after they asked her a few questions, finally acknowledging she was a person, about her heritage and why the damage was so bad, they had understood and were more than happy to help her hide the star platinum hair she was born with.

The process was not as daunting as it sounded; they had simply taken what looked to be a bulky iPhone with an intense camera lens to a lock of her hair and noted what needed to be fixed. They then mixed a cocktail of different fluids into a spray bottle and soaked her hair. The process wasn’t rigorous and simpler than she thought it would be. She was then treated to a toe-curling scalp massage and hair wash. Afterwards they had put all sorts of concoctions into her hair that involved aluminum foil, these were professionals so she trusted they knew what they were doing.

She had never felt more like a doll when they had brought out what looked to be yards of hair and had started to intertwine it with her own. They had turned the chair around, away from the mirror so she couldn’t see what was going on, it was just as well as she would probably get anxiety if she watched all that they were doing.

The next chair over, Audrey had relaxed with a facial, sparkling grape juice, and enjoyed a foot massage. Her normal beauty appointment wasn’t for two weeks, but she may as well enjoy some pampering while she was there. It looked way more relaxing that what was happening to Jane, but the fae kept her mouth shut and followed directions; even when some of the treatments and hair dryer turned painful.

*Beauty is pain.*

She reminded herself, she only hoped that she didn’t turn out worse than she had before. Her previous experiences at salons had not turned out as she had hoped, but she had faith that Iliofânia would never let a customer come out unhappy, especially at their prices and not while under the supervision of princess Audrey.

She also had no clue that being beautiful would take up so much time and effort. Audrey was always
so put together and perfect, Jane had always thought the princess had awoken that way. But as the sun started to set and they were inching closer to the time where they would miss curfew, Jane started to get anxious.

But once they were finished and had swung the chair around, any thought of Jane suggesting they hurry out had left her lips and were replaced with gasps.

She almost didn’t recognize herself in the mirror. Before, she had always seen this frumpy girl with terrible hair and who everyone was happy to ignore. Now she saw a girl with magazine perfect hair, the darker colour complimenting her skin tone and making her starlit blue eyes demand attention. The deep chestnut tresses cascaded well past her shoulders and almost to her waist, rivulets of romantic curls looked soft to the touch which she ached to feel but was too afraid of ruining them. Part of her fearful that she was hallucinating, that any disturbance would destroy the illusion and she’d be plain Jane again.

Everyone around her was smiling, obviously proud of their work and her awestruck silence.

“Well, aren’t you just gorgeous,” the stylist cooed, twirling a few locks to show how bouncy and healthy her hair had become.

“Absolutely beautiful,” Audrey agreed genuinely. Although she was planning on using Jane’s magic to win back Ben, part of her was glad to help the girl out. It wasn’t as if the fae was her enemy, she had come from a good family and the princess had nothing against her. They simply came from different classes and it was a big reason why they were never close; Audrey simply didn’t have a reason to befriend the other girl until now.

Jane had managed to not cry when trying on the dress, she couldn’t help the few tears of happiness that escaped when she realized it was the first time she had ever felt beautiful.

*I'm beautiful, I'm really beautiful.*

More stylists had come to give their own opinion, their hearts bursting with tenderness at helping a young girl find her confidence and beauty.

Jane couldn’t stop saying “thank you” enough; in her mind they had done a miracle. Despite flirting with breaking curfew, she listened aptly to their instructions on how to care for her new hair and she wasn’t going to rush or cut them short.

She left the salon with a goodie bag full of products that would keep her style as fresh and bouncy until the next appointment which would be in a few weeks; Audrey had already promised to pay for that one as well. Jane knew she couldn’t depend on the princess’ generosity forever, and she needed to figure out a way to pay for these treatments. She may not go as far as the extensions, but she definitely wanted to keep colour treating her hair with the salon’s superior and healthier dyes.

*Once mother sees how great I look, she has to let me get a job. I bet a part time job would pay for at least half and mother would make up the difference. It’s clearly a better deal than to keep paying for subpar dye with disastrous results.*

She happily chatted with Audrey on the way home, glad they had managed to leave in time to make it to curfew, or she would only be a few minutes late at most. She spent most of the ride looking in the sun visor mirror, every inch of her new look amazed her.

They had reached the threshold of the school right as the curfew bell rang, no one could say they were late. She had texted her mother and knew the floor chaperone would corroborate her story as
she knew her mother would double check.

Even though they had spent the day together, Audrey had invited her to her royal suite to do homework and hang out.

“But curfew…” Jane pointed out, she definitely wanted to see the royal suite, deeply curious as to how much more luxurious it had to be compared to the common dorms.

“Oh that,” the princess dismissed, “That’s only for the degenerates. They know we’re proper and good; they have no reason to worry about us being out late.”

The perks of being royal seemed to be endless. The chaperones in the commoner wing always had their eagle eyes out for stragglers, would snap at anyone dawdling, and had frequent rounds through the night to catch anyone out of bed. In the royal wing, she had yet to see an adult to tell them to get to bed.

Jane couldn’t help the awed face she made as she stepped into Audrey’s suite. She was fairly certain it was larger, it was certainly more lavish, than the entire cottage given to her mother. The amount of wealth just in this one room could probably set her up for life.

Audrey walked around and started to relax as if she wasn’t swimming in money, paying no mind to Jane. They both sat at an ornate marble table, taking out books to do some last minute homework.

While Jane tried to concentrate on her Auradon Lit essay, Audrey tried to think of a natural way to bring up magic. The other girl was still rather shy, which was maddening as she was eager to get Ben back as soon as possible.

“Know what I think would be fun?”

Jane didn’t respond other than to pay attention and wait for Audrey.

“We should have a sleepover.”

The fae’s eyes widened, not expecting that and the surprises seemed to never end that day. Part of her excited and wanted to say “yes” right away, but an always cautious part of her refrained; worried how her mother would react.

Before Jane would bring up her mother, again, Audrey went on,

“Besides, you want to surprise everyone with your new hair right? No one has seen it. It’ll be great; you’ll walk into school with me as a new person.”

That certainly appealed to Jane. She almost felt like she would be one of those contestants on a talk show or even a dating show. She would walk in and everyone would gasp, wondering how they had overlooked such a beauty. She could be anyone she wanted to be: confident, poised, and graceful.

She could be someone that Carlos would notice and he could forget all about Mal and her evil ways.

As always, Audrey could charm her way to anything she wanted and Jane had agreed to a sleep over. Her mother already thought she was in her dorm, there was no reason to text her.

She’s probably already in bed, there’s no need to worry her. I’m with princess Audrey, so it’s not like I’m doing something naughty.

The princess walked over to a golden rope on the side of the wall and pulled, a distant ringing could
be heard and suddenly a goblin had popped into her room.

“Get Miss FéeMarraine’s night clothes and toiletries from her room as well as a fresh set of her uniform. Bring them here and do not let anyone see you.”

The squat house goblin didn’t answer other than to nod and just as suddenly as it was in the room it had disappeared. A few minutes later, the goblin came back with all that was requested.

On one hand, Jane was happy she didn’t have to go all the way to the other end of the castle to get her stuff, and she could also keep the surprise of her new look as she wouldn’t have had to run into her roommates.

On the other, it was a bit disconcerting how the goblins could come and go unnoticed as they pleased into their rooms.

All of that was forgotten when Jane used the guest bathroom in Audrey’s suite, everything was pink, marble, and gold. Even doing something as simple as a quick shower, brushing her teeth, and washing her face was getting the royal treatment.

At least her pajamas weren’t out of place, the princess also had fuzzy bottoms with cute cartoon prints and matching tops. Both were comfortable and about to get down for the night, a trundle bed had been pulled for Jane to sleep in Audrey’s room.

“You know, I think it’s just so natural isn’t it?” Audrey asked as she brushed her hair and put it in a ponytail.

Jane almost didn’t hear her, she was trying to remember all the steps the stylist told her to take care of her new hair.

“Hmm?”

“Us…a princess and a good faery…we’re just natural friends, aren’t we?”

Jane had never thought of it that way. Too many times she had forgotten she was fae and just saw herself as no one and nothing.

“And since we’re such good friends, I’m going to let you in on a secret…you promise you would never tell anyone?”

Jane nodded, of course she would never betray Audrey. She inched closer and both sat on Audrey’s massive four post bed, and although they were alone they still huddled together to make sure only they were in on the secret.

“I know I can trust you, you come from such a good faery family… my break up with Ben wasn’t mutual. He’s the one who broke things off.”

Jane’s eyes widened at the revelation. She had been so convinced with how both royals acted and it was what was told on the news.

“Ben broke up with me because of Mal.”

That’s what Jane gasped and frowned, incensed on her friend’s behalf.

“He denies it, but there is no other explanation…we were so happy before that horrible girl came to Auradon.”
Of course they were, Jane knew as did everyone else that Ben and Audrey were going to be married someday. There wasn’t a day that went by that the magazines and all the television shows gushed over the royal couple and speculated when they’d see a ring on the princess’ finger. They had also been going out for a year and had seemed so in love in all their photos.

Audrey was right to suspect Mal, she didn’t know why she had ignored her until she herself became a victim of the fae’s cruel nature.

*Mal is so evil, of course she would go after Ben. He’s the next King of all 18 Kingdoms…poor Carlos. Under her evil spell, she’s probably stringing him along until she gets her claws into the Crown Prince.*

Jane laid a comforting hand on Audrey’s, trying to convey that she was there for her.

Audrey knew she had Jane where she wanted her, she had pushed out a few tears for good measure.

“I just don’t know what to do. I have to help him before she turns him evil or does something terrible. I love him so much…but how can I fight an evil faery?”

“Maybe my mom can help…”

“We can’t go to the headmistress. She’s under her spell too, everyone just fawns over her. For some reason they can’t see how evil she really is.”

That was true enough, Jane knew. Her mother lectured her for months about how Mal and the others were just misunderstood. For some reason, it was perfectly fine for Mal to have her fae hair and have her eyes burn with magic, but Jane had to have terrible dye jobs and was never allowed to lose her temper in order to fit in. Perhaps it was a spell, she wouldn’t put it past Mal to have bespelled everyone as soon as she step foot in Auradon; the more she thought of it the more Jane became heated.

*She can’t be allowed to get away with this!*  

It was seriously starting to annoy Audrey how quiet Jane always was, it was like she had to suggest and do everything herself.

“But *you* have magic…*you* can help me…us. You can help us.”

“…I can try…should I look up how to break spells? We would have to figure out which ones she has cast, that could take a while…”

“We don’t have time…how about a love spell?”

“Love spell?”

That was the last thing she would have thought of, a love spell didn’t sound like it would help anyone.

“Yes, a love spell…to combat the lust spell she must have cast on poor Ben. Once he shakes off her evil influence, the love spell turns into regular love again.”

“Oh…yeah…I guess that makes sense…but I don’t know a love spell.”

“But you’re so clever, I’m sure you could probably find one. And of course I would never tell a soul, your secret is safe with me. It’s not like we’d get in trouble anyway, we’re doing it for a good cause.
We just don’t have time to fill out all the paperwork. Everyone knows you’re a good faery and would only ever do spells to save someone.”

Jane still looked unsure, Audrey couldn’t have that.

“And of course I would be eternally grateful, as would Ben. We would need a good faery on our side at all times, who knows what Mal would do when her plans are ruined. Royal events, school functions, we’d need you for all sorts of things…and of course you would need to look presentable and dress appropriately, so it would be no problem for us to cover all of that for you. It would be the least we could do to thank you for saving Ben.”

Jane couldn’t help but think of all the beautiful dresses Audrey wore. If she were the royal good faery, then she would have to go to Garderobe Drive and Iliofáneia on a regular basis. It’s basically a full time job and it could be hers. If she saved Ben from Mal, that’s basically like saving Auradon.

She’d be a heroine.

*And if I did find a love spell to help Ben, then I could help Carlos too…he would be free from Mal and we would be so happy together.*

The realization that she could have Carlos on top of everything else, every dream and desire was within her grasp.

*It’s not like you’re doing anything bad. You’re helping, just like Audrey said. Both would be better off without Mal’s evil influence. You’d help the princess, just like in all the stories. And the de Vils are the richest family in East Riding and even most of Auradon, they’re practically royal themselves they’re so wealthy. Carlos is just like Cinderella, he needs help going from rags to riches…mother was more than happy to help Cinderella, it’s no different.*

“Yes,” Jane agreed, she would help Audrey.

The princess smiled widely, so relieved to finally have her plan under way. For the small price of dresses and hair treatments, she would get her Bennie Boo back and save Auradon.

“Oh, I knew you’d help. They’ll write this story for generations to come. With the help of my faery godsister,” Jane perked at the title, “We’ll save Auradon from that tramp’s claws and with any luck, have her kicked out and back on that wretched island where she belongs.”

Jane couldn’t have said it better herself.

Mal was enjoying an afternoon nap when Carlos came to her room. He had knocked but she had not answered and he let himself in. He walked quietly into the room when he saw she was asleep, he took a moment to watch her. Something deep in his soul stirred at the tender image, how peaceful she looked and without a care. She had surrounded herself with the thick downy duvet and had a mountain of pillows at her disposal. She had somehow convinced the goblins to provide her with a dozen or so, creating probably the most comfortable nest in all of Auradon, one pillow within her embrace. He might not have known she was even in the bed if not for the stark contrast of her dark purple hair against the light linens, so lost was she in comfort.

He took a few more moments to admire his fierce and lovely fae, enjoying the moment where he could just stare at her and be still.
Perhaps she could feel his eyes on her, she started to stir from her slumber and he walked towards her. He gently sat on the bed, with some difficulty as the pillows and comforter were a barrier and he had trouble finding balance, and he ran his over her cheeks; moving the hair that had fallen over her face. Without even opening her eyes, in a sleepy voice,

“Hey Carlos.”

With a cute yawn that reminded him of Beezy, she slowly awoken; she blinked away the last remnants of rest. She made no move to get out of bed, she only smiled at him and determined to not leave her nest of coziness.

He couldn’t help but to lean down to kiss her, although she was too lazy to even meet him halfway. He smiled into the kiss when he started to pull away but she had gotten a grip on his shirt and refused to let him move. He made a few more half-hearted attempts at pulling away, but she was determined to keep him prisoner to her kisses.

“Mal, I have a surprise for you,” he mumbled against her lips, still at her mercy.

“I prefer this,” she mumbled back, but she was intrigued enough for his surprise that she finally released him from her grasp. He did hang back for a few more kisses, but finally rose back up and she had sat up. She deigned to be at attention but still didn’t want to leave the comfort of her bed.

She slightly frowned at the laptop that he brandished for her. Although a deep sparkling purple, it was still a computer and she was not eager to have such an item which she knew he was aware of.

“I know it’s a ‘demon box,’” he had started, slightly amused and wondered where she had picked up such a dramatic term. “but I made this one especially for you.”

Touched that he would create something just for her, she opened it gingerly and pressed the power button. She was surprised that the light didn’t hurt her eyes as other computer screens had.

“I programed and created the screen to account for your photosensitivity and fae eyes.”

Well that certainly would go a long way to enduring her to the technology.

“I also created a special keyboard that is completely sound absorbent, so there is no clicking.”

Testing it out, she had started to henpeck the keys in order to set up her account. Carlos winced at how slow she had typed behind her and out of her sight, but patiently took it all in stride. He knew typing wasn’t natural for her and it would come with practice. It worked as promise, even with her hitting the keys as hard as she could, no sound had come from the board.

“I know even with these adjustments you would probably still prefer books, but Auradon is basically all computer based and paperless. All applications, college or jobs, will be online. You need at least something that connects to the internet.”

Her heart skipped a few beats, fluttering at how sweet and thoughtful he was. Although he had dreams of going to university and knew exactly which one and where, he had not mocked or pressured her to apply to schools near his top choices. She had been afraid that the other three would be adamant about sticking together and going to the same college, she dreaded applying to some school she didn’t care about and being stuck there for four years. But she was honest with Carlos, one late night before they went to sleep she told him all her doubts. How she didn’t know what she wanted to do with her life as it seemed so far into the future that it was unfathomable to her. She told him how anxious it made her to even contemplate committing to such a huge choice and sticking with it for years in the event she hated it.
She had expected him to tell her that her fears were nonsense, that she was Mal Lefay and could do anything she wanted by sheer will alone. She had expected that she would be told that this was the best choice and it would be foolish to squander the opportunity she had been given.

Carlos didn’t do any of that and she fell in love with him all over again.

He understood it was a major choice for them and they had very little time to get used to the idea. Most other students had all four years to think about what they would do after high school. Their options available to them since they could toddle. They hadn’t been in Auradon even a year and they were asked to map out their lives. On the Isle, they had such limited choices that they were easy to make.

Most of them revolved around not dying.

She would always remember what he told her,

_Evie and I are just lucky that we happened to have found our passions so young. We had so few choices, sometimes none at all, on the Isle…I don’t want you to ever feel like you have to rush into something just for us._

That’s what had stopped her from deciding outright to go traveling, she knew she would miss him and the others something fierce. But it had lifted the burden of deciding soon, if she changed her mind about university then she still had the option to do late admissions.

She would always appreciate how he made her heart light, never putting the burden of his happiness on her.

“If you decide to take a gap year and travel, the computer will be essential so we can talk to each other over Skype and you can tell me of your adventures.”

Carlos certainly made a good pitch for computers.

“I also made one for Evie, so her typing in all her invoices and cost spreadsheets won’t drive you nuts.”

She couldn’t help but pepper his face with appreciative kisses.

“You…are…the…best…boyfriend…ever…”

He grinned and tolerated her playful pecks,

“Yeah, I know.”

She decided to punish his immodesty with tickles.

Evie found them tangled in Mal’s comforter and all sorts of downy feathers wafting in the air like snow.

“Mal’s bed attacked us,” Carlos said cheekily when he knew they looked ridiculous, all twisted in the duvet and feathers in their hair.

“Looks like it won,” Evie joked back, she got a face full of pillow for her troubles.

That’s how Jay later found them, the room looked as if there was a pillow genocide.

He couldn’t even say anything, so confused as to what had transpired.
The three thought Jay looked too clean and grinned mischievously as they cocked their weapons.

The first day at school with her new hair was everything Jane dreamt it would be…well mostly.

The day started at an hour Jane thought was reserved for farmers who woke at a rooster crow. Audrey had several animal helpers get ready for the day which she had only read about before; it was surreal to see it in real life. Jane barely could even think yet and the princess was already ready to work out. The fae was certain she only agreed to exercise with her was because her brain wasn’t functioning well enough to say “no.” Suddenly she found herself with a fresh work outfit in her size and still not totally awake.

Although there was plenty of room in the living area with the television, Jane had almost run into Audrey several times as she was not used to the cardio and almost acrobatic video the princess liked to work out to.

Jane had never sweated so much and so early ever in her life.

It was also rather odd to have animal helpers, unsure of their presence and they acted as skittish around her as well, uncertain of how to respond to a non-princess who couldn’t understand them and they could barely understand her.

The fae also found it bizarre how they helped Audrey get ready; although they were required to wear a uniform, the princess still took their suggestions of hair accessories and jewelry. The squirrels assigned to help her looked rather put out that she didn’t have anything more than a bow after she had showered and dressed.

She had agreed with the squirrels, however. She looked at the remnant of her former self, the insecure and childish Jane that wore Cinderella blue bows in her hair since she could remember. She could hear her mother cooing in her ear, saying “It’s just darling” and in a fit of rage, she tore the silk accessory to shreds.

Being “darling” was for little girls. She was a woman grown and wanted the world to see the new Jane and refused to go back to that frumpy loser.

The two squirrels looked at each other askance, wondering what the issue was with the girl who they found with their princesses. Still, they were there to help and although they had little to work with, one bounced to the overflowing chest of accessories of their mistress.

The squirrel’s tale twiched, wondering what he should pick. The girl was clearly not royal, so he wouldn’t waste the fine jewels of their mistress; he had no idea if they could even trust a commoner with such finery. But he knew his mistress kept costume jewelry, for times when she amongst her lessers and didn’t need real jewels. He decided on something suitable and came bounding over, happy with his choice. The strange girl gasped, taking the bejeweled clip from his paw.

Jane was in awe of the beautiful hair clip, an ocean blue Atlantican starflower with a creamy white pearl in the middle. She had always loved pearls, she thought they were the epitome of elegance and grace. The cerulean sapphires that made up the petals gave the accessory a dash of flash,

This is probably worth a fortune, no way would Audrey let me wear this.

Audrey was ready for school and as impeccable as Jane had always known her. She saw the clip in her hands, recognizing it as part of a mermaid costume she had worn several years ago; she had
forgotten she even had it. She had worn it to one of her first high school parties, although the jewels and pearl were fake, they were the best fake jewelry money could buy. Most commoners couldn’t tell the difference, only Doug who came from a long line of dwarf miners and could spot a fake from a mile away.

“Oh, that would look great on you,” she complimented, vastly preferring it over those horridly old fashioned bows Jane always wore. It was one thing for Headmistress FéeMarraine to wear them all the time, but it was quite another for a young woman such as Jane to wear them.

“Really?” Jane couldn’t believe that Audrey was so generous; Ben must have been such a fool to break up with someone so kind and giving.

*He certainly must be under an evil spell, who would break up with someone like Audrey to be with Mal?*

Audrey simply walked over to Jane and took the clip, placed it becomingly in her new hair and smiled as they turned to a mirror.

“Ready to wow them?”

Jane could only nod enthusiastically and smile, eager to go to school.

At the bottom of the Neptune stairs, the reactions were immediate; the entire cheer team had rushed to them and started to compliment her on her new look. She didn’t even have to speak for the most part, people just volunteered their compliments and were in awe.

It was even better when she walked into class, most had done a double take and she could almost hear them wonder if she was truly Jane FéeMarraine from just their stares.

And it wasn’t just compliments, people were noticeable nicer to her all day. They offered to sit with her at lunch, they were eager to be paired with her for class assignments, and people made an effort to hold the door for her or to walk with her.

The table where she ate lunch had never been so full, it seemed the new her was a beacon of friendliness that no one could resist.

Although she was flattered at all the attention, there was still one person she hadn’t seen all day and it was his reaction she looked forward to the most. As she walked the halls, it went over and over again in her head. How Carlos would finally see her as something more than Plain Jane FéeMarraine, and it would be the beginning of how she would break Mal’s hold on him.

*He will apologize for not seeing my true beauty the entire time and thank me endlessly for saving him from Mal’s evil influence. I will of course console him, telling him everything will be alright and it wasn’t his fault. He’ll make me his new girlfriend right away, not wanting to waste any more time. We’ll go to Cotillion, I’ll be the official Royal Good Faery and we’ll look so amazing on all the magazine covers. We’ll go on expensive vacations with Audrey and Ben. I’ll be the new Royal Faery Godmother as well.*

It was a future she couldn’t stop thinking about, not since Audrey told her the heartbreaking story behind her and Ben’s break up. She would have to go to the Merlin Institute of Magic, although she was still very new to magic she was certain that as a Legacy that she would get in. Maybe once school was out, she could get special tutoring over the summer so she could catch up.

*Certainly Audrey would want the most powerful fae to be her faery godsister, it would only make sense that she would sponsor me. And Carlos is good with computers, everyone says so. That’s such
a normal and non-magical career. Probably another reason he needs to get away from Mal. The de Vils are staunch supporters of King Adam’s anti-magic legislation. Cecil de Vil is a famous lobbyist. I’m sure once Carlos proves he’s loyal to the royal family and doesn’t personally want to be involved with evil magic like Mal, then his family is certain to welcome him back to the fold.

She had thought it was odd that no one from Carlos’ extended family had come to see him. While certainly Cruella had left a black mark on the family’s reputation, it wasn’t like that was his fault. At first she thought maybe they wanted to wait and see if he showed any of the same madness as his mother. It was certainly something people worried about when he first came to Auradon Prep. But time went on without any incident and still no sign of any other de Vil to pay him a visit, she had started to wonder if it was because of Mal. Certainly they would want to distance themselves from any suggestion of villainy, which definitely would include the daughter of Maleficent.

It seemed the more she thought about it, more reasons why Mal was a bad influence and she was doing everyone a favor by helping Audrey. The de Vils were a tight knit human family, as rich as the nobility, and even the royalty, but without titles. While Jane was magical and from a different economic class, being in royal favor would certainly make up for that to his family.

And who knows, maybe if we have children then they can marry into the nobility. I would certainly be their ticket in, given how close we’ll be to the Dormröschens and Bourbons, and there’s always the Charmings; I am literally Chad’s faery godsister.

While she knew that there was no way any child of hers, official royal fae or not, would ever be wed to someone in the upper tiers of the succession, she knew Audrey wanted an army of children; it was rather open and well known that the princess loved kids.

Certainly one of the youngest of their brood, and female, would not be remiss to marry a wealthy quarter fae son of such a prominent family from East Riding. If a youngest daughter was still considered too high above their station, then perhaps a second daughter of Chad or one of the other courtesy royal families of Auradon.

Together, Carlos and Jane’s future was bright and boundless.

As with every class, Jane had decided to walk slower than she would on a normal day. Under the advice of Audrey, it was best to be the last person in the room; it was to make sure that not only would she stand out but it would be certain that anyone who could see her walk in would as they would already be seated.

She had gotten a few reprimands for being tardy and she dreaded what her mother would say when she found out, but they were all worth it as she drank in the stares of admiration. So she had taken her time, even went to her locker to put back some books she normally would have carried to class, and the bell rang while she was still in the hall. She was able to elude the hall monitor but she walked in perhaps two minutes after she should have.

“So sorry Mrs. Meza,” she demurely said, not wanting to antagonize the teacher and knew she would get in any trouble further than a reprimand. Perhaps the honors teacher had gotten a heads upon Jane’s new found inability to get to class on time and was willing to let it go. The teacher was more than aware of how hard high school could be, adding in Jane’s heritage and having to compete with the wealth of the royalty and nobility, if Jane was having a Pretty in Pink moment then she’d let her have it.

For the first time that day, Jane was disappointed by another student’s reaction, or she would lack of reaction. He had clearly seen her come in, new hair and all. But instead of the jaw dropping awe struck stare she had gotten from anyone else, he acted as if it were any other day.
He had seen her, they had made eye contact and she put on the biggest most welcoming smile she
could. But still, he did not seem fazed whatsoever of her new look. She even slowed down her walk,
aggravating the teacher, to see if maybe he would say something as she walked by.

But he didn’t seem the least bit interested. One glance was all she got and a half cordial smile, it was
no different than how he had always treated her.

*Maybe he doesn’t want to be obvious…Evie’s in this class. If he were too eager then she would go
running to Mal. I certainly don’t want him to get in trouble before I can help him.*

Jane kept stealing glances at Carlos, mentally willing him to look back at her and declare his undying
love for her. But that was a power she clearly didn’t possess as he aptly paid attention to the lesson.

She had found herself again the recipient of a reprimand when the teacher called on her and she
hadn’t noticed. When she finally did realize someone was talking to her, she didn’t know the answer
and all Mrs. Merza could do was tisk and annoyance creeped into Jane, knowing her mother was
certain to hear about her behavior in class.

*Gods, it’s one stupid class. Give me a break. How does Audrey get away with everything?*

Jane attempted to give the teacher a megawatt smile, hoping her charms would see her through.
Unfortunately for Jane, wide smiles only seemed to work for royals as Mrs. Meza scolded her again
and she was certain her mother was going to freak out later that day.

The class went on, Carlos *still* wouldn’t notice her; not even when they were told to pair up and go
over with each other the reading. It was the perfect opportunity to branch out, talk to her, and no one
being the wiser. Although she was flattered at all the boys who did ask to be her partner, the boy she
wanted didn’t even look back to her when he paired up with Evie.

*I’m beautiful now, why doesn’t he see me?*

All too soon, the class was over and she wouldn’t see him again until practice. She was still
technically the mascot, although she didn’t know what she was going to do. She couldn’t get into the
sweltering tin can and mess up her hair.

*Maybe Audrey will let me be a cheerleader.*

The class had started to funnel out, and soon he’d be gone. In desperation, she hurried to him before
he left the door and in her panic she did the first thing that came to her mind: she ran into him and
dropped her books.

He was rather startled as he wasn’t expecting Jane to rush into him, but his natural grace and solid
body had taken most of the shock. The same couldn’t be said for Jane, who had dropped everything
and almost fell down. He instinctively reached out to steady her, and when she finally got her
balance she had smiled shyly at him.

“I’m so sorry, I’m such a klutz sometimes.”

“Oh, it’s no problem,” he reassured her, glad it wasn’t on purpose and done to be mean to him. He
reached to the floor to help her pick up her stuff.

Jane was so happy that he was so kind and chivalrous, not being angry at running into him and
helped her gather her things. She tried to think quickly of what to say, but her attempt to flirt was
derailed when Evie had joined them and also helped with her things.
“Thanks, Evie,” she muttered with far less enthusiasm as she had with Carlos.

“No problem, I’ve got to say your new hair is amazing,” the witch’s daughter complimented. “Are these Rapunzel extensions or Bellami? I read Rapunzel extensions can keep growing, like real hair. They’re all the rage in East Riding, I’m so jealous, I wish they came in blue…”

Evie was certainly chattier than her female counterpart, Jane thought. While Evie was cordial and friendly, she wished the other girl would go away so she could attempt to flirt with Carlos.

The boy in question was slightly horrified there was something in Jane’s hair that wasn’t hers but could still grow. He didn’t understand Auradonian grooming rituals. He’d have to be blind not to notice Jane’s new look, and he knew it was customary to compliment others on dramatic changes,

“You do look nice,” he offered with a smile that didn’t show his teeth, he nervously watched the clock as time ticked away. If he didn’t leave soon then he’d be late to archery but he also didn’t want to be rude.

Nice?

That’s all he had to say about her new hair? The hair that took hours to put in and an hour to get ready in the morning? Her new hair wasn’t just “nice,” it was life altering and she felt she could almost cry that he didn’t see how great it was.

He didn’t seem to sense her inner turmoil whatsoever and as politely as he could,

“Sorry Jane, I have to get to class. See you at practice.”

He didn’t even wait to hear her respond, before she could he was out the door and Evie made similar excuses to leave but still managed,

“I have to get going too, but you look great, and I love that hair clip. Très Westerly chic. Bye…”

Jane knew she ought to get to History of Magic, her mother taught that class and certainly would not allow any suggestion of favoritism and would probably even go as far as to give her detention if she were unpunctual. So for the first time that day, she rushed to her next class and thankfully got in before the bell.

While she went to her desk, she locked eyes with her mother who was clearly not happy with her daughter. Headmistress FééMarraine would never cause a scene, so dealing with Jane’s new hair, which she did not give permission for her to do such a thing, and reports of her behavior would happen in private.

It was the first time Jane wished school would never end, she dreaded the confrontation with her mother. It was clear the older woman wasn’t happy with her new look, she tried not to resentfully frown and only half paid attention.

I don’t know what my mother has against me looking nice, why does she want me to be such a loser all the time?

All too soon the end of day bell rang and most students rushed to leave; glad the day was over and it’d be hours before they’d have to step foot in a class again. Some grumbled about the amount of homework that waited for them, while others had after school activities they had to go to.

Normally, Jane would walk towards the gym and look over her knight’s uniform if they didn’t have a game; she’d make sure it was well maintained and clean for the next event. Once the uniform was
taken care of, she’d make her way to the field and watch the cheerleaders’ routine and also steal looks at Carlos without being obvious. Memorizing the cheer routines wasn’t necessary, but she had convinced herself that maybe if she was at least familiar with the dance sequences, then maybe she could be a back-up if anyone got sick or injured. If asked why she was there, she always said she wanted to be aware of their steps so she wouldn’t accidentally bump into them. Most seem to believe that excuse, not aware of how desperate she wanted to be part of their group and the best she could do was hover on the outskirts of their circle.

“Jane, I will have a word with you,” Nadine said primly before her daughter could escape. Luckily most had already gone and didn’t notice she had to stay behind. Even with her new hair and popularity, it wasn’t enough to catch other student’s attention when they had places to be.

Jane squared her shoulders and did her best not to be kowtowed by her mother. If she wanted to be seen as an adult, then she needed to show her mother she wasn’t this timid little girl anymore who would bend at the slightest hint of disapproval.

She refused to wince when her mother had closed the door to give them more privacy in the empty classroom. She went to sit at a desk, back straight and ready to fight for the right to have beautiful hair.

When Nadine woke up that morning, she did not think she would have to discipline her normally perfectly behaved daughter over her hair. She almost didn’t believe the pre-calculus teacher when she told her that Jane had a new look but was late to class. It wasn’t until two other teachers had collaborated essentially the same story: Jane had not only newly coloured hair but was several inches longer. Certainly such a drastic change was more than the $100 limit she had set for Jane’s excursion to the mall yesterday.

To Nadine’s surprise when she checked her credit spending, her daughter had not made any charges. So not only did she have to talk to her daughter about her new hair and tardiness, but how in the world she was able to afford a salon day.

If she were a lesser fae, when Jane walked in barely on time and saw that not only had she gotten her hair done, but must have gotten it done at Iliofáneia, she would have chided her daughter then and there. There was no other salon nearby that could have done such a natural looking job on fae hair.

As disappointed and angry at her daughter as she was, she almost thought to move this meeting to their cottage. She did not expect it to be a long conversation, however. What was done was done, but Jane needed to know that she could not just make such drastic changes while she was under her care. Once she was an adult, then she could do whatever she wanted, but as her daughter she had to follow her rules.

“There are so many things we have to go over, I don’t even know where to begin.”

Jane’s heart started to race at how cold her mother sounded, so different than her normal sing song cadence and buoyant personality. She almost wanted to apologize then and there, say that she’d never do any of it again if only she wouldn’t speak in such a way again.

But then she looked down, her silky hair still in a perfect curl cascaded past her shoulders and she remembered how heartbroken she felt at homecoming. Not just this past one, but every homecoming at Auradon Prep. Where she would go in a dress that she hated, with a haircut she hated even more, spending hours in the ballroom to never be asked to dance and just hanging on the sidelines.

She remembered every smile and kind word she got that day, more people talked to her that morning than they had in the four years that she had been there.
That was worth her mother’s anger.

She remained quiet, not sure what to say and not wanting to admit that she had done anything wrong.

*I haven’t done anything wrong. It’s not wrong to want to be beautiful and liked.*

“Lets start with: how did you pay for your new…style?”

“Audrey was nice enough to…”

**Princess Audrey** paid for you to do this to yourself?”

Jane wasn’t only shocked by the interruption, but how her mother made it seem as if she had disfigured herself.

“…yes? I mean, she was nice enough to treat me to a spa day.”

“Jane, a spa day is a facial and maybe a massage. Your hair is a totally different colour and several inches longer. You can’t just accept such extravagant gifts from someone you barely know.”

“I know princess Audrey,” Jane said defensively, frowning at her mother’s description of their friendship. If her mother was reacting so badly to her hair, she certainly wouldn’t tell her about the designer dress. She didn’t like that she had to keep secrets from her mother, but if she was going to be so unreasonably upset, then what other choice did she have?

Nadine refrained from scoffing, knowing it would be unduly cruel to remind her daughter that not only where they several stations below the princess, but said girl was willing to almost all but ignore her daughter before the previous weekend. She didn’t know what caused the royal to start paying attention to Jane but it certainly seemed suspicious to her.

“Regardless,” the adult fae moved on, trying to be diplomatic. “You cannot just accept such expensive gifts. And you do not make such drastic changes without talking to me first. And you certainly do not hide it from me as long as possible. You weren’t where you said you would be, if something had happened then I would have had no idea you weren’t at the mall, but several miles at Garderobe Drive.”

“I didn’t know we were going to Garderobe, she just said shopping. I thought we were going to Starcourt, I was mistaken. We weren’t that far away from the mall…plus we have cell phones and body guards, nothing was going to happen.”

“I don’t care if you have the entire Kingsgaurd with you, you tell me where you’re going and where you are if plans change.”

She didn’t understand why her daughter was being so obtuse. The world wasn’t safe for women, and certainly not safe for fae women, she only cared about her daughter’s wellbeing.

Any fear Jane had of her mother’s reaction had been replaced with annoyance and frustration. She didn’t understand why her mother was so overbearing. They were in Auradon City, what exactly was she afraid would happen?

“And your hair…”

“What about my hair? It’s amazing and finally not some swamp water colour and hideous.”
Nadine did not appreciate the disparaging tone, knowing her daughter didn’t like the dye they had to use but it was what they could afford. She always feared Jane would succumb to the pressures of having such wealthy classmates, but up until then her sweet daughter had understood their limitations. It wasn’t as if she was going to Iliopháneia while her daughter was left with drugstore boxed dyes. They both had used it and made the best of what they had.

“What is the big deal? It’s a ‘natural’ colour, it’s not in some crazy style. I look perfectly normal and well within the school rule,” she went on.

Sure it was a normal enough colour and style, but Nadine did not want to set a precedent where Jane could just go and make such decisions on her own. If her daughter thought she could, then they could find themselves with some wild colour like orange or red, in a style that didn’t adhere to the school handbook.

“It’s not about what it looks like, it’s about respect. Respect for me and your father, you do not make such drastic changes without consulting us. We are responsible for you and everything you do. It reflects badly on us if we don’t know what you’re doing.”

Jane knew if she talked more, she was just going to get more upset and fight a losing battle. It was clear her mother thought she were some pet, having to jump when commanded. What was worse, no matter what, her mother had the power and would be right, no matter how much Jane made sense.

While she did not speak, her huffing, rolling her eyes, and slumping shoulders said everything.

“I do not like this attitude, miss. I especially don’t like this new look if it causes you to be disrespectful and late to class. If Audrey is putting these ideas into your head…”

“She’s not,” she defended the princess. Although technically it was true, Audrey was just trying to help her be popular and gave really good advice that worked. Better advice than “real magic is in books, and not spell books” or “just be yourself, that’s how true friends are found” ever would.

Nadine thought otherwise, however. Although Chad was her human godson and she loved him very much, she was not blind to the arrogance and other failings of the royals. Given their station, they had been taught from birth that certain rules were not for them, and they thought they could get away with whatever they wanted. Unfortunately, most of the teaching staff has seen it that way, despite her own emphasis of treating every student—regardless of their station or title—the same way and to execute the rules the same for everyone.

If princess Audrey was putting it in Jane’s head that she could do whatever she wanted with no consequence, then that was not the friend she wanted for her daughter.

Jane had to think quickly, she couldn’t lose Audrey as a friend. Not so soon, they had to save Ben and Carlos from Mal.

“I didn’t know there was some ‘rule’ about getting my hair done or whatever. I’m sorry, we won’t do it again.”

At the very least she won’t get such a dramatic change done. Although it looked amazing, perhaps getting the extensions was a bit too far and too much. The next appointment, they would just do the dye—probably closer to the box dye she got—and the softening treatment. That should look normal enough where Jane could have done it herself.

If her mother asks, then she’ll just say she got some really good tips from the stylist at Iliopháneia. Clearly her mother was completely unreasonable and couldn’t be told the truth.
“And being late?”

“And being late?”

“Sorry about that too…everyone has been so nice to me today…I wasn’t used to it and forgot the
time. It was just this one day…I won’t be doing it again.”

That was the first time Jane had said the truth and Nadine softened at how sincere her daughter
sounded. She wasn’t blind to how hard it was for her daughter, teenagers—human teenagers
especially—could be cruel and harsh. Although there was no name calling or other harsh words,
ignoring the existence of someone could be just as hurtful.

Although she thought the extensions were a bit much, she did think her daughter looked really nice.
She probably would have approved of a more toned down style and might have treated Jane to
Iliofáneia as an early birthday and graduation present if she were consulted.

She just didn’t want her daughter to learn that only looks mattered, that true beauty was found within
and not skin deep. So she would allow Jane to keep the style until the extensions had to be taken out,
but she would not be allowing Audrey to pay for such luxuries in the future.

“Well, what’s done is done,” Nadine started, figuring Jane had gotten the message. “There’s no point
in taking the extensions out. Maybe Iliofáneia has special shampoo to make the dye we normally get
be a little…kinder to our hair. But no more visits there, and certainly not on Audrey’s coin. And for
not updating me on where you were, and for all your tardiness…you’re grounded for a week.”

“Grounded?” Jane was confused, they were at a boarding school and it wasn’t as if she went out a
lot anyway. Although she had hoped that she would now that she and Audrey were so close.

“Yes, grounded. You are going to sleep at the cottage for a week. You’ll have to turn in your phone
to me every night and your computer usage will be restricted to school work.”

That was basically her life before Audrey anyway, so Jane was alright with accepting that
punishment for just a week.

“I accept and I’m sorry for my behavior.”

She wasn’t but knew that was what her mother wanted to hear. Auradon Prep had a messaging
feature with its student page network, so it wouldn’t be like she couldn’t message Audrey or be
totally cut off. No one really used it because they had cell phones, but it was a good backup as it had
an “.edu” domain and Jane was pretty sure whatever restrictions her mother put on her computer
wouldn’t filter it.

And it was just one week, what was one week of simply living as she had been for the past four
years compared to how great it was to finally be popular?

Having to sleep in the cottage every night for a week was a little annoying because it was so far
away, but again it wasn’t as bad as having to take the extensions out or being barred from hanging
out with Audrey indefinitely.

Her mother smiled, glad they had the talk and Jane was taking her punishment so well and maturely.
Nadine figured all teens went through a rebellious phase, she was just glad her darling Jane wasn’t as
bad as others.

Jane excused herself and went to the gym. She didn’t really feel like cleaning the mascot uniform
again, and she certainly didn’t need to practice. It was just jumping around and shouting “go team”
so she just went to the field where they were practicing. The tourney team was running drills, the
cheerleaders were practicing moves in their winter uniform. No one said anything as she hung
around the side, she even made herself useful by bringing water bottles to the squad between routines.

“Hey, where were you? We missed you on the field,” Audrey greeted her, gratefully taking the bottle and daintily swigging the water.

“My mom was mad that I got my hair done and was late to every class today,” Jane scoffed and rolled her eyes, thinking the whole thing was so stupid.

“What?” Audrey couldn’t believe anyone would be mad about that.

“Yeah, she thinks it’s like…inappropriate or something that you paid for it and because I ‘didn’t respect her or my father enough to consult them first.’”

None of that made sense to Audrey, or any of the other cheerleaders as they had the same confused look on their faces.

“I didn’t know being nice and generous was so weird…but whatever.”

“Right? And she was all mad about how we went to Garderobe Drive instead of Starcourt and I forgot to tell her. Like chill out mom, why don’t you just put LoJack on me?”

The other girls laughed, they could empathize with her plight.

“My mom is super controlling too,” a cheerleader commiserated. “Did she pull out the ‘while you’re under my roof you will follow my rules’ card?”

“Thank the gods, no she didn’t but probably would have if I pushed it. There’s no arguing with my mother, I just said I was sorry and understood. I was willing to say anything to stop the boring lecture.”

They all laughed again, some congratulating her on her ingenuity and patience; they had all been there at least once.

Jane took Audrey aside after practice, to update her on another aspect of her punishment.

“I’m ‘grounded’ so she’s putting blocks on my computer but I should be able to message you through the school’s website.”

Audrey nodded, not really sure what she would message Jane about but let the fae think she would.

“I have to sleep at the cottage but that’ll just give me more time to work on our…project.”

The princess caught her meaning and smiled, thinking maybe she ought to throw Jane a bone and message her; she was certain she could think of something to talk about.

Jane spent the week researching for a love spell, the restrictions on her computer really only pertained to social media and nothing else. That was fine with her, all the forums she was on weren’t associated with the regular social websites and her mother wouldn’t have thought her darling Jane would ever look up magic on her own.

She was able to talk to Audrey and even a few cheerleaders on the instant messaging feature; she ate with them as well during lunch, she was living her best life and what she had dreamed about since starting Auradon Prep.

Carlos still didn’t seem to notice her the way she wanted to, but kept telling herself it was clearly
whatever spell Mal had him under. There was no other explanation on how every other boy had started to pay attention to her, with the exception of Chad and Ben but they were royal and in a class of their own and didn’t count, but Carlos remained elusive.

She remained optimistic, however. She would have her Almost Prince Charming and live happily ever after, the heroine of Auradon.

Auradon Prep was officially in the National Championships for 2017. It had been the first time the school had made it past semi-finals in the last ten years. School would be extended another week to accommodate all the students that participated or wanted to attend. Finals were next week as well as Winter Recital, practice had become more intense for both the cheer squad and the tourney players.

The first Friday after the win that flung them into the championship there was a huge party happening at Archer Dornröschen’s estate, the son of the Marquess of Schöneblume and Audrey’s cousin. Most students had a car and were able to get to the party, if they knew about it at all. A few months ago, Jane would never have known Archer even lived that close, a half hour away at most and just past the border of Auradon City and Auroria. He was rather well known for throwing the biggest parties as his estate was the largest one closest to the school.

Now she was personally invited by none other than princess Audrey.

She had come to find out that most parties happened a little closer to campus, maybe a five minute drive depending on which noble was hosting, but since it was a party to celebrate the tourney team’s chance at a title then a higher born noble had taken it upon himself to host a grand festivity while his parents were away skiing in the Bald Mountains.

It was Jane’s first high school party and it was said to be the biggest one of the year, unless they won the championship of course then they all speculated it may even be thrown at Rose Hall Castle, the Crown Prince of Auradon City’s official seat.

She couldn’t help feel that it was such a big step that she wasn’t all that prepared for, as if she were on the JV squad and was thrown straight to the Olympics. She had already fought with her mother over trying to go to other parties. They had gone nowhere except her in tears of frustration. She decided she didn’t care anymore, it was easier to get forgiveness than it was to get permission.

*It’s not like I’m even going to be doing anything bad. Mother acts like I’m about to snort cocaine and run through the gardens naked. It’s just one party…first of many I hope.*

Luckily Audrey was on her side, the princess agreed her mother was way too over protective. Even queen Auroria and king Phillip made allowances for their princess as long as she was discreet and didn’t do anything shameful. Most other royals were in agreement to be inconspicuous, so pictures of them partying never made it to social media. Any non-royal or noble that were invited were warned to keep their phones to themselves lest they find themselves socially ostracized and never invited to a party worth going to ever again.

So unless Jane got arrested, she could get as drunk and wild as she wanted and no one would be the wiser.

*Which I’m totally not going to do. The worst is that I’d get a little tipsy, it won’t be the end of the world. I’ll be with Audrey, it’s not like she’ll ditch me to like a bunch of rapists or something.*

Jane would admit she was slightly afraid of that scenario, there were certain warnings that went bone
deep and couldn’t be shrugged off as easily. But she was determined to have a great time; she already limited herself to two drinks, maybe three if she didn’t feel too out of control. Other cheerleaders had boasted having up to eight drinks before they got wild, two should be nothing.

She was glad her roommates were easily bribed. With a promise of an invite to the next party, they were willing to take her phone and text her mother; same with being online with her profile. As far as Nadine FéeMarraine was concerned, Jane was sulking in her room and mopey about not going to a high school party.

In reality, Jane was putting the finishing touches of her makeup, curtesy of Audrey’s tutelage, and admiring another dress the princess had bought her.

“This is going to be the party of the year, second only if we actually win the championship. The red dress is a cocktail dress you’d wear to Family Day. You need something sexy and fun.”

Sexy and fun sounded like just what she needed to get Carlos’ attention. She had tried playing coy but it seemed Mal’s hold on him was just too strong. Perhaps showing him her superior curves would do the trick.

The dress Audrey got for her was a simple jean material, but it was off shoulder with bell sleeves and the tightest and shortest skirt she had ever worn. In front of a large tri-fold mirror, Jane admired herself from head to toe. Her hair was straightened and loose, large silver hoop earrings adorned her ears and four inch black suede pumps made her legs seems miles long and her rear pop out.

Her eyelashes were pitch black and fanned out, framing her electric blue eyes. She donned some peachy blush and matching lipstick.

*Watch out Carlos, I’m a siren tonight.*

She giggled at the thought, never would she ever have thought of herself as a sex symbol but that night she felt powerful. As if every man in her path would bow to her femininity.

The rest of the cheer team was in Audrey’s suite, all getting ready with them. Each girl was dressed to kill, their outfits tight and accentuated their best attributes. Jane was rather surprised at Audrey’s rather daring dress.

The normally modest princess wore a black backless and deep plunging neckline dress with tiered ruffled skirt.

*Wow, she’s not going to need a love spell to win Ben back with that dress…that’s probably the point.*

Jane knew better than to say that out loud, but couldn’t help but giggle at her friend’s boldness. She rather enjoyed getting ready with the cheer squad. She wasn’t sure if she was going to fit in with the other girls, they had been just as happy to ignore her as others had before she befriended Audrey. But it turned out they were all really sweet once she came out of her shell. She had never been complimented more in her life than with a group of girls who wanted to be fierce and sexy.

They all gossiped for a bit while a couple of them had put finishing touches on their outfit or hair, Abigail Darling had come over giggling with a bottle of clear liquid.

“Come on Jane, pre-game!”

Without declining politely or accepting, Abigail had poured her a shot and handed her a diet coke. She didn’t think she would have her first drink before the party even began, but it seemed like every other girl there had at least one shot, Abigail had at least three already.
Audrey smiled encouragingly,

“It’s super gross but it’s strong and whipped cream flavored so it’s not the worst. Definitely swallow and chase it as quick as you can,” she advised.

“Swish some coke, try to get that taste first. Then shoot, then immediately start drinking coke again,” Eva Bonfamille suggested.

“Boo, shoot it like a man. None of this chaser shit,” Barbara Dear mocked, encouraging Jane to take the liquor straight and led by example of taking a shot of her own.

The smell was rather nauseating, however, and Jane went with Eva’s advice.

*One shot won’t kill me.*

So Jane put the cold can to her lips, tasted the sweet soda and then drank the whole shot glass in one gulp. She was so glad that she had thought to immediately drink afterwards as the booze burned as it went down her throat, so bitter despite the saccharine whip flavoring that it made her almost gag; she didn’t understand why drinking this horrible nasty stuff was so popular.

“It tastes like death,” she finally said after she recovered.

But the crowd of girls cheered loudly and Jane felt oddly accomplished. She was surprised when Barbara took a black sharpie and drew a small line on her wrist.

“To keep track of how many drinks you have,” she winked. Jane thought it was rather ingenious.

“OK, before we get too shitfaced,” Barb went on, seemingly the one in charge. “Who is our designated cock blocker?”

A junior cheerleader had raised her hand and the girls applauded.

“We thank you for your sober service. Next, who—besides Audrey—definitely does not want to have sex tonight?”

Jane wasn’t sure if she was surprised by the amount of girls that had raised their hands, but she definitely felt better not being alone. Her mother definitely made it seem like every girl who went to parties was loose and always about to get pregnant.

“OK, for all the freshmen and noobs, remember. The designated cockblocker will make rounds at this party, she will not drink, she will check in on you throughout the night to make sure some Neanderthal does not get his filthy hands on you. Remember, this blockage is rigid and absolute. If you change your mind, too bad your drunk ass doesn’t know better.”

“OK, I want to change my answer to: no sex unless it’s Jayyyyy,” a senior cheerleader joked, but was serious. She earned herself several high fives and similar changes to their answer.

“Yeah, right. Good luck with that. He and Evie are grossly in love and he’s like annoyingly faithful.”

“I’m OK with that, she can join in.”

Jane and a few other girls couldn’t help but choke on their laughter, not ready for such a bawdy statement.

“Meh, maybe I’ll give Chad another whirl,” she decided when Jay seemed too out of reach.
“You’ll want a penicillin chaser then.”

All the girls riotously laughed, all knowing his reputation and most wouldn’t sleep with him… again…unless they were particularly desperate.

“Alright ladies,” Audrey alerted them after getting a ping from her phone. “Limo is ready.”

“Shoulders back, boobs out, lets walk,” Barb gave marching orders and they all made their way through a back entrance to an awaiting limo.

The whole gaggle of girls rushed from the dorms to the awaiting car, none wanted to bother with a jacket but had to beat the cold.

Jane slid in, feeling heady and eager for her first party. She accepted a flute of champagne, the bubbles tickled her nose but it was sweet and easy to drink down.

All her thoughts of only having two or three drinks started to go out the window, she was having too much fun.

I have the cheer squad looking out for me, I’m not driving, it’s a celebration… I’m going to let loose.

The radio was turned up and every girl was belting along, Jane thought this was everything she ever wanted. A group of friends she could just hang with and have fun.

Soon, they were at an estate that was roughly the same size as Auradon Prep’s castle dormitory.

Although the cadet Dornröschen’s were not technically royal, they certainly lived just as richly. The huge mansion made in the Beaux Arts’ fashion and mixed both Old French and Aurorian architecture.

Audrey was always willing to share her family’s wealth, even the non-royal ones, and told her everything she knew about the estate,

“It’s 70 rooms, 33 are for the help. It sits on 13 acres, several rooms were built in East Riding, shipped here, and reassembled. The central great all has 45 foot high ceilings…”

Jane only half listening as they pulled up, in awe of her surroundings and wondered how much wealth just one family had.

As they got out of the car, Audrey had taken her aside and whispered,

“There’s going to be a lot of people from Auroria here, so don’t tell them you’re fae; OK?”

Jane was a little shocked at the instruction, her being part fae had never been a problem before.

“It’s just that not everyone is as accepting as us for your…differences. I just don’t want the party ruined by some hick saying something stupid.”

Jane guessed that made sense. And it wasn’t like her being fae was all the obvious, not with her new hair.

She’s just trying to look out for me.

The girl’s made their way in, the large doors open and welcomed whoever could make it; basically the wealthiest and every heir and heiress Auradon had to offer, and all the commoners who could get a ride. There were already a ton of people there, some not even from their school.
The main party was inside the great hall, it was bigger than even Jane had imagined. There was a DJ on the second floor, looking over the hall. She wondered how anyone could just leave their kids alone, it didn’t even seem like there were any adult servants about. It was only teenagers as far as Jane could see.

“Those are all Count Whitmore’s kids, from the Summerlands and their friends. They’re all out of school already. Those are…”

Jane had been introduced to every royal and noble east of Sherwood Forest. She would never remember their names, but since everyone had been drinking it didn’t seem to matter. She mostly stuck with the group of girls who weren’t interested in hooking up. She had a ton of fun just dancing and joking around with them, having a few more drinks.

There was every type of liquor Jane knew about, which wasn’t a lot but still it seemed to be everywhere. Large buckets filled with ice and sodas, bottled beer, and wine coolers; several kegs of beer from every kingdom; and mountains of red cups stacked for anyone to take.

It was basically her mother’s worst booze filled nightmare.

“You might want to slow down,” Stacy Sinclair warned, motioning to the four marks Jane had on her wrist as she finished her cup. “Here, have a Gatorade. You don’t want to black out or anything… unless you do but they’re not that fun.”

They both laughed and Jane was grateful. It was another thing her mother was wrong about; no one was pressuring her to drink if she didn’t really want to. She was feeling really good and took the cheerleader’s advice and drank the sports drink instead. She didn’t want to get sloppy, although a few other guys and girls from other schools didn’t have such restraint.

Although she was having a blast, she couldn’t help but be disappointed that Carlos wasn’t there. She was certain he would have been since he was such an integral part of the team.

*Mal probably made him stay home, too jealous to ever let him out of her sight. She ruins everything.*

But her sour mood couldn’t last long as a great song came on and she danced with Audrey and the others. A couple hours into the party, Jane still felt like she could go on all night. She a few more drinks to keep her buzz up and even started to play Beirut.

She couldn’t believe Doug was such an amazing player; he got the ping pong ball in every time. The only time he drank was when he wanted to.

Audrey and Jane were on one team one round, they lost rather spectacularly but it was all in good fun.

The only time Doug missed was when he got totally distracted by the six that come in through the door.

“JAY! CARLOS! My man,” Doug shouted and left the game, eager to see his friends.

Jane’s heart jumped in her throat, seeing Carlos at the party looking as handsome as ever in a simple red polo shirt and jeans. The boys clapped their hands in greeting with Doug, happy to be there and immediately being offered a drink.

The cheer team tensed a bit when they saw Ben and Chad were with the Isle Four, he must have been their ride to the party. It seemed Audrey and Ben had some unspoken agreement not to cause a scene as neither really acknowledged each other’s presence other than a simple nod when they made
eye contact.

Chad and his past paramours did not have such an agreement as several girls had stormed away, too angry to deal with him.

“Oh damn Jay’s lookin’ fine,” Barb commented as she took another swig from her red solo cup.

He was particularly eye catching wearing a black men’s tank top and low hanging jeans. It was completely inappropriate for the weather but perhaps he was hot enough to keep himself warm. The shirt was tight enough that it rode up as he moved and gave everyone plenty to admire; not to mention his toned muscled arms that even Jane couldn’t help but stop and stare although in her heart she knew she loved Carlos.

“Shit, maybe I will try to sleep with Evie too if it meant I could hook up with Jay…I’m pretty right?”

“You’re beautiful,” Jane fiercely told her friend, her loosened tongue and slightly fogged head couldn’t let her friend think differently for a second.

“Beautiful enough to get Evie?”

“She’d be…she’d be so lucky to have you,” she sincerely said and meant it with all her heart.

“Gods Jane, we need to hang out more, you’re awesome.”

“Thank you! You’re awesome.”

That’s what Jane loved about the cheer squad, just a bunch of girls who were awesome and hanging out being awesome.

Her happiness soon faded when the two Isle girls strode in. Although they came from humble means, they were dressed as finely as any princess there.

Mal wore a red minidress with white flowers embroidered throughout, her gossamer sleeves went to her wrists, obscuring her arms and back, the embroidery lacing up and down her arms. She and Carlos’ outfits complimenting each other nicely without looking oddly too matched.

Evie had no intention of matching anyone, as her shoulderless mini dress had every inch covered in teal sparkling glitter, Jane wasn’t sure if it were stones or what but the material sparkled like stars and shifted with lights of peridot and white.

Doug was quite the charmer with a few drinks in him, he started to introduce people to the Four; not paying one bit of mind of the shocked faces of those who did not expect the children of villains to be at the party. They all went with it as Ben stuck with them as well.

But the Four seemed to know the secret of ingratiating themselves as they each brought several bottles with them and offered them to Doug and others.

“What is it?” he asked as they poured him the ruby red liquid.

“It’s apple wine, my own recipe,” Evie said, excited to be at a party.

“Your own recipe? You made this?” Doug was impressed, wondering how in the world they managed to ferment wine on school grounds.

Ben pretended he didn’t hear that but he was curious as well.
“That’s the greatest thing I’ve ever heard in my life,” he complimented when she nodded her head.

Others looked at their cups wearily, not exactly eager to taste the apple wine of the daughter of an infamous poisoner. Doug, however, trusted her completely and didn’t hesitate to down it all in one gulp.

“You should probably not…too late,” Evie tried to warn him but he had already finished his glass.

“Whoo! Damn that is good. Whew, that is strong but amazingly delicious,” he gushed over the drink. He already felt the libation go straight to his head, everything was light and dizzy in the best way.

When the dwarf didn’t drop dead, and after Ben had taken a few sips and praised it as well, the other felt confident enough to take their own drinks but took heed that they need not down it all at once. Just a few sips in, they agreed that it was the best tasting wine they have ever had and strongest to boot. They could see how a few bottles could go a long way. Most other kids still were not too keen on drinking anything offered by a child of a villain, Mal being fae also didn’t bode well in their minds.

The dark fae didn’t care, it just meant more wine for them. She could smell the horrid alcohol the humans favored from where she was and was more than happy to not imbibe.

She didn’t quite understand the concept of drinking games. After a few turns at Beirut, which she and Jay were surprisingly good at,

“But I want to drink…right?” she asked Doug.

“Well, you want the others to drink. That’s why you get their ball in their cups, it gets them drunker so they’re more likely to keep missing.”

“But I want to drink…”

Doug barked out a laugh, he felt her pain as most were not able to match him in Beirut, and he had never seen the fae so confused. It was actually cute and he realized that when he wasn’t cowering in fear, Mal was actually really pretty.

“You just do what I do, drink anyway and mock them for their lack of talent.”

“That I can do,” she took a big swig and told their opponents, “I’m getting too sober over here, I’m helping you guys out.”

“Nice burn.”

The dwarf and the fae high-fived and the game went on.

The boys were particularly popular that night. While most of Auradon Prep knew they were in relationships, some of the girls from other schools did not and tried their luck. There were even several girls, and some guys, who were drunk enough that having a significant other was not a road block but merely a speed bump to get over.

The apple wine had run out quickly, the Four were used to it but others were not and the party had gotten even rowdier. Evie and Mal had discovered a stash of wine coolers which were almost as good and strong as the witch’s apple wine. They had broken away from the boys and were chatting up a couple girls from the marching band.

“Doesn’t it bother you guys? How bold some of the girls are being with your boyfriends?” Addison
asked.

The two Isle girls looked to where their boyfriends were; just standing a few feet away and at the center of a bunch of girls who were not exactly subtle in their flirtation or body language.

“Nah,” Mal told her, not worried. “They are really cute, aren’t they?”

Addison and Evie nodded, the former still perplexed at their cavalier attitude when she had seen all out fights happen between girls, and boys, out of jealousy. But when she really looked at the boys, she could tell that while they were being friendly and polite, they didn’t really seem to be reacting to what the other girls were offering.

*Mal and Evie are beautiful, I’d love to be that confident to not be jealous.*

She also couldn’t miss the heated stare that Carlos sent Mal’s way, apparently he was too distracted by the very short and tight dress she wore. The fae was all too aware of the effect she had on her boyfriend, the fae only smiled then politely excused herself from the group and went in the direction towards a wing of the estate.

Addison smiled when soon Carlos followed her soon after, she fanned herself knowing exactly what those two were probably up to.

Jane found a less crowded place in the vast mansion, just out in a sunroom that overlooked a massive pool and just beyond, gardens. She was sulking just a bit, it was a repeat of the first day of debuting her new hair. She had gotten so many compliments and even a few boys had flirted with her through the night.

But it wasn’t by the boy she really wanted, she had tried to flirt with him but she was blocked by the dozens of other girls who had the same idea. He treated them all with a friendly smile but nothing more, answering questions they may have but always just polite and never flirted back.

“Jane, what are you doing out here all by yourself?” Audrey slurred out, clearly tipsy but not falling onto herself just yet.

Jane was impressed Audrey could still walk in such high heels, she had trouble even when she was dead sober.

“Why do you look so sad? Don’t be sad, have another drink.”

Jane tried not to get weepy, but the liquor was making her emotions hard to control but she accepted the hurricane flavored wine cooler and took a deep drink. Once she had gotten more alcohol in her, she opened up,

“I just wanted to get the attention of…” she wasn’t quite ready to reveal who her crush was. “…of a boy…and he didn’t notice me at all.”

“Boys are so stupid,” the princess lamented. “We’d all be so much better off if there were no boys around. Women get shit done and it’s us who should rule the world, not stupid boys and their stupidness.”

Jane couldn’t argue that point, but giggled at how angry Audrey was on her behalf and the booze lifting her spirits.

“We’re…we’re going to find this boy and I’m gonna…I’m gonna punch him in his stupid face until he realizes how great you are.”
Jane was drunk enough to think that was a great idea.

“Yeah, let’s find him and make him not stupid…I mean look at my boobs, they’re so nice in this dress,” she grabbed them to emphasize her point.

“They’re amazing! You have the special boobie lifty bra…boys don’t appreciate anything we do for them, they’re so ungrateful.”

“And my butt, it’s such a cute butt…he should be all over…this,” her hands flailed as she motioned towards all of herself.

“Exactly, we’re going to find him and unstupid him.”

“Yeah.”

They both stumbled through the massive house, neither really knowing where they were going but still drinking as they went. The princess didn’t even know who they were looking for and several times Jane forgot as well.

In their quest they had picked up Barb who was just as enthusiastic to find “the stupid boy” and make him see reason.

“Who are we looking for?” Barb asked, still following but aware enough that maybe they ought to have a real person in mind to look for.

“I’m not sure, I’m following Jane,” Audrey admitted.

“OK,” it was all perfectly reasonable to the cheerleader.

The three finally came across glass French doors that led to what looked to be a study, and on a massive oak desk sat Mal. Although she was facing the door, she was too distracted by the head that nestled between her thighs, skirt bunched up, her eyes closed, and scandalous sounds escaped her lips.

All three girls were struck with shock, unsure of what to do and too drunk to make a decision quickly. They could only watch as the scene unfolded before them, in Barb’s case she continued to drink, enjoyed the show, and smiled as she completely forgot what they were doing.

They immediately recognized the platinum white and pitch black hair of Carlos de Vil as Mal ran her hands through his silky locks, pushing him closer to her core. They couldn’t see exactly what he was doing, but as Mal kept making lewd sounds and writhed, he was clearly doing it right.

“Carlos!” she shouted and stilled, shaking as her peak wracked her body. She collapsed back onto the desk, sighing loudly in contentment.

The girls finally snapped back to reality when Carlos stood up and they heard him unbuckle his belt and figured they had seen enough.

The three scurried like frightened mice out to the veranda, it was too cold but they didn’t want to turn back and made their way to an unlocked pool house.

“Wow,” Barb giggled when she felt she was far enough away. “Maybe it was Carlos I should have been gunning for. Mal’s so lucky.”

“You’ve got to be kidding, that was disgusting,” Audrey almost gagged, “I can’t believe they were
“doing...that,” she couldn’t even name it.

The excitement, and several drinks she had had, was too much for Barb and she had fallen onto the first soft couch she could find and passed out. Audrey sat down too, her feet sore after being in high heels for so long and then running, wanting to give her feet a rest.

Only Jane remained standing, pacing around the living room of the comparatively small house. The princess saw small sparks start to emerge from the fae’s hands and wondered what was going on.

Jane couldn’t believe what she saw, she knew that they were “together” but it just tore and ate at her heart to know they were so...intimate. If they had stayed longer, she was certain she would have seen them even more intimate than she would ever want to see.

*I’t's all just a spell, Mal’s evil spell. No one would want to do what he was doing, she must be making him. That filthy harlot!*

With a livid scream, Jane released a supernova from her hands and the entire house lit with her fury. Audrey had to close her eyes to shield her from the brightness, she wondered why Jane was so mad.

“I will find you that love spell Audrey, and Mal’s evil reign will be put to an end,” the fae growled out her promise.

“Yay,” Audrey cheered, not connecting what they had witnessed to what Jane had just said. She was just happy that Jane was still committed to the plan.

“What happened?” Barb suddenly got up, frightened by the light but no idea where it came from.

“Nothing happened, you’re drunk,” Audrey told her fellow cheerleader, not wanting anyone else to know of Jane’s magic.

“Oh, OK,” with that, Barb went back to blacking out.

Ben was never much of a drinker, while he had a few to relax; there was something about imbibing to the point of losing his wits seemed too unprincely so he normally stopped when he had a nice buzz going. He made his rounds to all his royal peers, wanting to be friendly and never snub anyone. He had lost sight of the Four for a good portion of the night, but once the party finally died down around two in the morning, Evie and Jay had gathered at the main entrance.

“Where are Carlos and Mal?” he asked.

“Not sure, it’s the third time they’ve ‘disappeared’ somewhere in the castle,” Evie snorted, knowing what their friends were up to and hoped they didn’t leave a mess. She would hate to not be invited back because Carlos and Mal left evidence of their activities.

“It’s your own fault for putting Mal in red, you know Carlos can’t keep his hands off her when she does,” Jay jokingly chided his girlfriend.

Which was exactly her and Mal’s intention that night so Evie just giggled uncontrollably.

The Isle teens were too buzzed to see how strained Ben’s smile was, trying to laugh at the joke as well but Chad could see his best friend’s struggle.

“Well they need to hurry their asses up or we’re leaving them,” the prince of Charmington grunted to change the subject.
Before anyone could challenge the prince on this threat, the last remainder of their party had finally shown up. Both rather disheveled and it was not lost on any of them on what they had been doing.

“Where are your shoes?” Evie chided Mal when she noticed she was barefoot, they were hand dyed and sewn with matching embroidered flowers, “You better not have lost them.”

“They’re so uncomfortable I don’t like wearing them,” Mal whined.

But before the witch could get angry, Carlos brandished the missing footwear and saved the day.

“You can’t walk out with no shoes,” Evie’s anger turned to a mother’s worry, not wanting her friend to hurt her feet.

Since he knew Mal was not going to put the shoes back on, and didn’t want her to be uncomfortable he swept her up into his arms.

“Problem solved,” he said cheekily, he was rewarded with a kiss from his girlfriend.

“You two make me want to vomit,” Chad said obnoxiously, hoping they would stop being so cutesy in front of Ben. “Speaking of vomit, I love my car and if any of you hurl in my baby I will have no problem leaving you on the side of the road.

“Chill out Charming, we know how to handle our liquor,” Jay told him dismissively. “Just pull the car around and turn the heat on, we’ll rush to get in.”

“Why didn’t you guys wear coats?”

“Jackets don’t go with these outfits Ben,” Evie answered the Crown Prince condescendingly, as if he didn’t know that and notice practically no one at the party had a winter coat despite the cold.

Ben could only roll his eyes, grateful that his fashion sense at least included a sports jacket.

He would say the Four’s first social event was a success and he could be happy for them.

No matter how much it tore out his heart.

The boys were done with their weekend practice, on their way to the girls’ dorm to hang out with them the rest of the day. As they came to their door, Jay had reached up to knock before Carlos caught his hand and stopped him.

He sniffed and air and tilted his head to get a better angle to hear what was going on inside.

“We need to make a trip to the kitchens.”

Jay knew exactly what he meant and immediately turned around to follow instructions.

When they came back, they had their trays filled and knocked softly, they carefully entered even when told to come in.

They saw their girlfriends looking rather miserable and splayed out on their respective beds. Both still in their pj’s and were not about to get up anytime soon. The tv was, showing some movie on a channel they could see was called “Lifetime” from the logo in the bottom corner of the screen.
Neither boy understood why the girls were watching it when it seemed to have made them upset.

“Carlos come here,” Evie commanded with tears in her eyes and sniffing. He immediately came to
her, dropping off his items on one of the desks in the rooms. He was surprised when she enveloped
him in a tight hug, as if she were scared he’d disappeared if she let go.

“You’re my best friend, I won’t let the bees get you,” she fiercely promised through her tears.

He had no idea what she was talking about. He looked to Jay, wanting some help but his friend was
in the same position. Mal had latched onto him and made similar promises,

“I’ll burn down the entire forest to kill all the bees if they got you.”

“Mal, it’s almost winter…there are no bees,” Jay tried to reason as he hugged her and rubbed his
hands up and down her back to soothe her. He didn’t understand what was going on, but he knew she
was upset and he’d do his best to make her feel better.

It took a few minutes and reassurances that they were alright before the girls let them go.

“Look, we got you tea, chocolate, cookies, other snacks, and a hot water bottle,” Carlos offered to
them, knowing they were probably in pain.

He wanted to take it all back when Evie started to cry again.

“I love you so much,” she hiccupped while she accepted his offerings, placing the warm rubber
bladder over her pelvis and started to relax when it soothed her cramps.

Mal allowed Jay to pamper her with food and comfort, although she vehemently refused the honey
for her hot tea.

“No honey…I’m mad at the bees.”

Jay took the sweetener away and wondered if it was worth asking where their sudden hatred of bees
came from. Both boys then snuggled with their best friends, sort of liking how clingy the girls were
being.

They spent the rest of the day relaxing, cuddling, eating snacks, and watching movies while the girls
convalesced.

It had been a while since they were able to get away from school long enough to enjoy a day at the
field. They couldn’t be there long, Winter Recital was that evening and they all had to prepare. Finals
were over and the recital was technically the end of term, but it was Carlos’ birthday so they got up
extra early to sneak out to give him his gifts.

Carlos was the only thing that could get Mal up at the crack of dawn, particularly since they all had a
long day and probably evening ahead of them. But he was always worth the extra effort, and their
gifts were not something they could do within the comfort of their dorms.

The ground crunched beneath with winter frost, their breaths clouded the air. The forest and field had
a unique beauty, covered with ice crystals and so still from the cold.

Mal, Jay, and Evie were wrapped head to toe with every layer they could and still be able to walk,
still light shivers plagued them as they fought the frigid temperatures. Only Carlos seemed to be in
his element. He smiled as he admired the intricate patterns created by the frost as they moved through the woods, dressed in the lightest layers and only wearing a winter coat because Evie would not let him walk out without one.

Free from prying eyes, Carlos let out a soft blow between his lips and magically the air started to dance and twirled snowflakes around his friends, landing on Mal’s nose. She scrunched her face and shook her head as the magic tickled. She pouted playfully at her boyfriend who only smiled mischievously, narrowed her eyes and she wondered if he deserved a flicker or two of green flame his way.

Knowing her exact thoughts, he rushed to her before she could make a decision and picked her up, whirling her around and not stopping until she laughed and begged,

“Noooo, Carlos stop!” she giggled, too dizzy to even think of doing magic. He did as she commanded, but stole a kiss as payment for his submission. It was his birthday so Mal thought it was magnanimous of her to not retaliate and to give such payment.

“It’s too early for you guys to be this gross,” Jay yelled at them from ahead, wanting to get to the field and back to the dorms as quickly as he could to hopefully get back to sleep. He felt a light punch to his arm and saw his girlfriend frowning at him although there was no real heat to it.

“Leave them alone, it’s his birthday.”

“And his gift is us freezing to death?”

She rolled her eyes at her dramatic boyfriend, then decided he was right and they were indeed freezing while Carlos seemingly immune to the cold and Mal able to conjure fire frolicked. Still, she didn’t want to disturb them as they were quite adorable despite Jay’s grumblings, so she unzipped Jay’s thick jacket and snuggled herself to his chest; he laughed and wrapped his open jacked and arms around her and thought it was a fair compromise.

He gazed into her lovely eyes, lined with cobalt kohl and the dark blue lashes were graced with delicate snowflakes. Although cold, he couldn’t help but be happy whenever he was with her, her ruby lips smiling up at him.

Perhaps Carlos has the right idea.

He leaned down to kiss Evie, she stood on her tip toes meet him half way. When they broke, he couldn’t help but rub their noses together in affection and loved to hear her giggle. When he looked back to his friends, he rolled his eyes as the two were again levitating off the ground. He could see Carlos’ magic had caused the light snowfall.

“Showoffs,” he scoffed, but stopped from saying anything further when Evie playfully bit him in his chin, reminding him to be extra tolerant of Carlos on his special day. Jay decided not to be as courteous as his girlfriend would want him to be and gathered the dusty snow that had accumulated on the ground into his hands, packed it into a ball, and then threw it at the floating duo, hitting Carlos’ leg.

It was enough to get their attention but both were powerful enough to maintain their position despite being startled. Carlos merely stuck out his tongue but Mal’s eyes promised retribution at some later point. Jay only laughed, always enjoying tormenting his friends when he had the chance. They came down to the ground and they finally were on their way again and made it to the field soon after.

Mal checked their root cellar to take inventory and that nothing was disturbed, stolen, or damaged by
wild animals. Once she was satisfied with their stores, they made their way to the fire pit she had dug for homecoming. Green flames erupted with a snap of her fingers and they started their gift to Carlos.

Evie made a wide circle around them with blessed black salt, their trust and love for one another were absolute and were easily able to enter the circle unharmed. Within that circle, they placed Carlos at the center; Mal, Jay, and Evie locked their hands together around him to create another circle.

“Carlos Oscar de Vil, you are adored and most precious to us. On this day of your birth, a most auspicious day, the solstice where the day and night are in equal measure and is the first day of winter, do you accept our blessings?” Mal recited the beginning of their ritual.

“I accept freely and with an open heart,” he responded perfectly.

“I, Maleficent Bertha Lefay the Second bless you with my power, that it may protect you from those who wish to harm you with magic.”

With Mal’s words, the air in front of her started to glow aflame with green; her magic then flowed into Carlos and lit his heart radiant, he felt its warmth and love.

“I, Jay ibn Jafar al-Jina, bless you with my strength, that it may protect you from those who wish to harm you with their might.”

Jay’s magic took the form of scarlet sand that twisted like a cyclone until it wrapped itself around Carlos, creating a barrier that no man could hope to breach. He felt as if he could take on the world.

“I, Evilette Viveca Von Weither, bless you with my wisdom, so that you may know you are always loved and cherished and that it may protect you from those who wish to harm you with their words.

Her magic came as a calm river, flowed above him as it turn into a crown upon his head, filling him with joy.

The ritual was done, Carlos imbued with the power of their blessings.

Mal, Jay, and Evie were still freezing, but wanted to present Carlos with his other gifts, material items they had gotten for him still needed the privacy the field granted them, away from prying eyes and unfriendly ears.

Mal took the lead and went to a black duffle they had carried with them.

“This is my gift,” she pulled out a red, black, and white wrapped gift box.

It was the first time any of them were able to get wrapped gifts, he excitedly tore at the paper and was confused when he saw it was his own laptop and cell phone.

“Thanks?”

They all giggled at his confused expression but still willingness to be grateful.

“They’re both enchanted to never break and never be able to be stolen. If anyone tries, they both will re-appear when you’re looking for them.”

His eyes widened, duly impressed with such a feat.

“How were you able to do this? Most magics and electronics don’t mesh, I’ve tried.”
“It took a lot of research, the library has a surprising number of theoretical magic books and Evie worked out the math. A lot of laptops and cell phones perished in our experiments.”

“What computers and phones did you use?”

“We kept stealing Chad’s. Every time we stole them, he thought he just lost them and he got new ones the next day,” Jay explained.

“Wow, thank you. I love it,” he kissed Mal, she smiled wide at how happy he was with his gift. He would never have to worry about his computer or cell being dropped or stolen. Although Mal hated technology in general, she knew he had an affinity for it and would want to keep what he loved safe.

“I expect a similar thank you, by the way,” Jay joked when he handed Carlos his own gift.

Carlos laughed but Mal just growled her discontent. Evie gave Jay a pinch to let him know he was not as funny as he thought he was. He couldn’t help but laugh at all of their reactions.

Jay’s gift turned out to be a carved wooden chocolate box, filled with Carlos’ favorites. The box itself was beautiful, dark mahogany with gold inlay of geometric designs. He helped himself to a peanut butter chocolate disk, savoring the sweet and salty treat.

“Now close the box and open it again,” Jay instructed. Carlos did as he was told and was amazed that when he reopened the box, the chocolate disk had been replaced and the box was as filled as when he first opened it.

“Self-filling chocolate box, you’re welcome. I know it’s your favorite gift ever.”

Carlos just rolled his eyes, the three knowing he would love all his gifts equally but perhaps there was a little truth to Jay’s statement. He shared the unending bounty of the chocolate box with all of them, still amazed at how it magically refilled itself and he’d never go without chocolate again.

Evie handed her gift next, a long shirt box with a simple white button down shirt inside.

“Hold it and think of your favorite pattern,” Evie instructed him. He did as he was told and as he thought of his jacket from homecoming, the white became filled with the black paisley design. He then thought of the crimson red he wore at the party and the shirt morphed into the scarlet colour.

“It can turn into any print or colour you want, and it’s self-cleaning, self-ironing, and it will always shift so it fits perfectly.”

It was an amazing gift; he basically would never have to shop again.

They were all amazing gifts.

“All of these gifts are amazing, thank you guys.”

And just like the first night they found the field, they all hugged each other and reveled in the security and love of their friendship.
10 Points to the first who can tell me the movie the girls were watching.

Yes it's a long chapter and the Winter Recital is next. I first meant to put the WR in this chapter, but I really wanted to flesh out Jane some more. I hope you guys get a really good insight into her character.

Also there were SO MANY people who wanted Ben with Mal. I totally get that, because it's cannon and I think I did a good job at detailing how much he's in love with her. But man I felt bad for Carlos. While no one said it outright, in order for Ben/Mal to happen then Carlos has to be dumped. So I really wanted to also add in Carlos and Mal's dynamic and relationship. Hopefully I get people to see why I love them together.

So I don't disappoint too many people later on, I'll say this now: Ben/Mal is not end game. Carlos and Mal are going to have their up and downs but they're my OTP for this story.

I've dropped more hints as to Carlos' heritage. I hope people picked up on it. lol

Of Carlos' gifts, which was your favorite?
The Four journeyed back to the dorms, all decided to get a little more sleep as they had a long afternoon and evening ahead of them. Since it was Carlos’ birthday, they had also planned to do a late dinner in the city. Ben had offered them his personal limo and driver to take them into the heart of Auradon City and to whatever restaurant Carlos wanted. With his royal connections, Ben was able to get them reservations at Tiana’s Palace.

They had stopped Ben from paying for their meals as Mal, Jay, and Evie wanted to be the ones to treat Carlos. That didn’t stop the Crown Prince from giving him a small chocolate cake at lunch in the mess hall, leading the whole room in a round of “Happy Birthday” with the band being the loudest.

Carlos was rather touched that the band and the tourney team had chipped in to get him presents. Doug had presented him with a ruby and onyx wrist watch—“they’re just leftovers from the mines but they’re real”—and Ben on behalf of the whole tourney team with a gift card to his favorite electronics store. While Mal didn’t particularly care about tourney or the people on it, other than Ben, she was happy that Carlos had found his place and had other friends that cared about him.

The amount of people gathered around them started to put her on edge, it was never a good idea to be completely surrounded on the Isle. She couldn’t help but think of all the ways someone could attack them if they were so inclined. She eyed the silverware, thinking the butter knife, steak knife, or even the dinner fork was within arm’s reach if anything should happen; it calmed her down to know she had available weapons in order to defend herself or the others.

She scooted closer to Carlos, taking his hand and intertwining their fingers.

_He’s here, we’re safe. We’re fine, don’t ruin this._

She repeated that mantra in her head, wishing the others would go away and leave them to their lunch, but Carlos was clearly having a good time. She knew it was selfish to wish that it was just the four them, like it had always been. But she couldn’t blame the others for finally seeing his pure soul and wanting to be his friend.
She eyed Jay as his hand seemingly nonchalantly ghosted over a fork, he too was ready to fight at a moment’s notice. Years of friendship had taught her to see the tension in his shoulders, they met eyes for mere seconds, but the understanding flowed between them.

They would always be ready to protect the ones they loved, Evie and Carlos could relax and be social; it was never meant to be their burden to worry about being attacked.

But Evie and Carlos knew their loves well too. He squeezed Mal’s hand, and without needing to be asked,

“Hey guys, can you back up a little? All of your ‘love’ is making me claustrophobic,” Carlos asked those gathered around them with an award-winning smile. All the other students giggled at his hyperbole but respected his space and backed up.

“Yeah, plus all your moist breathing is going to ruin my hair, I didn’t spend all morning straightening it for your swamp breath to give me frizzies,” Evie told the rest who didn’t quite get the hint, the band’s loud “ohhhhs” and laughter covering any hint that either Jay or Mal were uncomfortable.

Evie and Carlos still didn’t say anything or acknowledge what they did, they simply took their beaus’ hands that were intertwined with theirs and softly kissed their knuckles.

Carlos heard their heart rates slow down and the scent of anxiety dissipated, he didn’t want anyone unhappy on his birthday.

Each showcase had a dedicated space within the gymnasium, concourse, auditoriums, or halls within the school. It was considered an honor to be chosen to have their artwork shown or to have a solo in one of the two dance performances—one each for the lower and upper grades.

Besides the dedicated space, there were plaques next to the exhibits with a short bio of the student, the name of the piece, and times they would be around to answer any questions. Most of the time the students wanted to see other Showcases, so they set aside a specific time so they wouldn’t be required to stand next to their art all night. The scheduling took into account that the Isle Four all wanted to see each other’s exhibitions.

Mal was still convinced that Winter Recital would end badly, so she opted for the latest block of time. She figured that most people would have gone home by then, and it worked out since Carlos’ dance performance was later since he was a senior.

All four were dressed in what some might call “Sunday Best.” It was halfway between what they wore to Arbitration and Homecoming. Something sophisticated and professional, but with a little bit of flair.

Evie forewent her normal royal blue and opted for a cocktail dress with vertical waves of teal, spring green, and black with a sheer black mesh bolero. Her accessories were a simple ruby heart topped with a crown necklace.

Mal surprisingly matched her friend with an asymmetrical bleu de France skirt with a purple wrap and a double lapel jacket.

The boys’ attire was rather simple. Evie had taken a varsity jacket and dyed it Jay’s signature oxblood red, his pants were a simple black and he wore a standard white oxford shirt. Carlos was dressed similarly, with long black trousers, a white shirt, and a plain black sports jacket with a
crimson tie as his lone pop of colour.

Jay was up first for the late afternoon, early evening. He had a series of black and white photos and others in full colour, none of the other Isle kids really knew anything about photography but they liked what he had chosen. They aptly listened to what the adults had to say, all praising his crisp lines, clean silhouettes, and a bunch of other things Mal couldn’t quite follow or understand.

“I see you have called this series ‘Firsts’, what is this in reference to?” an nameless parent asked, curious as to Jay’s creative process.

Jay nervously coughed, not really expecting to have a crowd around his exhibit but he remembered his coaching from arbitration. Nothing was on the line, he could answer honestly and seeing his friends smiling at him gave him courage.

“Well, on the Isle we didn’t have much…of anything really. Growing up there, we didn’t notice what we didn’t have so much. It’s hard to conceptualize missing or knowing what we’re without if we never had it to begin with,” he stopped short of admitting that the only thing they really noticed they were without was food, he was certain none of the parents were interested in how they starved.

“But coming to Auradon, seeing all its wonders I got to see what we were missing out on and had no idea. Here,” he motioned to one photo, “is my first sunrise. The dome and pollution kept us under a haze; seeing all the beautiful colours the sky could be, it took my breath away. It has sister photos of my first sunset and the first time I saw a starry sky.”

Mal was glad to notice the parents didn’t ask specifically where any of these photos were taken, she couldn’t bare it if they knew it was their special field of indigo and the administration forbade them to go out that far. But all seemed charmed and moved by his story, the photographs telling the story of the poor Isle boy’s appreciation of Auradon.

“It’s not just first experiences,” Jay went on as long as the adults were eager to listen. “but the first time realizing certain important events in my life. Here, at the top of the west tower, looking over the gardens and the bay was the first time I felt like Auradon was my home.”

Mal was surprised by that admission, wondering how much of it was true or if he was doing it for the parents’ benefit. It never hurt to make a show of how much they preferred Auradon over the Isle, it seemed to endear the populace to them; although part of her didn’t understand how anyone would be surprised,

_Hmmm…abject poverty or life as a commoner in Auradon…such a hard choice._

She stamped down any other negative thought and refocused on Jay, she wanted to be present for her friend’s big day.

Jay went photo by photo, explaining each’s significance and then he came to the last three. They were of his friends; Mal, Carlos, and Evie were front and center of the crowd, like they were in his life.

The first photo was of Mal, laying against a willow tree and reading a book in one hand and a sketchpad in another. She remembered that day, she had been reading The Importance of Being Earnest and was inspired to sketch out one particular scene. She didn’t realize that Jay had caught such a moment, but she found she didn’t mind.

“This is Mal Lefay, doing her favorite things: reading, sketching, and not talking to anyone.”

The three Islanders, and even a few brave students and parents, had tittered at his joke.
“She’s my best friend,” Jay went on, “she was my first friend on the Island, my first friend ever. She made the Isle feel less lonely and that maybe it wasn’t all bad.”

Next to Mal’s portrait, there was a photo of Carlos. It was one of their weekend trips around the forests of Auradon Prep. Lake Villeneuve had pristine jade waters against a mountain backdrop that had the first dusting of winter snow. He remembered how fresh and clean the air was in his lungs, even more so than around the school and certainly leaps and bounds better than the Isle. He recalled Jay taking photos of everything, once stopping on him and told him to “smile.”

Carlos couldn’t help but ham for the photo, he spread his arms wide and looked to the heavens. His two-toned hair hidden under a grey beanie, he wore a grey and red plaid fleece shirt over a grey cable-knit sweater.

He looked so normal, the students weren’t sure if it was the same person. They had always believed that villains, and by extension their children, were serious and melancholy—if they weren’t maliciously manic—and with Jay’s photos he showed that the Isle Four were just regular teens.

“This is Carlos de Vil. He was the first to teach me that family didn’t have to just be those you shared blood with. He brought light and laughter to our lives. No matter how dire things got, he could always bring a smile to our faces.”

Carlos fought not to blush, he smiled ear to ear; almost like he was in the photo. Jay smiled, part of him enjoying making them feel bashful but he meant all that he was saying.

The last photo was of Evie, she was in the fashion studio and working with pins and measuring tape on a mannequin. She was singularly focused on her task and Jay was pretty certain she had no idea he was there taking the photo. It was one of the many nights she would work late and he would go to keep her company and make sure she had food and whatever else she needed. Some commented that they didn’t know how he could stand to wait for hours while she worked; what they didn’t understand was that he loved to be around her, even if it was in silence. Simply being around her made him happy. And it wasn’t like she didn’t reciprocate, he didn’t think watching him practice or even the games were all that thrilling for her.

But time went by quickly and everything was made easier with love.

“This is Evie Von Weither, she’s the first person I’ve ever fallen in love with. She showed me ambition and winning with grace; that I can always do better, I can always be better.”

Evie could not hold in the burst of love she felt at his confession. She had launched herself from the crowd and into his arms. He was always ready to embrace her and twirled her around, kissing her and neither cared that so many eyes were on them.

The crowd cooed and “aww’d”, but there were still a few teachers who had cleared their throat to give the young couple a warning that it was inappropriate behavior for a school function.

Mal thought that perhaps the Winter Recital was worth braving the masses. She looked around and was glad to see that any suspicious look the parents had, had disappeared. She had started to hope that maybe they would stop seeing children of villains and simply see them as children.

Mal was always the forthright type, so her friends would never ask whose showcase she had looked forward to the most. She would honestly and without hesitation say it was Carlos’. Evie and Jay
knew better than to ask else their feelings would be hurt.

It wasn’t as if she wasn’t proud of her other friends, but she had little interest in photography or fashion. She had clapped and supported Evie in her showcase, but she was always proud of everything the witch had created. And she could always see the photographs Jay took whenever she wanted. She had yet to see Carlos perform in a show. There were school dances where he showed off his moves, but it wasn’t the same as a performance. The Isle Four had front and center seats in the auditorium, and she tried to ignore everyone who had not too subtly stared at her and the others. This was a completely different crowd than the one that had shown up to either Jay or Evie’s exhibits. There was a soft hum across the room, some were minding their own business and excited to see their kids dance. Others couldn’t help themselves and speculated about the Isle Four. What were they doing there, how surprised at how talented they were. Mal didn’t understand why they couldn’t be allowed to live as they wanted, what was it about them that caught everyone’s attention after all this time?

The stage crew was still cleaning up from the last performance, a production from the first years and sophomores. She tried to remain inconspicuous by reading the program for the hundredth time. Carlos was apparently in the “Lyrical” dance category. She had no idea what that meant, but it sounded pretty. He was also only one of seven boys in the entire dance program.

The rumbling quieted once the lights dimmed and the curtains parted. The stage was beautifully decorated, Jay smiled with pride and pointed to the pieces that he personally helped make. The stage was an autumn forest, flush with a riot of yellows, browns, deep reds, and fading green.

A gaggle of juniors were at the center of the stage, all dressed in costumes that made them look like fall foliage. At the center of the troupe was Audrey, who wore a crown of red and brown maple leaves and carried a scepter of twisted oak. She led the others and they bounced around the stage, probably telling a silent story that Mal couldn’t quite follow.

It made more sense when Carlos finally graced the stage, moving fluidly like water and as if gravity had no hold on him. He was the King of Winter, decked in white faux fur and a crown made of jagged ice. She was impressed with the special effects as the stage started to shift from fall to winter, the forest started to glisten with frost and then turned snow white. As Carlos made his way to the other dancers, they had bowed reverently. As soon as he touched each dancer, they undid some buttons and untied some sashes, their costumes changed into silver and white.

Audrey as the Queen of Autumn had backed away from King of Winter, relinquished her scepter, and then danced off stage. In Carlos’ hand, the staff changed to birch and holly.

She had never seen him so happy and confident, his movements strong and perfect. He had even managed to do a few flips and aerials. All the hours he spent on top of every other school curricular was well worth the effort. Once the performance was over, he had earned a standing ovation from the entire crowd.

It took a while for the crowd to disperse from the auditorium, all that were left were parents that wanted to congratulate their kids, all carrying large bouquets of red roses. Mal glanced nervously at her own flowers, hoping that he didn’t mind that she didn’t go for a traditional arrangement.

A few feet back, Belle observed the Isle Four and wondered if she ought to go over and say “hello.” She was only close to Mal, and her showcase wasn’t for another twenty minutes. She had always enjoyed the Winter Recital, more than happy to be the royal representative; Adam was too busy in Auradon City and Ben was at another showcase. The Queen couldn’t help but be curious about the boy Mal was dating. She knew Carlos was not “in the way” as the dark fae could choose who she wanted to date, but as a mother she was a bit biased and couldn’t imagine why anyone would choose
She couldn’t deny the de Vil scion was talented, and that he was handsome; but a part of her knew that her Ben was valiant, kind and everything any girl would want. Ben was someone any girl would be lucky and proud to call her own.

So what was it about this boy that Mal preferred over a future king?

Belle observed the teens as Carlos came out to the main area, out of his costume and redressed in his dress outfit with exception of the ice crown. It appeared he liked it too much to part ways with the prop.

Jay and Evie both gave him hugs, the former couldn’t help but mess with the crown and laughed when Carlos kept swatting his hand away. Her heart broke for Ben as she saw how tenderly Mal smiled, almost shy when she presented Carlos with a bouquet of star gazer and spotted tiger lilies. She couldn’t hear what the fae whispered into his ear, but he gave his own secret smile and he gave her a deep kiss; both were blissfully happy as they gazed into each other’s eyes while their foreheads touched.

Carlos was in love with Mal, unequivocally and all-encompassing and the girl returned those feelings. Belle didn’t like to throw around “true love,” as so many other people did. She also knew it wasn’t something restricted to only royals, but seeing how Mal and Carlos looked at each other made a sweet ache bloom in her chest.

It was a beautiful thing to witness, but it was marred by her grief for her son.

*Maybe we can have a family vacation to the Southern Isles, somewhere far away and something to get his mind off of things.*

She knew it must hurt Ben to know his first love didn’t love him back, but he was young still. There was still plenty of time to find his own true love, someone who was free to love him as much as he deserved.

Queen Belle wasn’t the only one who was watching the Isle Four.

Queen mother Leah had always been a patron of the arts, particularly the dance program. She had donated and raised so much money that they named the auditorium after her. She was fit to burst with pride at how beautiful her granddaughter was, even prouder that Audrey had a lead part—and had one three years in a row. The princess of Auroria had no equal in terms of grace, until she had seen the boy dance as the King of Winter. There were so few males that joined the dance program, most had looked clunky and unrefined next to the princess, but Carlos had a raw talent not usually seen in someone so young. She thought she had known all of the students worth knowing, but he apparently was a new addition.

When she had read the program, she thought the surname de Vil had seemed familiar, but she couldn’t quite place it. The queen mother tended to keep to herself, as had most of the Aurorian court after they had woken up from their 100-year curse. Everything about the modern age seemed too loud and moved too fast for her liking, so news did not travel all that quickly to the Aurorian royal family and if it didn’t concern them, they scantily paid attention.

Whoever the boy was, he was clearly talented, and she wished to give her own congratulations for a job well done. She had also wanted to ask if he would be interested in their summer programs and if he planned on going to an arts school after Auradon Prep. She would certainly be more than happy to give her own recommendation, always willing to help an Auradon Prep graduate.
But before Leah could approach the young man, she saw something that sent her back in time and froze her in place. She was no longer in an auditorium, but a castle made of stone and a court filled with nobles in their finest attire—the fashion from lifetimes ago that she no longer saw anywhere. A frightful beauty smiling maliciously with full blood red lips, cheekbones supernaturally high, and eyes that shown hellfire green and gold.

She couldn’t help her feet as they walked towards the all too familiar girl.

“How are you here?” she asked with a broken voice, “How have you stayed so young?”

In her heart she knew it had to be some wicked evil spell to keep even a faery so youthful even after a century.

Mal turned to see an old woman in a light pink suit with pearl accents, matching pearl earrings and bracelet. She didn’t know who she was and didn’t understand the question. She looked around to see if there was anyone or anything that could give her a hint.

“Grammy…” Audrey came over and whispered to her grandmother, wanting to get her away from Mal as she was certain she would do something evil. “We don’t want to be talking to this girl, not unless you feel like taking another hundred-year nap.”

Mal’s back straightened, if the woman in front of her was Audrey’s “grammy” then that meant she was Aurora’s mother, queen Leah. Maleficent had told her about Stefan’s wife, the weak queen who did nothing as her father invaded the Moor; and continued to do nothing when Stefan slid into madness.

“I missed everything because of you,” queen Leah went on, not hearing the warnings from her granddaughter.

“Your highness,” Ben stepped in, coming from the auditorium next door after the Wind Ensemble had finished playing. He had thought it would be better to sit out the senior dance showcase. Not only did he not want to take any attention away from Audrey with any whispers of their break up, he didn’t think he could stomach watching Carlos. He knew his mother had been in attendance, and he was going to collect her before they went to see Mal’s artwork. He did not expect to see queen mother Leah confront Mal, he had hoped that all royals from across the 18 Kingdoms would have enough tact to respect his edict but apparently some ghosts could not be reined in. “This is Mal, Maleficent is still on the island,” he tried to calmly reason with her.

But it seemed Leah could not hear him,

“My daughter…she was raised by faeries because of you…” angry tears started to gather in her eyes, but she was too proud to let them fall.

“I am not Maleficent,” Mal ground out, trying not to cause a scene; she knew that the woman was clearly lost in some long-gone memory and she had too much to lose. Jay, Carlos, and Evie stood by her, not knowing what to do; the realized this was the first adult they had come across that had been directly affected by one of their parents.

Snow White, Aladdin, Jasmine, and the Dearlys were only names to them, Ben had kept them sheltered from their parents’ past up until then.

Queen mother Leah blinked, she seemed to have realized that not only could the girl not be Maleficent but also recalled Crown Prince Ben’s edict.

“You shouldn’t be here,” she whispered harshly. She didn’t care that Mal wasn’t Maleficent, the girl...
didn’t belong in Auradon, no evil faery did. “I see you have more than enough of her evil blood in you.”

**Queen mother Leah,** Crown Prince Ben had enough, the Aurorian royal had gone too far.

Audrey bristled at the reprimand, she couldn’t believe he would dare to talk to her grandmother in such a way.

Leah would not be bowed so easily,

“What do you expect Ben,” the crowd that started to gather had gasped, surprised that a lesser royal would be so familiar with their sovereign prince in public. “‘Bad blood will out.’ These are children of poisoners and spell casters. Spells that tear apart families! My daughter, she was raised by faeries because of your mother’s curse,” her vitriol was redirected back to Mal. “I missed her first words, her first walk, I missed **everything.**”

Mal remained placid, unable to deny that her mother had cursed Aurora and later the House of Dormröschen and all of the royal court. She stood against the rage of an old woman who lost her daughter, refusing to play into the role of a mad and vindictive faery. The other three had followed her lead, they knew that this type of confrontation would happen sooner or later, they also knew they had to keep their cool. Any lashing out would not be blamed on their parents’ victims and they would not risk going back to the Isle.

The danger of the Isle far outweighed the anger of bitter adults.

“I am not Maleficent,” Mal repeated, she would not be made to feel ashamed.

Leah only sneered, thinking the lowly girl ought not to even be in her presence much less think she had the right to actually talk back to her.

“You should not associate yourself with filth, if you want to get anywhere in Auradon,” she warned Carlos, thinking he was some wayward commoner who didn’t know any better.

Carlos did not know this woman and where she thought she had the right to speak to anyone that way, but he wasn’t about to let her talk about his girlfriend that way.

“The only filth I see is your attitude, we were having a lovely night before you came over.”

So much for her patronage, Leah gasped at the teen’s rudeness. Clearly he had to have also been from the Isle as no one raised in Auradon, royally or as a commoner, would ever speak to a dowager queen that way.

“‘Bad blood will out’ indeed,” she said coldly as she looked at the four of them, “Thick as thieves the lot of you. Bastards born out of bad blood and broken promises. Your mother should have drowned you as soon as she whelped such a disrespectful boy.”

“If you want someone to blame, then why don’t you look in the mirror,” Mal could not let Leah’s barbs go unanswered. She didn’t care if the older woman told her off, but she could not disrespect Carlos. “Maleficent may have cursed Aurora, but she did not send your daughter away. That was Stefan, your ‘king,’” Mal scoffed, disdainful that the royal title could even be applied to him. “He lied to gain his crown and you stood by like a prized heifer to be given away. You stood by again as Maleficent cursed your daughter because of **his** trespasses. Then **again** when he sent your daughter away, even though the curse would not come to fruition until she turned sixteen and all his plans had been for nothing anyway. Maleficent did not cause you to miss Aurora’s childhood, Stefan did, and
you did **nothing** to stop him.”

Queen mother Leah was shocked into silence, never had anyone spoken to her or treated her as so. Part of her also flinched at Mal’s accusation that part of Aurora’s banishment was her fault, hitting closer to the truth than it was not.

**“How dare you, you fil…”** Audrey incensed that someone would talk to her grandmother in such a way, especially the trampy faery that had stolen her Ben away.

“I think we all need to step away from each other and cool down,” Belle stepped in before Audrey could let loose her wickedly sharp tongue, wishing she had done so sooner but harsh words came so quickly out of their mouths before she had the wits to do something.

Everyone in the crowd deferred to the reigning Queen, even queen mother Leah as she was outranked. Both sides stared coldly at each other, angry but knew they could not gainsay Queen Belle without serious consequences.

Audrey looked tempted to ignore her Queen, but her inner princess held her tongue and she merely huffed and tried to calm herself down. She took her grandmother’s arm in hers and they walked away with their heads held high and with as much grace as they could muster.

Ben was dumbstruck, he wished he could turn back time and interfere or at least have talked to the Dornröschens before the events started. He didn’t think he would have to tell other royals they needed to behave, especially ones so much older than himself, but perhaps Mal was right; he was too naïve and thought it would be easy for everyone to let go of the past.

Thankfully, his mother was there to smooth things over,

“I know that wasn’t easy,” Queen Belle told the Isle four in a gentle voice they rarely ever heard directed at them. “It certainly could have gone better, from both sides,” she wanted to stress. “But it also could have gone a lot worse. Mal, your showcase is starting, and I can’t wait to see what you created.”

While Mal wanted to be angry, she found it hard to do so when the Queen smiled at her and had such wide begging eyes. It seemed she had a soft spot for warm brown doe eyes,

“Yeah…” she decided she would try to salvage the situation as best she could. She smiled and although it didn’t quite reach her eyes, it cued in the others that she didn’t want them to do anything rash or lash out. “Let’s go, I’m…uh…I’m excited to show you guys.”

The three of them all nodded their agreement, following her lead and Carlos had taken her hand, intertwined it with his own and brought her knuckles to his lips in an encouraging kiss. Queen Belle was right, it could have gone leagues worse and he was proud of Mal for the restraint she did show.

While it felt like several daggers to the heart, Ben was relieved that the situation was over and that they could all try to enjoy the rest of the evening. He genuinely looked forward to Mal’s piece, having already seen at least a portion of it beforehand. He was certain the finished product would be breathtaking.

Like the royal gentleman he was, he offered his arm to his mother and she gladly took it. If any other royal had any ideas of confronting or causing trouble for the Isle Four, it was quickly quashed as Queen Belle and Crown Prince Ben made it clear they supported them and would not tolerate any further trouble.
Unfortunately, the night would not remain peaceful. It was late and most of the showcases had come and went. Many of the parents and students had cleared out, which was Mal’s hope for her showcase to begin with. She specifically chose a late slot to not only be able to see each of her friends’ showcases, but she also knew she was the most notorious of the Four; out of them, as queen mother Leah had shown, she would have been the one to cause the most contention and likely to have been confronted. Her best hope was that she basically would only show her finished piece to her friends and Queen Belle.

She never thought she would see former king Stefan staring at her art.

Mal had heard tales of king Stefan growing up, her mother letting her know exactly why they were banished to the Isle and whose fault it was that they were stuck there. The story of Stefan and how he mutilated her mother was drilled into her head ever since she could toddle. Mal always imagined some giant of a man, someone almost monstrous who could hurt the Protector of the Moor in such a way.

She never thought he would be a broken old man in a wheelchair.

The former King had gone almost completely grey, his hair thinned out with age and lines marred his features. She had heard some stories of how he had survived the Fae Wars. While queen mother Leah may resent being cursed for 100 years, the fact they woke up in modern times with advanced medicine was the only reason why Stefan survived such a fall. Maleficent may have broken his body, but Mal thought that was the price he should have paid for cutting off her mother’s wings.

Stefan could no longer walk, Maleficent could no longer fly; Mal thought that was a fair trade off. But in the end Stefan got the last laugh as 18 Kingdoms came together under one banner and they defeated the fae armies and banished Maleficent and the others to the Isle.

Mal always wondered what she would do if she ever came face to face with Stefan, the monster from her mother’s stories. When she was younger, she promised her mother she would slay the human who dared lay a hand on her. It was the few times Maleficent ever seemed happy or proud of her daughter. But seeing him before her eyes, real and not just in a story had her frozen on the spot.

Kill him, it’d be so easy. There’s hardly anyone around. I could easily ward off those body guards and no one knows about my powers. Once well-placed fireball and she’d be so proud of me. I could show her it was no mistake for letting me live. All the pain from the Isle, it could all be worth it if I could end him…

The dark voice whispered in her ear, more tempting than she thought it would be. She thought she had left the Isle behind, ready to live out her life in Auradon and never look back. But when the past lay in front of her, so easy to destroy; small wisps of flame escaped from her hands unnoticed by her.

All I need to do is flick my hand and I can right every wrong…

Carlos noticed, however, and he slipped the fae rune bracelet from his wrist and onto hers. Mal immediately felt the effects of her magic dampening and almost fainted. She was caught by her boyfriend and he murmured that everything would be alright, and she finally regained her senses.

She couldn’t believe she had almost used magic in front of the Queen and the Crown Prince. She had almost risked everything and for what?

This is king Stefan. If he could hurt Maleficent, what could he do to me?

There was a tense standoff between the Isle Four and king Stefan, who looked like he was lost and
didn’t even notice them yet. Crown Prince Ben worried at how frozen the fae girl was, not used to seeing Mal in such a state. The normally confident and standoffish girl looked paralyzed, no one knew what to do.

*Mal was right, this was a mistake.*

Ben groaned internally, cursing his stupidity. How in all 18 Kingdoms did he think this would go smoothly? He should have had at least a meeting or warned the royals that the Isle Four were going to be there. He felt like a foolish child who didn’t deserve a crown he clearly wasn’t ready for.

Stefan admired the painting that took up an entire wall, not noticing he had an audience. It didn’t quite grasp the beauty of the Moor, but he doubted anything other than the real thing ever could. It had been decades since he had last seen the beautiful fae landscape, technically over a century but he didn’t count the years he was asleep during the curse. He never thought he’d ever see the Gem Pool, Wallerbog Bog, or the Pixie Glen again. He remembered a happy childhood, at least happy after he met Maleficent and was granted free access to the Moor. It was a simpler time then, when he and Maleficent were young and had no worries, they played to their hearts’ content.

If he were honest with himself, it was the only time he was happy. Honesty wasn’t an ambitious man’s friend, however. He couldn’t quite remember how or why, but having wealth and power became more important than the Moor or his relationship with Maleficent. He started to work in the castle and worked his way to the King’s Privy Chamber. Stefan thought he could get a knighthood, maybe even a low peerage such as Viscount, after years of good service. Never in his wildest dreams did he think he could ever get the Throne of Auroria.

He couldn’t quite remember when or why he got the mad courage to actually try to kill Maleficent. But he clearly remembered buying the sleeping drought and lacing the sweet wine with it. He spent his life’s savings on a pure iron saw chain. They had a beautiful day together, just like when they were children. If he had stopped to think that it’d be the last day he’d ever step foot on the Moor, as well as the last time he’d see his childhood love then maybe he wouldn’t have gone through with it.

Maybe he could have been happy with just her love and live permanently in the Moor.

But once she fell asleep, he held the cold iron in his hands, the only thing he could see was the golden crown upon his head, seated on the throne he never thought he would have, and in the castle he had always coveted. In that moment, the crown was worth more than true love ever would.

He had meant to kill Maleficent. That’s what the price for the crown was, the death of the “winged creature,” the proof he initial sought being her head. But his foolish heart would not allow him to end her life, he somehow convinced himself that simply taking her wings would be enough. In his imprudent arrogance, he thought being wingless would bring Maleficent low enough to never confront him for his crimes, certainly not when he was king and had an army at his disposal.

It certainly worked with the three Pixies, as they paid him his respect due as Sovereign of the Human realm and even offered to give Fae Blessings on his newborn daughter. He felt safe in his kingdom until Maleficent show him how powerful she actually was, wings or not she had terrifying magic.

He had unwisely mistaken her kindness for weakness. She was not some vapid fae that flew around all day painting flowers or bringing in the seasons.

His crimes could not stay hidden forever. Maleficent got her revenge; he lost his legs and his family’s claim to the throne would always be in doubt. She may be trapped on the Isle, but he was trapped in a chair and after twenty years he still had to fight for his daughter’s, and soon granddaughter’s, claim to the Aurorian throne.
There wasn’t a night that went by where he wondered if all of it was worth it.

He stared longingly at the painting, enjoying the memories of warm days playing in the streams and the wonderment of magic.

A commotion caught his attention in his peripherals, he saw several young students heading his way and focused on a fae girl with purple hair that reminded him of a chance he foolishly squandered. He had known Maleficent’s daughter attended the school, and he figured she would have been the one to paint the Moor. He absently wondered how she would have known to paint the fae lands in such detail as she had never been there. Perhaps Maleficent had told her such vivid stories of her homeland.

“You look just like her,” he sighed, not talking to anyone in particular, but there was no mistaking the girl’s heritage or her family connections. With a sick ache in his heart, he wondered what a child of his and Maleficent’s would have looked like.

Hearing Stefan say that, it shook Mal out of her stupor and unfroze her legs. Whatever desire she had for the showcase, what little she had to begin with, immediately evaporated and she couldn’t stand to be there another second. She had no wish to start a shouting match or confront him in any shape or form. She had to get out of there as being in the same room as Stefan was too overwhelming and she feared the magic in the bracelet would succumb to the magic that reacted to her anxiety.

No one tried to stop Mal from leaving, even Queen Belle and Crown Prince Ben understood that it would be best for all involved to get their bearings elsewhere. The night proved that it was too much too soon for anyone to confront the past.

Carlos, Jay, and Evie quickly followed Mal out of the castle and to the deserted garden. They were well within shrubbery that no one would see them if Mal did any accidental magic. Jay had known the fae for most of his life, he knew that she had quite the temper when provoked, and he had no idea what to do with a silent and seemingly calm Mal. When they were younger, her sharp tongue and eagerness to fight would get them into all sorts of trouble on the Isle. He knew that it would get them into even more in Auradon, especially since so many were just aching for an excuse to send them back to the Isle.

But he would have preferred her screaming and her green fire going off like fireworks over her silence and trembling bottom lip. She looked like she filled with some unknown dark emotion that overwhelmed her to the point where her body literally didn’t know how to express it. Even though it was the beginning of winter and their breaths crystalized in the air, it seemed she barely noticed; too lost in whatever memory or thought she was having.

Even Carlos was unsure of how to handle Mal at the moment; his first instinct was to pull her into a hug and try to tell her that everything would be alright. But he knew from his own episodes when he was feeling every emotion coming to him at once that the last thing he wanted was physical contact.

“Mal?” he tried to gently coax her into talking, trying to find any hint of what he should do.

“How?” she simply asked, but her voice was strained with trying to keep her emotions in check.

They weren’t sure what she was asking and remained silent, all desperately wanted to help her.

Evie bounced nervously around, partly to keep moving and from freezing in the frigid weather but also having no idea what to do. This was Mal, their leader. The girl who always knew what to do and if she didn’t, then she was confident she’d find the answer somehow. The witch was at a loss, wishing she was smarter or could use magic to make everything better. She had never felt so useless
in her life.

“How could he...how could he get the drop on Maleficent? He’s just a human...I was there...I could have ended him...I should have ended him...it’s all his fault...” Mal’s carefully erected walls started to crack and brake, the more she spoke the more her voice betrayed her fear and anger.

She could have been talking about a number of things. Her mother’s banishment to the Isle and all the subsequent atrocities Maleficent laid upon everyone to gather power.

How? How? How? That echoed through her mind. Her mother, powerful even without magic had somehow lost her wings to Stefan. That was always the blank in the story, her mother never revealed exactly how Stefan, some random shepherd boy turned castle servant was able to cut off her wings. Mal had speculated through the years, Stefan turned from villain to monster in her mind.

If Maleficent was the most powerful faery in the Moor, and by extension all of Auradon, then that meant that Stefan had some secret terrible power. Something so awful that even Maleficent wouldn’t speak of it.

What kind of power was that? Did he still have it? If he could overpower Maleficent, then what could he do to Mal? What would Maleficent do if she ever found out Mal had the opportunity to kill Stefan and didn’t take it?

“I should have killed him,” tears started to drip unwilling from her jade eyes, she then started to scratch and tear at her arms and back, her scars aching and itching. “I should have killed him, it’s what a good daughter would have done. I have magic, but I just stood there, useless. Useless and wingless, not good for anything...I’m not a proper fae...”

Although it may not have been what Mal wanted, when she started to dig her nails in and break her skin, Carlos had to stop her from hurting herself. She had no energy to fight as he took her hands, and she let him take her into his arms. The only place she ever felt safe was with him and the others. Jay and Evie, both had tears in their eyes for their hurting friend also surrounded her, taking them into their arms. She stopped trying to hold back her pain and her sobs echoed through the icy night.

Although none of them knew what to say to make her feel better, and deep down they knew there was nothing they could say, Mal was able to let out her anguish that had haunted her. The fear and anger had always followed her like a ghost, something no one could see but she could always feel their presence.

Surrounded by her friends, those ghosts didn’t feel so close.

Ben had looked around for the Four, he wondered where they had gone. He had seen them exit the school and towards the dorm castle. He wished he could have followed them when they first ran off, but Audrey and her grandmother had come; both had started to cause a commotion, insisting that the Isle Four, Mal specifically, had done something rude. All they had seen was that former king Stefan was near Mal’s painting and had been teary eyed. Most spectators were inclined to believe the royals, not even willing to give the Isle Four a chance to defend themselves if they had stayed there. It didn’t help that Stefan would refrain from saying anything, even explaining why he had been upset.

He was grateful for his mother who supported him and helped with damage control and keep the teens’ name in good standing. He had no idea how much he got through to them, but he did at least say that Mal and the others had done nothing wrong. Again, Stefan remained silent, so most didn’t know what to believe.
Ben had checked the teens’ rooms first, he hoped he could speak with them, but they were in neither the girls’ or the boys’ dorm rooms. Thankfully one of the groundskeepers had seen where they went, it wasn’t technically past curfew just yet, but it was getting close. He had planned to offer them hot chocolate in his private suite and his sincerest apologies, but once he came towards where they were, he heard Mal’s heartbreaking sobs and the four of them in an intimate moment. He sincerely wished he did not push her to participate in the Winter Recital as it went as bad as she had feared it would. With hindsight, he knew that he gave much too much credence to his fellow royals and should have taken her concerns more to heart.

He had never felt more like an outsider, almost profane to witness such a close moment. He remained hidden, and again hated his inconsiderate push to make everyone get along. He shook his head, determined that he would make it up to them. He walked to the dorms and spoke personally to all the hall monitors on duty that night. He gave strict instructions that the Isle Four had his permission to enjoy the gardens and to not give out detentions if they were seen outside their dorms after curfew.

Most had already heard what happened at the Winter Recital and assumed it had something to do with that, so they easily agreed that any break in curfew would be forgiven that one time.

None of them really thought about how they didn’t see any of the Isle teens come in, before or after curfew. Most assumed another hall monitor had seen them and let them go, none of them were any the wiser that each teen could sneak into the dorms as easily as they walked in the park.

The next day, Mal and the others were recovered from their ordeal enough to be polite in other company. Mal was glad no one had witnessed her breakdown as she didn’t think she could stand the embarrassment. She was even keeled enough to even speak to Ben as if nothing happened, and he knew not to pry as he was woefully aware that they weren’t that close for him to even think he could ask.

But he did apologize for not taking her worries more seriously, and further for not having the foresight to really warn anyone that each other were going to show up and what he expected of his fellow royals.

“I dumbly thought that everyone would just magically be OK, and that was inconsiderate of me. I should have listened to you, I’m sorry.”

Mal could appreciate that it was hard to apologize, probably more so for royals as most of the time their word was law. She couldn’t even recall if she’s ever apologized for anything ever while she was considered the heiress of the Leadership.

She also didn’t want to harp on it, and in order to move past it (thanks to direction from Dr. Li) then she had to accept apologies.

“So, if you four will please follow me?” he jovially asked, smiling as he was pretty certain Mal had forgotten their previous conversation.

She wasn’t sure what he wanted but all four of them followed him to the front of the dorm castle. They were further confused when four brand new fully electric cars with bows lined the driveway.
“No,” Mal scolded him, recalling their bet and she thought he knew that she would never hold him to it.

“Yesssss,” Ben replied, grinning like an idiot. “They’re already custom painted, I can’t take them back.”

“Wait, are these for us?” Evie asked, excited about the sapphire beauty with Swarovski crystal license plates that had to be hers.

“Yep, I made a bet with Mal and I lost. I never want it to be said that I’m not a prince of my word.”

That was enough for Carlos and Jay, they weren’t sure what it was about, but they weren’t about to turn down a free ride. They especially appreciated the pearl white and deep cherry they had respectively, the cars were definitely to each of their tastes. Carlos’ vehicle had black leather seats with a crimson stripe, Jay’s had ochre leather with gold thread. Each were the same model, sleek and sporty.

“You guys, this is too much,” Mal wanted them to not get too attached to the idea of having a car. She really didn’t expect Ben to drop hundreds and thousands of dollars on them all because of a stupid bet. He had done enough already with giving them free tuition and board.

But her three treacherous friends all pouted their lips and gave her sad puppy eyes.

“But your car is purple, Mal! Sparkly purple,” Evie tried to reason with her, reaching out her arms like a car show girl to emphasize the vehicles features.

Damn, it is beautiful.

Mal’s resistance didn’t last long, and she couldn’t resist four sets of puppy eyes when Ben joined the three of them in begging her to let them keep them.

“Well, I guess we don’t want to make Ben a liar…”

“That’s right, you don’t,” he cheekily agreed. “But there is a downside.”

Now it was Mal’s turn to give a sad puppy stare.

“None of you have driver’s licenses,” he explained, they were bummed they couldn’t drive them right away but at least the cars were still theirs. “So, you can’t drive them until you do. But I have set up lessons, and once you guys do those and pass the practical then they’re all yours. And since Carlos’ birthday dinner got ruined, please take my limo and personal driver for an entire weekend in the city. I’ve already set up hotel rooms for you guys.”

“Yeah!” both boys shouted, excited to have such a fun weekend planned.

They all celebrated and took the keys from his hands. Although they could not drive them, that didn’t stop them from admiring the cars from within and Carlos went straight to reading the driver’s manual.

Only Mal stayed outside with Ben, feeling like the only adult around.

“Thanks Ben, this is great,” she smiled at him, and grinned at how happy her friends were.

Ben didn’t tell her that the cars were given at a steep discount. Not only because he was the Crown Prince, but he promised to drive his own similar car around in public for the next year. The
dealership got great publicity and he honored a bet.

The weekend in Auradon City was the least he could do.

He would never tell her that her smile was more than worth it.

Mal tried not to fidget too much in the new dress Evie had custom made for the occasion. The witch wasted no time after she had found out exactly how talented Jay was with a camera. The Four found themselves in matching outfits, all made from the same material, and rearranging the girls’ dorm to accommodate back drops, several photography lights, and ornate chairs they had borrowed from the great room of the castle.

“Mal, many hands make light work,” Evie told the fae who didn’t seem to be keen on moving the massive four poster beds or anything else.

She wasn’t normally one to pout, but since she couldn’t intimidate Evie into bending to her will, she was stuck with frowning petulantly and letting it be known she was doing this against her will as she sluggishly got up and started to help move furniture that was clearly not meant to be moved.

I miss having henchmen.

Although the lackies on the Isle were stupid, mean, and smelled bad; they were good for such menial hard labor. She was tempted to call for some goblins but fought the urge as she knew they were paid workers and not there on their whims.

Especially not the whims of a mad teenage witch who got it into her head that they MUST have photos of all of them in coordinating outfits as soon as possible.

“Don’t you guys have Tourney practice? The Championship is like a day away,” she tried to get out of the impromptu photoshoot.

“Not until later, we’ll be done in plenty of time,” Jay was loath to betray his best friend, but Evie was quite convincing when she wanted to be.

Mal scoffed, but begrudgingly started to move things around at the witch’s direction.

Once the room was to Evie’s satisfaction, Jay took over to place them; he used a bunch of phrases from his photography class that Mal didn’t understand but she let herself be manipulated for her “best angle” and lighting and whatever else he wanted.

She resisted the urge to roll her eyes when she saw that Beezy had a matching vest, wondering when Evie had the time to make all these clothes and how exactly she got the feline to cooperate.

But she couldn’t help it when she said,

“The Book too?”

Evie looked defiantly at her roommate, carrying the aforementioned Book which had a fetching ribbon made of the same material tied into a perfect bow onto its suede corner.

“It’s part of the family Mal,” she explained determined and as if the fae was simple, hoping the Book wouldn’t feel insulted that its mistress didn’t think it worthy of a place in the family photo.

Book glowed gold, seemingly responding that it agreed with the witch.
Mal closed her eyes, wondering what was happening and if she were in some insane dream. The boys had kept quiet, more than willing to just go along with Evie’s machinations as it made life so much simpler and it wasn’t as if she were asking for much. She had made the outfits, they simply had to put them on, show up, and move a few things around.

“These are precious moments Mal, we need family photos to memorialize our time at Auradon Prep.”

The dark fae found herself unwillingly softening when her friend referred to the group as family. A hidden part of herself touched and even agreed with the sentiment and thought perhaps there was a method to Evie’s madness.

Mal found that less she tried to make sense of it, the happier she was, and she also had a rule about not arguing with crazy people. After a couple hours, two outfit and backdrop changes later she could admit—not out loud, never out loud—that maybe her friend had a point. The pictures turned out nicer than she thought, and they had all looked so smart and happy.

She found all the time and effort to take a handful of photos seemed worth it as she looked at them when she was in their dorm, a sense of home she had never had before would fill her.

Perhaps Evie isn’t as crazy as I thought.

“I think we should get a loom for the dorm,” Evie suggested later that night as if both of them would have a use for it. Mal’s eyes almost jumped out of her head when she saw the 6,589 F price tag and weighed almost 40 stone.

On second thought…

It had been years since he had stepped foot into Hell Hall, but the residence of the de Vil matriarch was still as imposing as P.H. de Vil had remembered it while growing up. The gothic mansion was richly decorated, it stood tall and impressive as a testament of how far the once humble fur traders had come. It was the biggest private residence in all of East Riding, so few had ever graced its halls as the de Vils had gone into semi-seclusion since the fall of Cruella.

While the First Daughter of the family had been banished, most were willing to forgive and forget as they still hungered for the fashion of House de Vil; more so for the inventions of P.H. The family had flourished in the last twenty years, but he knew that it wouldn’t have been possible without Cruella laying down the groundwork.

He also wondered how much better it could have been if she had not been banished.

P.H. still wasn’t sure how his cousin Cecil managed to become the executor of Cruella’s estate, but the bumbling idiot was in charge of all of her money and their point of contact for anything to do with her son.

The boy in question was why he was at Hell Hall, he walked through the deserted galleries; all the riches they held were only shown for ghosts. He found the Malevola sitting in a large ornate armchair covered in Northern Wei brocade; she nursed an old fashioned while watching television in almost complete darkness; the floor to ceiling leaded-glass lattice windows had been shuttered with heavy drapes. P.H. couldn’t remember a time in recent memory when sunlight had been allowed to shine in Hell Hall.

On the screen, there was a teenage boy with the familiar platinum and black de Vil hair, gracefully dancing across the stage. He was lighter skinned than the typical de Vil, but there was no mistaking
his familial connections when he smiled, the shape of his jawline, or the slope of his nose.

“He has her smile,” Malevola commented without turning around, sensing his presence and almost as if she read his mind. “He’s graceful too, she was always a graceful dancer. She wanted to go to the East Riding Ballet Theater. I talked her out of it, I pushed going into fashion and business. I warned her that a ballet career was finite, but fashion…fashion could be a dynasty that lasted for decades.”

P.H. wondered if Malevola had regretted pushing Cruella into the family business, it wasn’t hard to imagine how things could have gone better and romanticize hypotheticals when everything had turned out so horribly.

Maybe if Cruella had been a ballet dancer, she never would have become obsessed with having a spotted fur coat. But P.H. knew mental illness didn’t work that way. Maybe if she had been a dancer, she simply would have obsessed over a spotted leotard or tutu. Her career didn’t make her sick, it just manifested itself into an obsession she already had.

“How did you get this footage? I thought he wanted nothing to do with us.” he asked his aunt, knowing that the de Vils were not welcomed at Auradon Prep.

“We have plenty of loyal employees whose children go to the school, sponsored by the de Vil Foundation.”

Of course, money could forgive a multitude of sins.

“Perhaps we could bid him again for a visit, I know he’s angry…”

“He’s more than angry,” Malevola snapped at him. “He hates us, and why shouldn’t he? We failed his mother, we failed him. He had to grow up in that gods forsaken island. Starvation, a sick mother, gods know what she told him about us or what he’s been through.”

All the old wounds were reopening, he was brought back to twenty years ago as the family scrambled to find out what exactly happened and their surprise that Cruella had been banished. He felt it had happened so quickly, the courts moving at a breakneck pace. All he had heard was that Cruella had some sort of episode, sounding too fantastic to be true. But then the next thing he knew, she was being carted off to the Isle with barely any time for their lawyers to get a handle on the situation. Although the de Vils were one of the wealthiest families in Auradon, their money had not been able to save his cousin from exile. Probably their lowest moment was when, as a family, it was decided that they leave Cruella to her fate as they opted to save the family name and businesses.

Somehow, to his greatest shame, stocks and investments became more important than family.

He didn’t understand how his own blood could be so disloyal to their own, especially the one which had brought them to the forefront of Auradon society. He had almost gone and rescued Cruella himself, but he had been talked out of it by Malevola; reasoned that all he would do was earn his own banishment.

There are other de Vils besides Cruella, we have to save the family legacy.

So, for the sake of the children, the future de Vils, he had stayed his hand and worked to salvage what was left of their reputation. Now the de Vils were richer than ever, but he wondered if that wealth was even worth it. The family never gathered anymore, the two scions—Diego and Ivy—were spoiled brats who cared more about their social media followers than anything to do with the family or House de Vil.

Now there was Carlos, the de Vil none of them knew about; even Cecil who had sworn he didn’t
know of the boy’s existence despite supposedly getting reports of Cruella’s whereabouts and condition every year.

He had almost confronted his cousin, he wanted all the reports and everything he knew about Cruella’s time on the island. P.H. had a laundry list of documentation to demand, he wanted to know the Trust’s efforts in monitoring her. But then the letter came, by official royal messenger bearing the Crown Prince Crest and letterhead, and told them that Carlos wanted nothing to do with them and that they were to stay away from him, the school, and his mother. The missive stated in no uncertain terms that since they had not cared about his existence before, then they had no right to care when he was in Auradon. The letter was accompanied with apologies and promises by the Crown Prince, to keep imploring him on their behalf to give the family a chance.

While P.H. could petition his cousin, he couldn’t very well make demands on the Crown Prince; it was more than enough that Crown Prince Ben had brought Carlos over and gave him a coveted spot in the most exclusive school in all of Auradon. P.H. couldn’t very well ask him to order Carlos to meet with them.

Still, while he couldn’t deny the letter was from the Crown Prince himself, there was something that bugged him; something that he couldn’t shake off and he knew Cecil was a part of it. He could understand Carlos’ anger at the family, who wouldn’t feel abandoned and betrayed? And from the reports Malevola had gathered on her own, the boy had a harsh upbringing. Being young, P.H. could imagine that Carlos would be angry at the family that had failed him for a while. But he still thought that Carlos would have at least be curious of his only blood relatives. Then there was the money, certainly anyone would be interested in the vast fortune they had a right to.

He turned on a light and thumbed through the most recent reports that Malevola had left sitting on an end table, there were the boy’s transcripts and he couldn’t help but swell with pride at his good grades.

*He takes after me, certainly neither Cruella nor Fisher were as interested in science and technology.*

While P.H. never had children, although not for trying on everyone else but him in the family, he thought that maybe he wouldn’t have minded a son such as Carlos. Another knot of regret sat heavy in his stomach, he wondered if they had known about him when he was a small child, would the Crown had let them take him? Certainly, the boy was innocent of any wrong doing. Cecil had his own brood and Malevola was near ancient, P.H. thought that naturally Carlos would have gone to him and he would have been more than happy to take in his first cousin once removed.

*How could we have not known?*

He frowned when he read further into the report.

“He’s magical!”

“So it seems, they don’t know what though. I have researchers working day and night, they have yet to come up with anything. They are canvassing all the libraries in all 18 Kingdoms…I may even send them abroad.”

It didn’t deter P.H. in the least bit, he knew some of the family held some anti-magic sentiment; mostly Cecil and his ilk, they all wanted to appear completely human and the family as a whole never could shake off the suspicion of magical heritage due to their unique hair. But P.H. also knew that it meant Fisher was not Carlos’ father. Still, he didn’t much care. It would certainly scandalize the pearl clutcher in their family, but family was family as far as he was concerned. The boy was a de Vil and P.H. would certainly stand up to anyone who would say otherwise.
“And he’s dating the daughter of Maleficent?”

That was a bit more surprising than he thought it would be, he had heard all sorts of rumors about the dark fae, dating Carlos was not one of them.

“Clearly he has the de Vil charm, no one could resist. Not even a powerful dark fae.”

Her voice held more pride than he thought it would, but clearly she thought a beautiful Moorish fae from the most powerful bloodline known to Auradon was no less that what a de Vil deserved.

“How has this stayed out of the papers? I would have thought we would have been the last to know given how the paparazzo stalk the school.”

“Oh that, I simply bought out all the tabloids,” Malevola explained as if it were something as simple and banal as grocery shopping. “We pay the sources and make them sign an NDA and then it is never published.”

P.H. never thought he’d be using tactics normally employed by unscrupulous politicians to save their careers from a scandal, but he could admire his Aunt’s efficiency.

With their army of attorneys, a de Vil Non-Disclosure Agreement was almost as ironclad as a Faery Deal; the consequences for breaking one almost as severe. So, if someone had credible evidence of a relationship then it was better to take the money and never speak of it again; not even to speculate on social media. If anyone was caught breaking an NDA, their careers would be forfeit and they’d be left in destitution.

While Malevola may have decided to put Cruella’s freedom on the back burner to save the rest of the family, she protected her kin and if she had to monopolize the magazine industry to do it then she would without hesitation.

The de Vil matriarch may not have protected Carlos when she should have, but she would protect him from all of Auradon; even if he never acknowledged their blood ties.

She would not fail him again.

____________________________________________________________________________

After several nights of skipping out on homework and focusing only on finding a spell, Jane had finally found one that was guaranteed to work. What was better, was that it took the form of a cookie and she doubted anyone would think something so innocuous would be magical.

Jane didn’t think Audrey could be happier that she had found a spell, even if she had said her mother was about to expel Mal from the school. She had found the spell just in time as well.

“It’ll be so romantic. We’ll give him the cookie right before the game starts. We’ll win for sure, and once Bennie Boo goes up to the podium to accept the championship trophy, I’m sure he’ll confess his love for me and we’ll get back together,” the princess gushed, sighing at the dreamy notion of such a grand gesture.

Jane also sighed and smiled, thinking it would have been perfect for her and Carlos, but she would never infringe on her friend’s moment. She started to think of when she would give Carlos his own cookie, slightly put off that the closest romantic moment would be Eros’ Day in the middle of February. That was certainly too far into the future, and she couldn’t stomach the thought of Carlos remaining with Mal for that long. She couldn’t free him from Mal before break, so she would just have to settle for the first opportunity when they got back to school. It would practically be February anyway, and she didn’t want to miss out on the most romantic day of the year.
Maybe I could convince mother to let me on campus during the break. It’ll be tough, I can’t think of a reason I’d come all the way back to school from Cinderellaburg. Maybe Audrey could invite me over...no that’s still too far. At least if I do it as soon as we get back from break, we’d be together for Eros’ Day.

It wasn’t her picture-perfect fantasy, but it was better than nothing. What would be worse would be to witness Carlos and Mal being disgustingly together, doing whatever deviant sexual act the evil fae would force her poor sweet Carlos into doing on the one day a year that everyone decided to rub their relationships in single peoples’ faces.

It was after hours, the big game the next day. The castle’s kitchen was completely abandoned; Jane was surprised the dorm supervisors didn’t do a sweep of the area, but she guessed with domestic goblins, most would see no need to sneak out to the kitchens. She had again convinced her roommates to cover for her in case anyone did drop by, but she was confident the entire school was asleep, not willing to miss out on any rest for the big game.

She had gathered all the supplies, most of it could be found in the cupboards and refrigerator. Whatever she knew the kitchen wouldn’t have, luckily Audrey could obtain with her royal connections.

The princess in question finally came to the kitchens,

“Sorry I’m late, I got lost. I’ve never been here before,” she looked around, realizing she had never been in a kitchen of any sort. It was all rather foreign to her, she wondered what was in all the cabinets and how it fit all the food they fed to the students.

“It’s alright,” she had only been waiting an hour, she’d probably wait forever if it meant she could get Carlos and help Crown Prince Ben. “Do you have the two ingredients?”

“Yep, I have a dozen Aurorian Beauty roses, freshly plucked and from my personal garden. Mother was more than happy to send me a ‘reminder of home.’” Audrey giggled at her clever deception. “And one serving platter of pure silver, standard set in my dorm.”

Jane was surprised how easily Audrey had something like a pure silver plate just lying around her room; she would have thought the princess would have had to special order it. But either way, she was glad they had the items on hand at the time. She wasn’t sure how Audrey would have reacted if they couldn’t do the spell in time for the big game.

“OK, well I think we have everything. Let me check things off,” she started to recite the needed ingredients from a crumbled list of loose paper.

2 Sticks Unsalted Butter
1 Cup Brown Sugar
½ Cup Granulated Sugar
2 tsp Vanilla Extract
3 Large Eggs
2 Cups Flour
1 tsp Baking Powder

As Jane crossed things off, she was surprised that Audrey started to grab some items and put them aside. She didn’t dare question the princess and went on.

1 tsp Kosher Salt
1 ½ Cup Chocolate Chips
Once she was done, Audrey had her pile and a paltry few were left.

“This won’t do. Bennie Boo would never eat such a sweet right before a game. And refined sugar is so bad for you. We’re going to replace these,” she motioned to the ingredients she declared unsuitable, “and instead we’re going to use coconut sugar, it has less fructose and healthier, and stevia. For the butter, we’re going to replace it with Earth Balance, I think we’re going to try going vegan. It’s just a healthier lifestyle, I read all about it. So instead of eggs, we’ll use apple sauce, and let’s cut the flour in half and use oats instead. Instead of an unhealthy cookie, it’ll be a health bar. I know my Ben, he’d never eat a cookie before a big game. We don’t want him to get a sugar high then get sluggish.”

Everything Audrey said went right over Jane’s head, she had wanted to protest with every substitution but couldn’t make the words leave her lips. Jane thought back to all the times before when the cheerleader didn’t get her way, it was never pretty and she knew she could not be on the end of that sharp tongue.

Audrey does know Ben better. I’m sure these substitutions will be fine…it’s the spell not the ingredients that matter…I hope…

Jane still wasn’t sure, but once Audrey barked out for her to help look for the substitute ingredients, she immediately jumped in surprise and started to search the unfamiliar kitchen. It took another twenty minutes for them to get everything Audrey wanted, but if the princess was happy then Jane was happy.

Still, Jane looked nervously at their new pile of ingredients, basically nothing was the same and she worried what that would do to the spell.

I’m sure it’s fine, the message boards would have warned me if changing anything would cause any harm…I’m pretty sure…

It was from a message board, it wasn’t like every spell she had come across was tried and true. But she also realized it was after midnight and they had a long day ahead of them. They were already behind because of Audrey’s tardiness and then searching for the new items. They still had to put everything together. The message board didn’t even tell her how high to set the oven or how long to put the cookies in. She had looked up separately how to make regular cookies and hoped they were the same.

Now she had to hope cooking “health bars” were the same as well. If they were undercooked or burnt, she had no idea how they would get Ben to eat them. But she had to remain optimistic and turned the oven on at 190° C, she guessed that if they couldn’t achieve the spell in time for the game, then at least there was Eros’ Day to placate Audrey’s demanding nature. She was a little put off that she’d have to wait even longer to rescue Carlos, but she told herself she would save him eventually.

She tried not to pout as she mixed everything together while Audrey played on her phone. Once every ingredient had been mixed in, she scooped all the dough onto the silver platter.

“Now what?” Audrey asked as she had no idea how cookies were made but was pretty sure the mixture had to be separated into cookie sized parts.

“We surround the silver plate with the rose petals,” Jane told her as she plucked the satiny petals.
from the flower and sprinkled them around the plate. “Now we just need a Tear of True Sadness.”

“Oh, I can do that.”

“Really?” Jane was relieved, she wasn’t sure if she could think of something suitably sad enough to make her cry right then and there.

“Oh yeah, crying is easy.”

Audrey then opened her eyes wide, foregoing any attempt at thinking of something sad. What would she ever be sad about anyway? She was princess Audrey, her life was perfect; or at least soon would be once she righted the wrong of Ben breaking up with her. The kitchen lights were suitably bright enough to irritate her eyes the longer she stared at them without blinking. It was a neat trick she learned when she was younger, crying on demand would get her anything she wanted and was particularly useful against her father, King Philip.

Within a minute, her eyes pooled with tears and with a swipe of her finger she had a rolling droplet ready for the spell.

Jane was quick with the plate, not wanting to lose the tear and with a flick of the princess’ finger, a salty drop landed right on the dough.

“Alright, next is the spell,” Jane closed her eyes and hovered her hands above and to the side of the plate. She focused all her energy into her hands, willing her magic to go into the mix.

_Sweet, sweet thoughts of me_

_You will think constantly_

_Let my cries bind your heart to mine_

_So that our souls be forever entwined_

Audrey pivoted on the balls of her feet, so excited that things were working out. The light from Jane’s hands had turned a dark pink as she spoke the spell, the petals of the roses lifted into the air and swirled around the plate; in a burst of fuchsia sparkles, where the mound of dough once lay there were a dozen perfectly round cookies.

The princess’ mouth dropped open in astonishment, she had never seen such magic done before her eyes. Jane smiled in triumph, despite the substitutes the spell clearly worked, and she was about to burst with pride. She went to turn off the oven and grabbed a Ziplock bag, placing the cookies within.

“OK, you just need to give Ben a cookie…” Jane started to instruct Audrey.

“No, you’ll give the cookie.”

“What?”

“It’ll look too suspicious if I gave him a cookie and suddenly he was in love with me again.”

“But he’ll fall in love with the first person he sees.”

“Which will be me, but you have to be the one to give it to him. Plus, he has a strict rule of not eating sweets before a big game; he knows that I know that. But if you give it to him, he’ll think you don’t know that and eat it to be nice. Don’t worry, I’ll be right there to swoop in right as he takes a bite.”
Jane felt like she may throw up, not expecting to be the one to give him the cookie. Wasn’t it enough that she had risked doing the spell at all? Now she had to risk THE Crown Prince accidently falling in love with her? The thought alone almost had her hyperventilating.

“You’ll be fine,” Audrey insisted, her patience wearing thin. It was clearly the best route, why was Jane being so difficult?

The half fae winced at Audrey’s terse voice, her fear of letting down the princess outweighing her fear of the plan going wrong.

*I’ll just make sure to look up a counter spell, why didn’t I do that earlier?*

Jane could kick herself for not thinking of it sooner, of course she should have a counter spell on hand if something went wrong. But she was too tired to think of it anymore, the championship would be in the Summerlands—a neutral arena associated with neither school—which was a several hour drive. They would all have to be on a bus in a few hours.

*I’ll look it up later. We probably won’t even need it. Audrey knows what she’s doing, she could definitely get his undivided attention, it’ll be fine.*

The plan was in place; she would meet up with Ben and hope he was somewhat alone, give him the cookie, before he could take a bite Audrey would swoop into his line of sight. He’ll fall in love with who he’s supposed to be in love with, declare it in front of the entire school, and eventually they’d get married, have a dozen children, and live happily ever after.

Thankfully Audrey offered a sleepover, it would be easier to escape the chaperones and the princesses wasn’t about to let her hard-earned spell be taken away as midnight snack contraband.

The next morning, Jane was pretty certain if she had eaten anything, she would have thrown up. When Audrey described the plan, it seemed righteous and good, easy even.

The benevolent faery used her magic to help the princess and saved the day.

None of the stories included nauseous anxiety, she was pretty sure her mother would never sit on a bench with her leg nervously bobbing up and down or have her nails be bitten down to the stubs. She wasn’t even sure if Ben would be alone enough for her to give him the cookie in secret. What would she do if she had to give several people a cookie to avoid raising suspicion?

*We can’t have several people fall in love in one day!*  

Luck seemed to be on their side as Ben was running late, he had left a piece of his uniform in his locker and ran towards the back of the school to retrieve it. Audrey had silently nodded her head for Jane to follow him, she would come a little later, at least Jane hoped that’s what she meant.

Jane rushed to intercept Ben at the back of the school, most of the other students were on a bus already. They were blessedly alone, she took that as a good sign that what she was doing was approved of by Fate.

“Hi Ben! I have some health cookies. They have oats, coconut sugar—it’s lower in fructose and healthier—and all sorts of healthy alternatives. They’ll give you energy for the big game.”

Ben was flattered that Jane would go through the effort of making the team a snack, it was his usual rule to not eat before a game but it would be a long bus ride, he didn’t think eating one healthy cookie would hurt anything and he didn’t want to hurt her feelings by refusing such a kind gesture.
“Thanks Jane, that’s so nice of you,” he graciously accepted the confection and it did look good, as he brought it to his mouth, Audrey had come out of nowhere and said,

“Hi Ben! The busses are about to leave, we couldn’t leave our star player.”

He nearly choked on the cookie, startled at how unnecessarily loud the princess was which wasn’t like her. He chewed and swallowed the treat, not wanting to choke,

“I’m coming, I just had to grab my shin guards. Thank you Jane…” he looked confusedly around, the fae girl nowhere in sight. “Jane?”

“Oh she had to go, giving away health cookies. She’s so nice…anyway, how do you feel about the big game?”

“Oh…ummm…nervous I guess. But we have a really good team this year, Carlos and Jay have been instrumental in getting us this far,” he made small talk to be polite and took a few more bites. This was the most they had spoken to each other since the breakup, he guess he was glad that she was willing to talk to him but still a part of him thought that every interaction was laced with awkwardness.

Audrey could not care less about the actual game or whether those Isle urchins were to thank for getting them to the championship. She studied his face, wondering when the spell would kick in and if there would be any signs. Jane had created light and sparks, would Ben light up too?

_I better stall him for a few seconds, to make sure no one sees any magic._

“That’s great, it’s good to feel confident in your teammates…how’s Lonnie?”

“Lonnie?”

“Yes?”

Audrey didn’t know what else to talk about to stall for time.

“She’s fine, she’s been running us ragged with drills. We haven’t been able to get one ball past her, so she’s at peak performance. I think we have a really good shot at winning…we should really go, I’m already late and I’m sure coach will give me an earful once I’m on the bus.”

“Right! Sorry…yeah we should go…Go Knights!” Audrey had never felt more foolish in her life. Why didn’t the spell work?

_I give her one lousy spell to do and she can’t even do that. I should have looked for a more competent faery._

Ben uneasily waved Audrey goodbye and joined his teammates. All students were finally on the buses and they were on their way to the championship.

Jane felt like she was friendless again, clearly Audrey was not happy with the results and she didn’t know why the spell didn’t work. She wanted to desperately tell Audrey she was sorry, she’d say anything for her not to be mad.

_People it’s just a delayed reaction, the message board didn’t go into detail with how the spell would work. I’m sure he’ll confess his love for her any moment._

But sneaking glances at Ben, he didn’t seem any different. He spoke with Chad, Carlos, and Jay the
whole way. Lonnie sometimes made an appearance to talk strategy, but otherwise the Crown Prince seemed his normal jovial self.

While Jane sat alone, Audrey still stewed about the spell not working, she was at least glad Mal and Evie were on a separate bus. She was certain the girls would have taken up all of Carlos’ attention. She imagined herself sitting with him, watching a movie on his tablet and snuggling together as some of the other tourney and cheerleader couples were doing.

Although Ben was as talkative as ever, hyped for the game he couldn’t help but feel slightly off for some reason. He brushed it off as nerves; it was his senior year and first championship. He was team captain, and everyone was counting on him to lead them to victory. He was certain that what he was feeling was anxiousness, his body just over heating in response to his stress.

He fiddled with the air vent, grateful the bus had climate control and while it was the end of December, he was able to turn the cool air on. He noticed that Carlos had done the same, part of him wondered if the other boy was as nervous as he was.

Another part of him inexplicably angry at his presence, he shook his head to clear his mind. But every time he caught sight of black and platinum blond hair, he had the urge to punch and tear at something. Ben tried to clear his mind, focus on the game, but whenever he wasn’t angry at Carlos, he would think of Mal which was just as disastrous. He thought he had made some headway with his crush, accepting that she was happy with Carlos and he would move on eventually.

He was certain that his smiles had turned genuine when they were together, and he was happy for them. But on the bus, all he could think of was Mal’s smile, the way dimples would appear and it made his heart race.

“Are you OK?” Chad asked, wondering why Ben seemed so twitchy.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” he denied, hoping his princely smile would fool his best friend.

“Are you sure? You seem a little feverish,” he noticed Ben’s flushed face.

“I said I’m fine,” it came out harsher than Ben intended but he didn’t need any attention on himself. The Charming prince took the hint and let him be but made a note to himself to keep an eye on him. It would suck if their team captain had come down with something and had to sit out because he was sick, but his friend was more important than some trophy.

Ben was rather famous for his easy-going nature and kind heart. Even before Isle-to-Auradon he had been thoughtful and caring to even their harshest competition. Before every game he would genuinely wish the other side “good luck” and for a good game.

For the championship, Ben had shaken the other captain’s hand as was tradition, but Chad noticed the wince of the other boy, the Crown Prince’s grip tight enough to cause pain. He didn’t even smile once, something was off and it worried Chad.

Since it was the National Championships, there was far more pomp and circumstance than any other game. They had brought in a special musical act to sing the National Anthem, special refs were brought in with commemorative coins for the flip, the two team captains had to shake hands and wish each other luck in front of cameras.

The game finally begun and Chad couldn’t concentrate on anything other than winning. It wasn’t until Ben had started to call plays that went against what they practiced and initially agreed. At first he thought maybe Ben had just seen an opportunity, that perhaps he had noticed a weakness from the
other team and wanted to exploit it. It wasn’t until after a few failed plays that he noticed that the calls had more to do with snubbing Carlos than anything else as that was the only thing that had changed.

He wasn’t the only one that had noticed the common factor in the plays, Carlos had tried to talk some sense into Ben as he wasn’t being utilized. But it seemed like their captain was adamant to do things his way, even if no one else could see his reasoning.

After two more fumbled plays, the coach called a time out and yelled at all of them to get over whatever their issue was and to play the game. He took Ben aside to speak to him personally, not only as captain, but he could sense there was something going on.

“What is with him?” Jay asked Chad, hoping the prince would know and not automatically take his friend’s side.

 Thankfully Chad was worried enough to not try to pretend nothing was wrong,

“I don’t know man, he’s been off since before the game started. I think he’s sick or something.”

“Fuck,” Carlos cursed, not wanting to hear that answer. He could sense there was something off about Ben, something not right with his scent but he had no idea what it could be.

Whatever coach said to Ben, it got through to him as he started to call the players more fairly, but the Crown Prince started to play more aggressively than they had ever seen him and totally out of character. It was the first time any of them had seen Ben get warned by the referees with a yellow card.

Unnecessary roughness? Ben? What is going on?

Chad wished they could call another time out as clearly there was something wrong, but it was the fourth quarter and they were all used up.

While their offensive game was falling apart, the defense was holding strong and Lonnie was the only reason they weren’t getting a closeout. It was a low scoring close game, but with a few final reasonable calls by Ben, Auradon Prep had won its first Championship in years.

Most forgot Ben’s weirdness in the glow of their win, the entire stadium almost drowning in blue and gold confetti and the school’s anthem being blasted out by the marching band and every student proudly belting out their glee.

The time for awards were given out, the seniors were given a special commemoration and the MVP was awarded to Lonnie Li. Some thought it might have gone to Jay, but he knew that one year of good playing paled in comparison to her four years of consistent good play. He could also admit that because of his aggression and showboating, the team had more penalties than they ever had in a year, so MVP was definitely out of his reach.

Jay and Carlos clapped raucously, so proud of their goalie and glad that they were able to pull a win for the seniors. It was a fun game they played, but the other team members had been playing and working towards this for years and it was really for them.

Chad stole glances at Ben, hoping his friend was alright but it seemed he was getting worse, his face flush and he was still sweating despite their cool down and the cold weather. The Crown Prince was barely paying attention to the speeches and halfheartedly clapped for the MVP announcement. It was so out of character for Ben and he had no idea what was going on.
Everything was made worse when during Lonnie’s acceptance speech, Ben had taken the mic,  

“Excuse me. Excuse me. Can I have your attention, please? There’s something I’d like to say.”

The entire stadium was focused on him, not only for having the mic but because he had grabbed it from Lonnie so rudely. The girl frowning besides him, not knowing what to do.

Part of Ben knew he was acting rashly, if not a bit insanely. But something inside of him would not let him rest until Mal knew his true feelings.

“I love you, Mal! Have I mentioned that?”

There, now it was out in the open and once he started, he couldn’t stop.

Mal’s jaw dropped in the stands, unseen as she was one among hundreds; aghast he would do a prank like that as it wasn’t funny, and she had plans to throttle him and everyone else who was in on it.

Carlos was frozen on the spot as he was certain he heard him wrong. Jay and Chad swallowed harshly, each looking at each other and hoping their best friends did not try to kill each other.

“It’s just that I’m in love with you, and there’s nothing I can do. I’ve tried for months to ignore these feelings, but I can’t anymore, I just need to shout them out. I dream of you, basically every night now. I just need to let everyone know I love you…did I mention that?…I need to let everyone know how you’ve rocked my world and I’m just living each day to see you. I never thought it would happen to a guy like me, but I would give up my Kingdom for just one kiss. I know it sounds ridiculous…”

Ben was cut off by an incensed Carlos, who had initially been held back by both Jay and Chad but the two boys could no longer hold him off.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing!?” Carlos growled at him, Ben had been pushed over several feet. Everyone around them had back away, scared at the monstrous form the Isle teen had taken. In his rage not only did his eyes glow ruby red, but his hair had grown shaggy and covered his face, claws were extended out, and fangs had protruded from his mouth.

It frightened the crowd even more when a hellish roar echoed through the stadium and reverberated through their bones.

The roar did not come from Carlos.

Ben quickly got up and in the place of a handsome prince stood half a beast. Ben’s soft brown eyes replaced with molten gold, horns stood out amongst his bronze hair, and had claws and fangs that looked to be itching to fight Carlos.

“You don’t deserve her,” Ben cruelly spat out.

Whatever control Carlos might have had was gone, unable to withhold his anger that the prince dared challenge him for Mal.

The two lunged at each other, fury fueled swipes of their claws that scared even the seasoned royal body guards. The two boys probably would have fought until they killed each other if not for the intervention of the Fairy Godmother.

Restreindre!
Before either of them could swipe another claw, they were bound in starlight. Headmistress FéeMarraine floated down on a beam of light, her mouth in a hard line and wondering what had gotten into either of them.

The Royal Family had always worried that some of Adam’s curse may have passed down, Ben had always had a penchant for roaring and bearing his teeth when angry when he was younger. They had hoped it was just some childish eccentricity, as he had outgrown it for the most part.

For his inner beast to make itself known so publicly was their worst nightmare, but the Headmistress also knew Ben had been acting out of sorts; she couldn’t ignore the possibility that he had been cursed. Both boys were biting at the bit and demanded that she let them go, she ignored them of course but she made sure with a push of her hand to place Carlos further away.

She went up to Ben to see if she could see what was wrong. Most of the hair growth he experienced was mainly on his arms and head, his face was unobscured except for the thick fangs he had grown. His face was red and feverish, his eyes only a thin ring of gold as his pupils had dilated.

“Let me go!” he growled out his displeasure, fighting against his bindings; snapping his teeth like an angry wild animal. “He doesn’t love her like I do, and I’ll prove it!”

Nadine had a sinking horrible feeling what the culprit to his had behavior was, but she couldn’t believe that Mal, or any student, would be foolish enough to do that to anyone, much less the Crown Prince.

The crowd gasped behind her as she started to do a diagnostic spell, a shout of “Look out!” and as she turned she was stunned to see that Carlos had somehow broken out of her bindings and was heading towards Ben, intent on getting back to the fight. She was momentarily stunned that he was able to break out of her magic, as so few creatures had the ability to do so.

Carlos was moving so fast, she may not have had enough time to hurl another spell; one she was loath to cast as it was an aggressive defensive spell that may hurt him, but in the moment she didn’t know what else she could do.

But then she saw a flash of purple run between Carlos and Ben, crying out,

“Carlos stop! Please…don’t do this,” Mal pled with him. She had no magic, as far as anyone knew, and she hoped not to reveal her secret. She went in with blind faith that he wouldn’t hurt her, even in his current form and as angry as he was.

Anyone would have called her gambit foolish, but luck favored the brave even if they were being totally idiotic.

“Get out of the way Mal,” he commanded her, he wouldn’t hurt her but he still wanted his pound of flesh.

“No, Carlos…this isn’t you. And that isn’t Ben. Clearly he’s on drugs or something, and even if he’s not I love you…that’s all that matters. Please, I don’t want to go back to the Isle.”

The tears in her eyes and fear in her voice slowed down his rage, enough for him to really see what he was doing. He looked to see Jay, who had his jersey torn and a cut above his eyebrow; he then saw Evie who had tears streaming down her eyes.

He had done this, it was his fault and the guilt packed down his rage enough for his features to return to normal. He fell to his knees and breathed heavily, the realization of what he had done made him feel empty.
He had attacked a member of the royal family. He was going to be sent back to the Isle.

Mal, Evie, and Jay all rushed towards him, wanting to protect him as they also knew what attacking Crown Prince Ben had meant. Mal held onto him, refusing to let go. She wouldn’t let them take him away, she couldn’t let them.

Jay and Evie stood by him, ready to fight anyone who would dare try.

“I’m sorry, I’m so sorry,” he said into Mal’s jacket, holding onto her just as tightly. He knew he was going to be dragged away, and he wouldn’t let them be dragged with him. He had to get at least one last hug from her, he knew it was probably going to be his last.

“I’m not going to let them take you away,” she promised hysterically, refusing to believe that it could happen. Even as police and the royal body guards started to surround them, she kept promising him that she wouldn’t let them take him.

“No Mal,” he tried to push her away, willing to go peacefully if it meant the others would be spared. He had to believe the Crown would be fair and only punish him and not the others.

“No!” she refuses to let them take him, she grabs the wrist of the police officer who tries and surprises them with her strength. She easily moves to toss them over and is ready for the next one, but Carlos voluntarily goes with them to be cuffed.

“Mal, you need to stop!” Dr. FéeMarraine yells at her, knowing fighting would only make it worse. She grabbed the young fae and presses upon a mental link to calm her down and subdue her. It was not as strong as if she were her mother or any kind of relation, but with her eyes glowing white and Mal’s green and gold, it was enough to get the girl to stop fighting.

“Please, you can’t let them take him back to the Isle. My mother will kill him.”

Knowing the dark fae as she did, and how scared and hysterical Mal was being she believed her. Although what Carlos did was rash and illegal, there were extenuating circumstances and she believed that sending the boy back to the Isle would not be justice.

“He’s not going back to the Isle, I promise. But he needs to be taken into custody so we can know what happened.”

Knowing there wasn’t much else she could do, Mal calmed and submitted. She couldn’t fight the Headmistress and she didn’t to save her magical energy if later they needed to break Carlos out and they had to run away.

Mal felt like her heart was being ripped out of her chest as she saw Carlos being placed into a police cruiser, cuffed and looking defeated. He looked out of the window, hating to see Mal so upset and all because he couldn’t keep his temper. She saw that he mouthed, “I love you” and she wanted to set the entire stadium on fire as he was driven away.

Once the other Isle teens were subdued, Nadine went back to Ben who had also calmed down enough to revert back to his human self. His pallor had turned yellow and sickly, she quickly did a diagnostic spell and saw that it’s magic poisoning.

“He has magic poisoning,” she told a medic that had come to the scene and had brought a gurney. As they started to strap him in, she gave them instructions on how to treat him.

“He’ll need a saline drip made with purified salts blessed by the fae and water from the Enchanted Lake. The hospital should have some on standby, for now you need to give him some low doses of
iron to start purifying his blood. The medic nodded, while magic poisoning was rare due to strict regulation, it wasn’t unheard of and they had all been trained to deal with magical incidents.

Nadine halted them from loading the Crown Prince into the ambulance, she had a sneaking suspicion as to what caused the poisoning and wanted to see if she were right:

*Aphrodite, goddess of love be gone*

*Hear no more your siren’s song*

A halo of pink engulfed the royal and his breathing became more even and was knocked out cold as the spell that was poisoning his body had been lifted.

The Headmistress had sighed in relief, the counter spell would give Ben a better chance at recovery, but now she was left with the question as to who would be foolish enough to cast a love spell on a royal?

“I want those responsible gone! They will be expelled from Auradon Prep and banished to the Isle!” Adam raged, slamming a fist down onto the oak desk of his personal office.

Headmistress Nadine, who had been summoned to the royal palace of Rose Hall immediately after she had spoken with the police and left the game, flinched at the sudden crack, the desk giving into the onslaught and splintering. She had no doubt that the only thing that was saving those responsible for Ben’s poisoning from death was because the UKA had outlawed it almost a century ago.

Although given the temperament of the current reigning King, perhaps that ruling would be overturned post haste.

“We don’t know who is responsible,” Nadine tried to calm the King and keep rational. “It is being investigated as we speak. It’s possible that wasn’t even someone from Auradon Prep. Crown Prince Ben is under surveillance, but the doctors say he will recover.”

“What do you mean we don’t know who is responsible? It’s clearly that evil fae girl, she had poisoned my son with a love potion. He had admitted it was her.”

“I do not think it was Ms. Lefay. Despite Ben’s confession, she has no reason to employ a love spell. By all reports, she is happy with Mr. de Vil…”

“Don’t be daft FéeMarraine. This is the daughter of Maleficent, this is probably part of some diabolical plot to free the villains from the Isle.”

“Your Majesty,” the star faery warned him as much as she dared, “As I have said, we are investigating into the issue. I honestly wouldn’t be surprised if it wasn’t some wayward student with a misguided idea that they needed a love spell to gain a boyfriend. As far as the tests show, it was a weak spell done poorly. It’s possible it isn’t even someone from Auradon Prep, this could potentially be a prank by the other school. These things happen, and we have a protocol in place on how to deal with it. We have more to worry about than an errant love spell.”

“What could be more important than investigating someone harming a member of the royal family?” he couldn’t believe she would even suggest such a thing.

“The fact that Mr. de Vil was able to throw off my magic.”

“What does that mean?”
“It means he has a natural immunity to magic, and only a rare few are able to do so with a fully realized fae.”

It took Adam a few minutes to realize what she was getting at.

“You mean…?”

“Yes. It seems that he had fathered a child before we were able to smuggle him off the Isle.”

“No,” he refused to believe what she was implying. “He…the girl…the girl gave him a charm, something that would protect him.”

She looked hard at him, she didn’t want to believe it either but he was going into full on denial.

“Even if she did, there is no way she could have created anything powerful enough to throw off one of my spells.”

“Shit,” all colour had drained from Adam’s face, the levity of the revelation making him need to sit down.

“Indeed,” Nadine replied flatly, grabbing a tumbler from a cart inside the office and pouring herself four fingers worth of brandy. With one swig, she had downed the entire glass.

“Then we need to expel him from the school…we can say it was the girl and they all had part in the plans. We can’t let them stay. We have to get him back onto the Isle before anyone realizes…”

“We can’t just expel her on made up charges and bring them all down with her. Your son will throw a fit and start asking questions we are not ready to answer.”

“Carlos attacked a member of the royal family.”

“This isn’t the 1600’s where that was an automatic death sentence. Carlos didn’t attack Crown Prince Ben, he attacked Ben—the boy who had confessed his love to his girlfriend. Boys get into fights.”

“He had magical strength, he could have killed him.”

“If he had wanted to, I’m sure Carlos could have done it in one swipe. And Ben has his own… strengths,” she didn’t think King Adam would be able to handle mentions that his son may be magical.

“This isn’t 20 years ago, people actually care about transparency with our laws and legal system, I doubt most would see it as fair to banish Carlos when by most metrics it was a fair fight between two hot-headed teenage boys. And I doubt Ben will hold it against him once he recovers, he did make a spectacle of himself and in any other situation, anyone else would have fought him too. Bottom line, Carlos did no real damage.”

King Adam sighed in frustration, realizing she was right. They couldn’t be rash and they certainly didn’t want to do anything suspicious.

“Do you think he has any idea he has a son?”

Perhaps it was the alcohol, but Nadine snorted at the thought.

“If he did, I’m pretty sure Auradon Prep would be a pile of sticks and rubble right now. As far as I
can tell, Carlos has no idea who his father is, and his father has no clue about anything. Anyway, he’s all the way in Charmington and on the edge of the Enchanted Forest, living the simple life on a farm and out of the way and off the grid. That was the deal. I doubt he even knows about the Isle-to-Auradon program, or that Carlos is in Auradon at all. I think our best course of action is to keep Carlos close. If we know where he is, then we know who he has contact with.”

“If they’re practicing magic, then it’s only a matter of time before his powers point to…”

“Like I said, I do not think it is them and they are not practicing magic. I would not allow it in my school.”

It was probably the only time he had ever seen the Faery Godmother look serious since the Fae Wars. She had helped herself to another tumbler of brandy, needing the courage to deal with the demons of the past.

King Adam had to trust her, their future was intertwined together.

*I need to call Cecil, that sniveling rat will be more than happy to help quash this.*

Ben woke up slowly, his eyes heavy and mouth felt like it was filled with cotton. With a few blinks, he could focus enough to see where he was. He realized he was in a hospital bed, with an IV feeding him fluids. A nurse rushed to him, telling him she was so glad that he was finally awake.

He found out that he had magic poisoning, slowly his memory of what had happened came to him. He wished could go back into his dead sleep and never wake up as he could not believe that he had proclaimed his love to Mal in front of two schools and every important adult in his life, and in such a garish way. In fact, if the earth could just open up and swallow him whole then he would appreciate it if Fate could help him out.

It was made even worse when Headmistress FéeMarraine had come in to question him with his mother by his side. He had told them that he thought it was due to something he ate, he tried to keep it vague. He had been offered something before the game, and since eating it how he compulsively felt the need to confess his love for Mal.

“I don’t know why Mal,” he lied, not wanting to admit his feelings and wanting to try to spare Mal from the knowledge. He thought he had made her life hard enough with the embarrassing proclamation, if he could blame it on the spell then maybe the scandal could die sooner and she wouldn’t feel as awkward.

“Some love spells, low level ones, work by falling in love with the first person that comes into your line of sight. More advanced ones use either personal items such as rings or other possessions, other dark ones involve things like hair or blood to have it focus on a specific person. Those are advanced, no student would be able to do those, thank the gods. So, that makes me think it was a student who had gotten a low-level spell. If you accepted something and it was before the game, then it was most certainly an Auradon Prep student. Please Ben, think harder. Do you remember who gave it to you and what exactly it was?”

Ben wanted to forget the whole thing happened, he knew it would embarrass Dr. FéeMarraine, and he was certain Jane didn’t mean any real harm from it. He planned on talking to the girl later, try to let her down gently and tell her the obvious dangers of dabbling in magic. And furthermore, she was a lovely girl who didn’t need to resort to magic to get a boyfriend.

“I’m sorry, some of the day is just a blur…I really can’t remember.”
Nadine wasn’t totally convinced, but she didn’t want to pry any further that night. She knew enough to get a lead, and there were other ways to figure out who had poisoned Ben. She left him with his mother, glad to not have to talk about it anymore.

“Ben…” Belle started, unsure of where to start. “I’m so sorry,” she cupped his face and since they were alone he let the tears that had been waiting to be shed. Her poor baby, she couldn’t imagine the pain he was in. Someone had betrayed his trust by feeding him a love potion, and the magic had forced his feelings out in the open, to a girl that was not free to love him back and loved another fiercely.

“I just want this to be done with…” his voice cracking and rough.

“I’ll see what I can do, maybe you should take the rest of the school year off…be taught by private tutors.”

“No,” he was adamant. “I won’t cower away, and it’s winter break. That’ll be enough time off. It was a love spell gone wrong, it doesn’t need to be more than that.”

She was proud of how brave her son wanted to be, but sometimes she thought that there was nothing wrong with taking time to recover. But he would not be swayed from his plan.

The school was on lockdown and under martial law. The administration had hired an entire new staff to do patrols and the police questioned everyone. The investigation went further than interviews, everything was being monitored.

The Isle Four were the prime suspects, not that it took much nudging to get others to jump to conclusions. The four of them had been questioned by the police, and Headmistress FéeMarraine had kept her promise, Carlos had not been banished back to the Isle. While he had to do some community service and had to attend anger management classes, he was in no more trouble for getting into a fight than any other student would have and was allowed to go back to school the next day.

Mal had latched onto him, unwilling to be parted until forced to when they got back to the dorms. Because Ben had been poisoned with magic, the school had heightened all security measures. Both Jay and Carlos had been smart enough to discreetly get rid of their bracelets, the presence of fae runes would have been damning.

Most students resented that they had to stay after winter break started, but they rather stay and be questioned than the alternative which was to surrender their computers and allow their rooms to be searched without them there. At least if they were present, they could defend themselves and explain any contraband they may have.

Several students were in worlds of trouble with their parents once the administration had confiscated all their condoms, pre-written reports, and other contraband they had bought; some was purchased from the Isle Four, some were not. Even more were put on internet probation by the vast amounts of porn found on their computers or in their possession.

The Isle Four appreciated that the students had not tattled on them, the adults placated with the excuse of purchasing all items off the internet or off school grounds through other unknown parties. Although their computers were being reviewed, there were plenty of illicit websites that sold such items discreetly and most were tech savvy enough to quickly lie about using privacy tabs.

The Book had enough magical sentience to know when to hide, and as it could get itself to the Isle, it
was powerful enough to hide from searches. Their spell work mainly dealt with casting, so no potions or other magical paraphernalia were around. The police were also so anti-magic that they didn’t think to use magic to find traces of magic. Mal was certain if Headmistress FéeMarraine helped, a simple spell would have at least found minute traces of magic in their dorms. At the very least she would have found the enchanted shirt and chocolate box Carlos had received for his birthday. The human officers simply overlooked such items as mundane and unassuming.

The police were slightly confused by just how many piles upon piles of fabric samples and sewing equipment Evie could stuff into their room. Thankfully none of it was magic, so they had been deemed free from contraband early on; the boys as well.

After a few days of searches and interviews, Mal was finally free to walk about the campus as all four of them had been cleared. She had gotten a message from Ben to meet her in the library, his mom had reserved a room for them to talk. She wasn’t exactly eager to be alone with him, but she did need to talk to him about what happened.

“You didn’t eat any questionable food before you got here, did you?” Mal asked sardonically, still couldn’t believe he would fall for a love spell.

He wasn’t amused by the question, but he wouldn’t snark back at her since she was the one embarrassed by the whole ordeal and innocent of having anything to do with it.

“How are you holding up?” he instead inquired.

“Well despite saying all four of us are cleared, everyone keeps looking at us to confess and accusing me of either being a whore or trying to use you in some dastardly plan to free our parents. Why do these assholes keep thinking we want our asshole parents freed? Do they think we were having fun on the isle?”

It was a rhetorical question that he knew not to answer.

“I’m sorry this happened, if there’s anything I can do to help…”

“You can help by telling them who put the spell on you.”

“I don’t know who did.”

“OK, Ben. Let’s cut the bullshit and promise each other not to treat the other like we’re stupid. I don’t practice magic,” lying to him wasn’t treating him like he was stupid, it was just smart of her to not reveal that to anyone. “but I know enough to know that the spell done to you was especially shit-taculare. Not only did it not work as intended, as clearly it misfired and had you fall in love with me, but it also poisoned you. So that tells me it’s a low-level eyesight love potion, the shittiest one they have. Meaning they either couldn’t get or didn’t know they needed your DNA. So, you had to be fed or drank something; otherwise the spell could have been done remotely, and those don’t poison anyone. They just go horrible wrong, because that’s how love magic works. So that leaves two options. Either it was a prank and your dumbass ate something from an unknown person, which no in Auradon would do because guess what, eating things from unknown sources leads to terrible things. OR you were fed it by someone you did know and trust, and their dumbass didn’t keep your attention long enough for the spell to engage. And since I know you’re not a dumbass, who gave you the spell Ben?”

Ben huffed, not too happy with her description of how it happened, but also couldn’t deny it’s almost exactly what happened. He couldn’t vouch for the spell’s integrity, other than he knew he hadn’t seen her since Jane gave him the cookie and when he professed his love. So whatever Jane had
done, it simply compelled him to reveal his true feelings. But that wasn’t something he was ready to admit to and didn’t see a point in doing so. He looked around to anything but Mal, he still believed that it was a misguided attempt and mostly innocent, magic wasn’t taught at school and it was easy to be lured away by a quick fix.

“Why are you protecting your would-be rapist?” She couldn’t understand why he wouldn’t come forward with the person’s name, why would he protect someone who had tried to harm him?

“She wouldn’t have raped me,” he thought she was being over dramatic.

“A-ha! So you do know who it was and that it’s a she.”

He didn’t want to say anymore, afraid he’d give it away.

“Ben, they are out for blood and I’m afraid that if they don’t find who really did it, then they’ll be happy enough with a scapegoat, and that’s us,” referring to the Isle Four.

Mal dropped her sarcastic tone, he hated that she was scared of being sent back. Given how badly the Winter Recital went, then her fears probably held more weight that he wished they did. He took a few seconds to think and really try to see it the way she did.

He was the Crown Prince and while he wanted to be treated like a normal student, he knew that for some that was impossible, most notably by his father. He knew his father loved him fiercely and had always been protective of him and his mother. While Auradon City was in his jurisdiction, his father could overrule him and banish the four if he really thought they were a danger.

His father wouldn’t see it as a misguided attempt to get a boyfriend, or to have what he was sure would have been a chaste relationship if it came from Mal or the other Isle children.

Either way, the transgression was not something anyone would be willing to take lightly, and part of him knew that it shouldn’t, and it wouldn’t be fair for anyone besides the guilty party to take the blame.

“It was Jane,” he admitted softly, so soft that Mal almost didn’t hear him. She also wasn’t sure she heard him correctly, as the mousy timid girl was the last person she thought would try a love spell.

“She gave me a cookie before I boarded the bus to the game.”

“Jane? But she’s…” There were so many synonyms to “timid” and “harmless” that flitted through Mal’s head but then the conversation she had with the girl months ago came to her mind, sometime before homecoming where Jane had wanted fae favor and things became clear to her. “Oh, that sneaky bitch.”

Ben must have been the boy she wanted to impress with glamours to her hair and nose.

“Wait, what?” Ben would have thought Jane would be the last person anyone would ever call a sneaky bitch.

“I should have known it was Jane. She asked me soon after I got here for magic. She said she wanted to impress some ‘boy.’ I guess that boy was you.”

“No, not Jane…at least not the way you’re thinking. She’s so quiet and…” he didn’t want to insult anyone by calling them “plain,” but it was the first thing that popped into his head. “and meek. She’s wears bows in her hair and volunteers for dance committees.”

“And?”
“And I don’t think she really meant anything by it. I think she just wanted a boyfriend.”

“Right, and boyfriends and girlfriends have sex. Ergo that makes her a would-be rapist.”

“No, not Jane. She probably just wanted someone to go to dances with and…go on picnics by the lake with.”

Mal cocked her head and silently asked him if he really were that stupid, at least that’s what her face told him.

“If that’s all she wanted, then she could have chosen someone less high profile. Hell, she probably could have gotten some sexless plain nobody just like her to do all of that without a spell. But no, she wanted you and decided she wanted you so badly that she’d resort to magic to make it happen. You don’t go that far for picnics and walking along the beach holdings hands. You do that to people you’re trying to entrap. I wouldn’t be surprised if she planned to make you fall in love long enough to get her pregnant, then you’d be honor bound to marry her.”

“Woah, that is a much dastardlier plan than I think she’s capable of.”

“Ben wake up, please!” she begged, getting frustrated and couldn’t believe he could be this naive.

He was surprised she had started to yell at him, but she had to try to get through to him.

“Good people with good intentions do not resort to love potions. Love magic never works as intended because to use them is the antithesis of what love actually is. Let’s pretend she did only want to hold your hand or whatever, the fact she used a love potion on you means that she doesn’t care about how you actually feel. She only cares about how she feels and doesn’t care or mind that she’d be violating your feel free will and body autonomy. Even if it’s just holding hands, they’re your hands and she doesn’t have the right to force you to hold hers.”

Ben hated that he fell just a little more in love with Mal after hearing her so passionate about protecting him, and how important his choices were; and that no matter how benign Jane’s intentions may potentially have been, and he can admit that maybe he doesn’t know her as well as he thought he did—she did use a love potion after all, she didn’t have a right to do that.

No one has a right to use love spells, period.

“You’re my friend Ben, I don’t want you hurt because you’re too nice to see people how they really are,” she pleadingly looked into his eyes, she held him by the shoulders and all but begged him to listen to her.

As annoyed as he first was and convinced that Jane was harmless, he had to remember that Mal had come from a not so harmless place. Maybe she was right, Mal seemed to be able to see things clearer than he was able to, especially when it came to people’s motivations. If the love spell worked, then Jane could have done whatever she wanted with him and he would have probably gone along. Even if he wasn’t infatuated with Jane, the spell did make him feel pretty loopy and he was definitely out of control of his faculties. He could easily imagine how susceptible he could have been to anyone when inevitably Mal had rejected him for Carlos. It could have been disastrous not only for the country with a compromised King, but he would have been stuck in a loveless marriage with a child. Love spells wore off, but marriage to him was forever and he would have felt honor bound to marry the mother of his child; especially if he never figured out he was ever under a spell to begin with.

It started to sink in just how bad it could have been, and he’s thankful Jane’s plan didn’t go through even though he had been humiliated. But almost being violated in such a way made his stomach
twist and acid rise up in his throat.

His shoulders sagged and he took a seat at the conference table, sighing deeply and rubbed his face in exhaustion. He had to accept that what Jane did was a serious offense, and they weren’t kids and she couldn’t be treated like one.

Jane made the decision to put a spell on him, and she would have to live with the consequences.

“You’re right,” he said after a moment of reflection. The naivetés fell from his eyes, the responsibility of kingship turned his stare hard. “What she did was wrong, and there are consequences to breaking the law…this is now a matter for the Crown. I expect you understand that this conversation needs to remain between us…and that the proper authorities will take it from here.”

Mal didn’t need to be told that she ought not to do anything rash, such as confront Jane herself. No matter how angry she was, if she would to take things into her own hands would only make things worse.

As long as she and the others were safe, and the proper culprit was detained and brought to justice, then she didn’t care how it happened. The stern look in Ben’s eyes told her that he was taking things seriously, and she trusted in their friendship that he wouldn’t let her or the others pay for crimes they didn’t commit.

Normally Ben was so light and jovial, but the burden of ruling made him seem older. Given how young and fit King Adam was, she didn’t think it was fair to put so much responsibility on Ben’s shoulders at his age. Certainly, the principality and eventual kingship could have waited another five years, to let Ben have a proper childhood and university experience before he became laden with the concerns of the kingdom.

But she knew that if anyone would be a good king, it was him.

“I’m sorry, for what it’s worth,” she told them as they started to leave.

He turned to her, unsure of what she was apologizing for.

“For Jane, I don’t know if she was ever really your ‘friend.’ But she was clearly someone you trusted without question…and someone you wanted to give the benefit of the doubt. I’m sorry that someone you put your trust in betrayed you…that has to suck a lot.”

And that was the heart of the matter, wasn’t it? Jane may have been on the peripheral of his social circle, but she had been an acquaintance of his for most of his life. Her choices weren’t just going to affect her, but also her mother and the Charming family. They were going to be devastated that she had done something so foolish and illegal. He wasn’t sure what the exact punishment for using magic on the royal, but it wouldn’t be light. He knew that he would speak on Jane’s behalf, no matter how much Mal may protest, as he respected Professor FéeMarraine and he truly believed in second chances. It still wouldn’t be an easy decision, but that’s part of the burden of rule.

The right decisions weren’t always the easy ones.

“Thank you Mal,” he genuinely appreciated the sentiment. “Try to enjoy the rest of your winter break. I may not see you before school starts again, and hopefully this mess can be solved without any more involvement from you or the others.”

She remained silent but nodded her agreement. She and the others had already been through so much. With Ben coming forward with the real culprit, their names would be fully cleared and hopefully they could go back to normal.
Jane wasn’t sure what a panic attack felt like, but it had to be close to what she experienced when Ben had declared his love for Mal.

Although Audrey had been angry about the spell, it seemed the princess had calmed down enough to let Jane still be part of the cheer team. The half-fae girl was relieved, she figured the royal had presumed she had tried her best and they could always try again.

Personally, Jane thought that all of Audrey’s substitutions were probably to blame but she would never say so out loud. She did still have the silver platter in her room at the cottage, she could do the spell again (the right way) on her own. She already planned to attempt again as she did the cheer routines.

*It won’t look so out of place to give out cookies on Eros’ Day, I’m sure most will think Ben and Audrey getting back together would be natural. No one would think twice if Carlos fell in love with me then. And if some people accidently ate one, then no one would think anything weird about people hooking up for the holiday. It’ll be perfect.*

Jane was finally a cheerleader, cheering in the uniform and at the most important game of the year. It was everything she had always wanted, the entire school high on school spirit when the Fighting Knights won the championship.

But then everything went so wrong.

Ben had declared his love for the wrong girl. Jane was probably the only one to look at Audrey, the princess’ heart breaking when her prince said he had loved Mal. She knew in her heart that Audrey would never forgive her.

Carlos had flown into a rage and attacked the royal and was then carted away in a police vehicle.

Audrey was eerily quiet on the way home, especially as others couldn’t stop talking about what happened. Normally Audrey was the one who would fuel the fires of salacious gossip about Mal, but others were more than willing to speculate why the fae had done it.

Jane remained silent, too afraid she would slip and accidently confess; especially once everyone ventured about all the horrible punishments for someone who would dare put a spell on the Crown Prince.

In the aftermath, Jane realized there were some perks to being invisible, not many but some. One was that while no one paid attention to her when she wanted them to, they also didn’t pay attention to her when she didn’t want them to. Jane started to believe she was perfectly safe and beyond suspicion in her mother’s campus cottage and as the daughter of the Headmistress. Her “boring” and “goody-two-shoes” reputation made it so no one would even think to suspect her of any wrong doing.

When the love confession scandal happened, she had feared that all fingers would point to her as she had been the one to give Ben something to eat before the game. But when no accusations came forward, she thought maybe Ben couldn’t remember due to the spell. She had heard whispers that he didn’t recall most of the game or even his confession and subsequent fight with Carlos.

*It had been hours between giving Ben the cookie and when he confessed his love for Mal. I doubt he or anyone would even connect the two.*

It also helped that Mal was the object of his confession, and everyone automatically assumed it was the dark fae’s evil work.
She tried not to get sick at the thought of Carlos being jealous enough to fight the Crown Prince. Instead, she vindictively hoped that Mal would be expelled and she could help Carlos as he threw off Mal’s evil influence.

She did worry that Carlos would be expelled as well since he got into the fight, but she was certain that somehow, he would be cleared.

*If Ben was under a spell, maybe I could drop hints Carlos was under one too. Mal would have to for sure be exiled back to the Isle when both boys tested positive for love spells.*

She was seriously put out, however, that Audrey had dropped her so coldly and suddenly. The princess acted as if they hadn’t been hanging out the past month, or as if Jane had suddenly become totally useless.

*Why won’t she give me a chance to fix it? I know I can make the spell work, I just need to do the actual spell as written.*

Some part of her knew she ought to be angry at Audrey, that it was the princess that was in the wrong, not her. Not only had Audrey ruined the spell, but her friendship was clearly fair weather and fleeting. She also knew that deep down, the only reason the princess even approached her was probably for her magic and not that she really felt any kind of kinship to the half fae.

But she knew that even a superficial friendship with Audrey was better than nothing. The princess could provide popularity and people actually saw her, a few spells here and there seemed like it was a fair exchange.

Jane had proof that it was Audrey’s substitutions that ruined the spell, at least that’s what the forum had suggested. When she had posted questions about why her spell didn’t work, several people pointed out that magic was precise and finicky. Making substitutions on the fly could make the magic inert at best and deadly at worst.

*Thank the stars that he merely got a light case of magic poisoning, I’d never forgive myself if anything worse had happened.*

She had tried to explain that to Audrey, being as tactful as she could that it was really her fault but not daring to outright blame her. But she was not willing to hear any excuse. She could only focus on Jane’s failure. The star fae privately thought that the princess was madder that Ben had confessed his love for Mal. Before, his attraction to Mal had only been her fear, Ben had never confirmed her accusations. Jane had asked the forum, and while they couldn’t say for sure since they didn’t witness Ben’s confession and they weren’t privy to the exact changes she had made, they did suggest it was possible that the spell had turned from a love spell that made the subject fall for the first person they saw, to a heart revealing spell which would cause the subject to confess what was in his heart—which was what happened, at least she was pretty sure.

Jane knew better than to reveal that to Audrey, she was certain the princess would self-combust if Ben’s true feelings went deeper than lust.

*But maybe Mal’s love spell is just that strong. Maybe Audrey would forgive me if she thought my magic wasn’t strong enough against Mal’s. I probably should have seen it coming, Mal has had years to perfect evil spells. I’ve only just started. Maybe we ought to do a magic removal spell instead like I wanted to before...I wonder if Ben’s treatment to remove my love spell would have removed any and all spells on him...*

Jane tried to think of other ways she could get back into Audrey’s good graces, but her train of
thought was interrupted when her mother had suddenly come into her room with two other people she didn’t recognize.

Her mother always tried to keep a happy smile on her face, but it was one of those rare moments when she had been so dour and serious.

Jane’s instincts were screaming at her that something was wrong, goosebumps flared up on her arms and the hairs on the back of her neck stood on end. The two strangers had come into the room without Jane’s permission and started to look around.

“Mom?”

Nadine ignored her and before Jane could protest and hopefully kick them out, her mother instructed them,

“Her computer is on the desk, it is not password protected…” Nadine hesitated for a moment, grimaced when she realized that maybe her daughter had placed a password on her computer even though she was strictly forbidden from doing so. “If there is a password, then I will get it for you…and if she refuses then you have my permission to use whatever means necessary to get into the laptop.”

“Thank you for your cooperation, mam,” the officer thanked her, feeling somewhat awkward that the teen in question was just sitting on her bed and had been playing on her phone. From the chilly demeanor of Mrs. FeeMarinne, the girl was in for a rude awakening.

“Mom? What is…”

“Do not talk,” she advised her daughter as she was in enough trouble already. While she would not lie to the authorities about her daughter’s potential illegal activities, she would try to stop her daughter from incriminating herself. “We must go to the police station…” she almost choked on those words, never in her life did she ever think she’d have to say them to her daughter. “and we’ll speak with our attorney.”

Jane immediately stopped talking but wanted to desperate stop the men from searching her room. Not only did she feel totally violated by the invasion, but she was quickly surmising what the issue was and what they were looking for. She could only helplessly stand up at her mother’s instruction and leave with her.

Jane never thought she’d ever see a real police station, much less be in one under suspicion of a crime. The only time she had even glanced at one was via television. The car ride over had been silent and tense, she had hoped to whatever power that would listen to her that the trip was for something completely unrelated. She didn’t understand how or why someone would connect her to Ben’s poisoning. She and Audrey had been so careful, and she had tossed the cookies so there was no physical evidence. She always used incognito tabs when visiting forums about magic, she had done everything possible to cover her steps.

She schooled her features as best she could, she only hoped no one could hear how hard her heart beat in her chest. She prayed that her voice would remain neutral and strong, despite wanting to break down and cry then and there. She was led to a plain room with a simple table and chairs, she couldn’t help but feel trapped and ready to run. She sat on one side with her mother, and soon after they were joined by a man in an expensive suit.

“Hello, Mrs. FeeMarine,” he greeted her mother cordially. He glanced over Jane, not betraying what he truly thought of her, but he was polite to her as well. “Jane. Well, let’s get right down to it,” he
wasted no time.

“I’m Tybare West, your attorney,” he directed his statement to Jane as she had never seen him before.

All colour drained from her face, the gravity of the situation sinking in. She could no longer hope that she had been called for some benign reason, she had to be in a heap load of trouble in order for a lawyer to be involved.

“I’m not going to sugar coat things, this looks bad. The Crown Prince named Jane as the one to give him suspected magical food before the game.”

It didn’t help her case when she flinched at the revelation that Ben had remembered her giving him the cookie.

“Going off that, the police had combed the web for any evidence of magic research as we know the Auradon Prep library does not hold such books. Cyber forensics found a forum, the entries specifically about a love spell that matches what the Crown Prince told us. While the entries are under a pseudonym, they were able to trace the IP address to your cottage. Further, they had confiscated Jane’s laptop and ran forensics on that. They found that she had been using an incognito browser. And interviewing her roommates, there have been several instances where she has snuck out of the dorm and they had covered for her; even going as far as to answering text messages as her.”

They basically had irrefutable proof that at the very least Jane had looked up magic spells and circumstantial evidence she snuck away to practice magic. With Ben’s testimony, they had enough to probably convict her not only of magic use, but of using it against a member of the royal family. Looking over to her mother, she saw the older woman grow colder and colder with the mounting evidence. She wouldn’t describe her mother as angry, although she knew she must be livid, but it hurt worse when she realized her mother was disappointed.

Not just disappointed, but ashamed; maybe even disgusted with Jane.

That was so much worse than being ignored or overlooked. She wanted to beg and plead with her mother, tell her she was sorry and that she didn’t mean to hurt anyone. Both adults looked hard at the teen who had tears silently streaming down her eyes.

It was essentially an admission of guilt as far as they were concerned.

“What are our options?” Nadine refused to comfort her obviously distraught daughter. There wasn’t any time to coddle the girl, they needed to try to get through this without it completely ruining Jane’s life.

The attorney didn’t even ask Jane if she had done it, whether or not she was actually guilty was irrelevant, what mattered was what it looked like and what the prosecution could prove.

“Theyir case is pretty damning and I doubt a jury would be moved, the best we can hope for is a plea deal. Jane will need to throw herself at the mercy of the court, hope that with her total cooperation that they will give her a lighter sentence. Given how young she is with no prior record, I’m sure we can spin this where it’s a simple teenage indiscretion.”

Which was what he suspected it was, there were plenty of cases of young naive teenagers who dabbled in magic. Most got a slap on the wrist and community service, maybe some mandatory classes about the dangers of magic.
The problem was that the girl was foolish enough to put a spell on royalty, more foolish still it was the Crown Prince of the reigning monarchy. She couldn’t have chosen a worse target, and he doubted King Adam would be willing to be all that lenient. Everything made worse because the girl was half fae. The Fae Wars were not too long ago that any whispers of fae wielding magic wouldn’t be met with swift consequences. He was more concerned with keeping Jane off the Isle.

The two adults started talking about a battle strategy, going over the best ways they could minimize the damage.

“Of course she will be taken out of Auradon Prep,” Nadine assured her counsel, the news shocking Jane out of her stupor.

“Wait, what?” she couldn’t be removed from school, it was her senior year. Although she didn’t seem to have any real friends, and she definitely wouldn’t have any after this all got out, but she had worked hard towards graduation. She didn’t want the last four years to be a total waste.

“Jane, you poisoned the Crown Prince over a silly crush. Of course you can’t stay in school.”

“No mom...” Jane struggled with articulating any kind of counter argument, she knew the rules as well as anyone. Magic was strictly forbidden, and she had been basically caught red handed.

Any loyalty she had to Audrey clearly wasn’t worth it, as the princess had not spoken to her since the incident.

*I shouldn’t be the only one to get in trouble. It’s not even really my fault!*

Soon, Jane started to babble to the adults about everything that happened. Both shocked that the girl would name princess Audrey as not only an accomplice but accusing her of being the main proponent.

“She came to me, she’s the one who wanted the spell.”

Jane conveniently left out the detail that she had every intention of using the love spell for herself, but since it wasn’t for Crown Prince Ben then it wasn’t important.

The attorney was hesitant to go down that road, as all they had to go on was the word of a girl who at the very least misused magic. He started to get a headache from all the paperwork and mental gymnastics they would have to do in order to successfully pin the majority of the poisoning on a princess.

Nadine was shocked and almost wanted to call her daughter a liar, unbelieving someone of the royal family would stoop so low as to use a love potion to get an ex back. While she was close to Ben, she was not privy to such details of his personal life. She had known the two royals had broken up, and she wasn’t going to pry into his life about why.

*Princess Audrey has suiters breaking down her door. What did she need to stoop for a love potion?*

But she also knew her daughter, the dutiful, kind, and unassuming girl who had changed once she started to hang out with the princess. She couldn’t ignore how Jane’s attitude problems had only been a recent issue.

Over the next couple of days, their attorney had been in talks with the Dornröschen’s attorney and it went as well as West thought it would.

“Well, they have lawyered up to the nines. Princess Audrey claims she was being nothing more than
a good friend, and says she has no knowledge of ‘Jane’s plan.’”

“What about the silver plate and roses she gave me?”

“She says you stole them from her room.”

Jane scoffed, offended such things would be said about her and a dark anger started to blossom within her. She couldn’t believe Audrey would have the audacity to lie so much, but another part of her wasn’t all that surprised. The princess’s true colours were emerging, and all Jane saw was a spoiled brat who had duped her into committing a crime.

“They have also made it clear that any more ‘aspersions’ on Audrey’s character will be met with the full force of their legal team...given the evidence I think we ought to drop trying to bring the princess into this.”

“What? No! That’s not fair,” she couldn’t believe they were willing to give up so easily.

“Jane,” her mother’s warning fell on deaf ears.

“She’s the one that came to me. I didn’t even want to do a love spell. I wanted to do a curse removal spell...”

“Jane, you need to be quiet now,” Nadine desperately wanted her daughter to stop talking unless she would incriminate herself further. It was bad enough her daughter dabbled in magic, it’d be made worse if anyone thought she had all sorts of plans to use magic illegally.

“Jane, as your attorney we have attorney-client privilege. But that won’t work if you tell anyone outside this room any plans you may or may not have had. All you could do to yourself is dig yourself in deeper. So unless you have any proof such as text messages, emails, or even video of her being an accomplice, then all you have is hearsay and that won’t hold any water in court.”

It was assured that Jane would have this on her permanent record, probably haunting her for the rest of her life. Nadine had hopes of Jane following in her footsteps and getting into the Merlin Institute of Magic when she was older. She had hoped that maybe she could retire from redoing the magic barrier and pass off the responsibility to her daughter, but those dreams wouldn’t be realized, as the prestigious school wouldn’t accept anyone with a criminal record of magic use, and there would be no point in learning magic she couldn’t wield as there was no way the Crown would approve a magic license.

“No, mom, this is such bullshit,” Jane couldn’t help but lash out. She had angry tears start to well up in her eyes, her face becoming flush with rage.

“Jane Elizabeth FéeMarraine!” her mother couldn’t believe she would use such language. Nadine’s eyes flashed an electric white, putting an end to her child’s outburst.

Pain ripped through Jane’s skull, making her whimper; her own eyes flashing the unearthly colour of their bloodline. She kept her head down, submitting to her mother and remained quiet, only whimpering quietly from the ache that remained.

In the end, the Crown (at the behest of Crown Prince Ben) showed mercy. Jane was expelled from Auradon Prep and all but banished from Auradon City. In lieu of any type of prison time in a juvenile facility, she would be remanded to her parents’ custody under house arrest until she turned 18.

Jane was crushed to learn that she was banned from learning magic, as she would never receive a
license to practice. She dreaded having to move back to Cinderellaburg in disgrace and having to be homeschooled for the rest of the school year in order to get a diploma.

There was no talk about her attending university, she despaired that it would be totally out of her reach. The applications she had turned in were rejected, and she doubted this stain on her record would be forgotten anytime soon. Her mother barely spoke to her after she was sentenced, she was too busy packing up the cottage.

Guilt ate at her because her mother had to resign. Crown Prince Ben hadn’t asked for her to quit, but Nadine couldn’t see how she could continue working as Headmistress or even a teacher when her own daughter had flouted the rules so heinously.

Nadine knew it would only be a matter of time before parents called for her resignation, worried that a magic wielding fae had roamed the campus.

Ben sighed, sad that he was losing such an excelled teacher and administrator, but he respected her wishes. He could even admit to himself that she was probably doing him a favor, as much as he wanted her to stay; there were so many people calling for her resignation that he doubted he would have been able to fight them off forever. He had so many other fights on the horizon, such as keeping the students with any magical heritage in the school.

A frustrated ball of fury started to grow in the pit of his stomach. The more he thought of Jane’s actions, the more he grew to detest them and all the trouble they were causing. It was rare he got to see his father when school was in session, now that King Adam had to defend their claim to the throne, he felt like he didn’t have a father.

There had always been factions of Auradon that detested magic users, or anyone with magical heritage. It was in no small part King Adam’s fault as he encouraged them. But now that Ben showed he had inherited his father’s curse, there was speculation that the spell had rendered him magical as well and questioned their fitness for rule.

Normally he would spend his winter break doing royal duties with a few days of actual vacation, either to the Summerlands or somewhere in the Bald Mountains skiing. But his time was now eaten up trying to do damage control.

He couldn’t help but scoff at the hypocrisy of some of the lesser nobles that made up the House of Lords and government. Before most of his decrees had been accepted with little resistance because of Crown Prince of Auradon city, it was well within his rights to pass laws as he deemed fit. Now that he had a touch of Beast in him, they were questioning every decision he’s made thus far and were even talking about overruling them.

While he didn’t agree with his father about everything, he would stand with his family as a united front and defend their throne.

He wished he could see Nadine off, but given what Jane had done they thought it would be better than the half-fae not be in his presence for the near future. He watched from his private office in the Administrative Building, which was next door to the Headmistress cottage.

Despite all the trouble she caused, he couldn’t help but feel a pang of pity for Jane. She looked like she had been crying all night and hadn’t seen a good night’s sleep in a week. Her once long lustrous hair had become flat, greasy, and several inches shorter as the extensions had become tattered and needed to be taken out. Peaks of silver blonde roots had started to show, and it was all tied in an unkempt bow. With a heavy heart, he watched them see off the movers and get into the family car and drove off.
He sighed at the mountains of paperwork that awaited him, sad that he had lost a valuable ally especially in the fights yet to come.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you guys think this was worth the wait. Please review! Love you guys!

End Notes

Thanks for reading and please review. Please also note that I will answer any questions from here on my tumblr. I don't like that AO3 counts replies as "comments." I think it gives the story a false reading/review stat. Any "thank yous" will be acknowledged in the note of the next chapter. I won't answer questions via notes because that could potentially cause them to be longer than the chapter itself and nobody got time for that. :-D

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!