I never believed in fairy tales, in stories of prince charming or love at first sight. It just did not come naturally to the daughter of the Mistress of All Evil. But for the longest time, I looked back on the moment I laid eyes on her again and thought, that must have been it: the start of my very own happily ever after.

------------

*Timeline has been changed and entire story has had minor changes made throughout!*

Notes

I've been really wanting to write more Mevie lately, so I've been searching for something to inspire me. This one is based on some songs on my The Princess and the Dragon playlist. It's my first go at a longer fic, so I'm anxious but excited! Chapters will be uploaded as I finish them, depending on my work schedule!
See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1

I never believed in fairy tales, in stories of prince charming or love at first sight. It just did not come naturally to the daughter of the Mistress of All Evil. But for the longest time, I looked back on the moment I laid eyes on her again and thought, that must have been it: the start of my very own happily ever after.

The chatter of the locker room and the pleasantries of the stout lady who had been showing me around the campus quieted. No one else was in the room in that moment; just two descendants of villains in an unfamiliar context. There was no doubt in my mind that it was her. Evie Grimhilde, daughter of the Evil Queen, with her flawless tan skin and signature dark blue hair, was standing before me once again. My tour guide called Evie’s attention towards me, and my heartbeat quickened as her crimson eyes met mine with immediate recognition. Her answering grin was mischievous, and every step closer to me sucked more and more air out of my lungs.

By the time we were face-to-face, my knees begged me to sit down, and my palms were readily collecting evidence of my nervous state. I slid them into my pockets as casually as I could, hoping the denim would soak up the sweat. The last thing I wanted was to appear weak in a brand new environment.

The shrill voice of the older lady finally disrupted my tunnel vision. “Evie, this is Mal; Mal, this is Evie,” she introduced, gesturing between the two of us, blatantly oblivious to our familiarity.

Evie’s eyes never left mine. “Oh, I already know Mal,” she purred like a lioness. Her voice had changed so much since we last spoke. But of course it did; we were only children back then.

The stout lady gasped and clapped her hands together once, the sound startling me into an involuntary flinch, something Evie was sure to catch with how closely she was watching me. “Wonderful! I hoped that was the case!” she exclaimed, grinning ear-to-ear in blissful ignorance. “So, you’re okay with showing Mal around then, Evie dear?” she asked, tilting her head in question towards the blue-haired girl.

“Of course, Fairy Godmother!” she assured the lady, apparently Fairy Godmother herself.

Perhaps paying attention to her would have been beneficial; I had done a good job of pointedly ignoring the annoying woman thus far.
“Then I’ll leave you ladies to it!” Fairy Godmother nodded, my nose instinctively crinkling at the term *ladies*.

Evie’s gaze was intense, her eyes sparkled with curiosity, and her pearly teeth sunk into her red-painted bottom lip.

“Stay out of trouble!” Fairy Godmother yelled on a final note, already around the corner and exiting the locker room.

A fraction of a chuckle separated teeth from lip. “As if,” Evie mumbled, gently snaking her arm through mine and pulling me towards a small group of girls she had been standing with earlier. Her grip subtly tightened as we got closer to them, anticipating my flight instinct to rise.

I didn’t know if I loved or hated her perceptiveness.

The first to spot me was a short brunette, whose round, blue eyes widened comically. Her body stiffened to the point where she could have simply been a convincing wax figure.

Noticing the change in energy, a taller brunette pulled her head out of her locker and turned to examine the intrusion. Her scoff of disgust was audible, and my fingers clenched in preparation for a fight.

“So who’s the fetus?” she growled, expanding a hair tie with her long, skinny fingers and quickly putting her hair up into a high ponytail. Her eyes flicked between my purple hair and old, ripped clothing disapprovingly.

I bristled at the nickname.

“Audrey, this is Mal; Mal, this is Audrey and Jane,” Evie introduced, emphasizing Audrey’s name in warning.

In an impossible feat, Jane became even more visibly terrified, but it was no surprise. Everyone knew the most powerful faery of all time, Maleficent, had a daughter of the same name. Even though I went by a shorter version of it, one syllable was enough to strike fear into the hearts of many people in the land.
“The little bitch who banished you? The little bitch who bullied you for years?” Audrey yelled, becoming angrier by the second.

My body tensed further with every word, and I could feel my eyes beginning to glow in anger, something I picked up on from my mother.

Evie’s grip on my arm was bone-crushing at this point, but the rest of her body remained calm and loose. “The past is the past, Audrey; leave her alone,” she ordered with an air of authority that sent a shiver down even my spine.

“Evie, she-” Audrey pleaded, looking to her friend in disbelief, but whatever look Evie threw her quickly silenced her argument.

“King Ben himself personally asked me to show Mal around and make sure she’s adjusting well; I will not disappoint him,” Evie explained with finality.

Jane managed some semblance of a nod, and Audrey crossed her arms in silent defiance. It was then that she noticed that most of the girls in the locker room were blatantly staring at the four of us. Her hands balled into fists. “Hurry up, goblins; class starts in four minutes!” she barked, and the crowd scrambled to exit the locker room. Her locker door slammed, and she threw a quick glance to Jane, who fumbled with her own locker. The pair briskly walked out of the room, leaving just Evie and me alone together.

The tight grip on my arm relaxed significantly, and Evie breathed slowly to center herself.

I watched her in silent observation.

When her eyes opened once more, she caught my gaze with a soft smile. “Don’t worry about them, Mal. You’ve got me,” she assured, her enticing voice already working to soothe my inhibitions. “Although, I know you can take care of yourself,” she smiled widely, tilting her head down at me knowingly.

It was as though all of my muscles, except maybe my heart, stopped working. All I could do was stare at her in disbelief. I was not kind to her after she failed to invite me to her birthday party when we were only eight years old. All our lives we were raised by our villainous parents to hold grudges until we die, and yet, here she was, the same person from before the incident. The same little girl that
would meet me in secret just so we could get away from our tyrannical mothers and feel safe and loved. Here we were, alone once again, and it was as if nothing changed. But everything had changed since then.

We grew taller and stronger, our bodies and minds matured, and our situations had molded us into different people than we were. I had grown up on The Isle of the Lost, an island where the late King Beast banished all of the villains and their descendants to live after he had defeated the worst of them all, my mother. Life on The Isle was difficult. It was completely cut off from the rest of the kingdom and enshrouded in a barrier that prevented most magic from being used. The crime rates were insurmountable, and the good kingdom of Auradon couldn’t be bothered to send any police to attempt to keep the peace. There were weekly deliveries of food, but it consisted of all of Auradon’s scraps, some of which I wouldn’t even consider edible. Growing up on The Isle was a physical and emotional struggle, and that environment hardened me over the years. Auradon, on the other hand, seemed to maintain Evie’s purity, and for that, I was grateful.

“Did you bring clothes for gym class?” Evie inquired suddenly, effectively breaking my daydream.

My eyebrows furrowed in confusion. “Why would I need different clothes for a class?” I wondered.

Evie’s giggle simultaneously made my stomach flip and drop; I felt stupid.

“Right, there’s no gym class at Dragon Hall,” she nodded to herself, recalling the ridiculous curriculum that was taught on The Isle’s only school. It was where I had attended classes on how to be evil for twelve years and graduated at the top of my class. “Well, here in Auradon, you don’t need to run everywhere, and you can’t climb all over things in public spaces without getting fined, so they have a class to get you to exercise,” she explained. “Fitness is very important, after all!”

I likely looked as stupid as I felt, gawking at the concept in disbelief. “That sounds horrible,” I managed to reply, referring to both the rules of Auradon and a class exclusively for exercise.

“Oh, come on, Mal. I seem to remember you loving that kind of stuff,” Evie prodded, reaching out and feeling my bicep through my tattered leather jacket. She must have confirmed what she was assessing, because she smirked in success. “I’m sure you’ll even give the boys a run for their money,” she winked, turning to dig around in her locker before she could see how red my cheeks were becoming at the unexpected flirtation.

However, the comment was only the start of it because her locker was down near the bench. She had to bend over to access it, and to say her shorts were short was an understatement. Why would Auradon University allow their students to run around with their ass cheeks out but not let them
climb the trees on the lawn? Soon, I was once again met with Evie’s face. Unfortunately, my gaze had been delayed along with my thoughts, and her eyebrow quirked in suspicion. I did my best to pretend nothing was awry, but I could feel my cheeks burning even brighter with the embarrassment of being caught.

“Here,” Evie started, placing a pile of perfectly folded clothing into my arms. “You can wear my spares. I’ll just wait over here for you to t— she started. Her eyes widened, and this time it was her turn to blush as I casually began undressing. Apart from being annoyingly short and littered with various permanent reminders of life on The Isle, I was fairly confident in my body. Besides, no one on The Isle gave me the courtesy of leaving when I changed. Apparently, this included Evie, as she seemed to go into some sort of trance as the pile of my clothing on the bench became higher.

Her clothes were a little big on me, but I preferred it that way; I wouldn’t want to be flashing anyone during this so-called exercise class. The pile of my clothes moved from the bench into her locker, and I closed the door with a bang. Evie’s eyes were raking along my body when I turned around, apparently eager to see me in her clothes. I couldn’t help the satisfied smirk that crept across my face. “Are we ready?” I asked, and she shook her head, more so to clear her thoughts than to disagree, it seemed.

Her hand was cold in mine as she led us out to the classroom. When she pushed open the door, I was taken aback. This was the biggest classroom I had ever seen; it might have even been as big as the entire first floor of my mother’s castle back at home on The Isle. Apparently I was staring, because I could feel Evie shaking with amusement next to me.

“You’re late!” an older man shouted, and my heartbeat spiked once more; I couldn’t help but be on edge in this novel situation. There was already a mass of students, in various yellow and blue clothing, stretching on the floor in front of him.

“I was just helping Mal get situated in the locker room. She’s new, and I’ve been appointed to help her,” Evie apologized, offering her best smile to the teacher in hopes he would brush it off. We had no such luck.

“You know the drill; two laps!” he said, gesturing in a circular motion that I hoped did not mean we were expected to run around this entire classroom.

“You’ve got it, coach!” Evie replied, much too cheerily. Apparently, we were going to run around this whole classroom. Twice. “Race ya!” Evie whispered before releasing my hand and taking off. If she remembered anything about me, it was that I did not back down from a challenge. My eyebrows furrowed and my lips quirked as I followed quickly behind her.
Although the borrowed sneakers were a little big on me, it didn’t take long for me to catch up to her. I was faster, but her legs were longer, so we kept each other’s pace fairly easily. Her blue locks flew through the wind, and her smile shone brightly. It was as if we were children again, running through the streets of The Isle just trying to feel alive. My shoes didn’t fit me then, either.

By the time we finished two laps, we were both winded to say the least. My lungs burned, and the air around me seemed to flee from my grasp.

The other students were still doing various stretches. They were led by Audrey, who seemed to naturally take control of the entire class. “Annnd touch your toes!” she yelled, bending over easily to grab her shoes with her hands.

Like many of the other students, I couldn’t even get my fingertips to brush my ankles. I glanced over at Evie, limber as ever, whose nose was resting on her knees like some kind of toy that gives kids unrealistic expectations about the human body. I shook my head in disbelief.

“Those knees better not be bent!” Audrey shouted, and a few of the other students could be seen trying to adjust their position as subtly as possible.

Stretches did not last long after that, and soon the class’s attention was drawn to the various pieces of equipment scattered along the gym floor.

“Well done, Audrey; thank you,” the teacher said. “Today is fitness assessment day,” he announced, earning a chorus of groans from the students. “Quiet down, quiet down!” he warned. “You will be assessed today, and those scores will be compared to your final assessment on the last day of the year; you guys know the drill!”

I did not know the drill, but I hoped that this assessment did not include more running.

“Pair up; you will record the scores as your partner does the challenge, and then you will switch,” he explained before blowing his whistle. Apparently, the signal meant to begin, because all of the students quickly made eye contact and formed their pairs.

I could already see Audrey knowingly looking at Evie, but before I could worry about being paired with a judgmental stranger, I could feel Evie’s soft arm snake through mine once more. Audrey momentarily looked like she might murder me before grabbing Jane by the arm and heading to a strange little box on the floor.
“You didn’t have to do that,” I offered, but Evie brushed me off with a shake of her head and a pat on my hand and walked us to a thick mat in front of a wall. On the wall, above our heads, was a wooden board with various holes in it. The board extended all the way to the top of the high ceilings – an impressive feat. Evie jumped up to take two wooden pegs out of the holes and handed them to me expectantly. I stared at the pegs, pleading them to tell me what the hell I was supposed to do with them. “So what is this fitness assessment business anyway?” I wondered.

Evie bent down to retrieve two evaluation sheets from the ground and handed those to me before taking the mysterious wooden pegs back and sighing. “It’s just a bunch of little challenges to test your physical fitness. We do one today and one at the end of the year to see if we have improved at all. It used to only be required at Auradon Prep, but King Ben thinks that college students don’t get enough exercise,” she disclosed. “Or eat healthy enough...” she added after a beat. “If students don’t seem to be improving, he plans on retiring the program here.”

I nodded, trying to understand the sentiment. It was strange to me that the young King seemed so concerned about the well-being of people in Auradon but seemed to forget that The Isle was even under his jurisdiction. Well, apart from shipping villain kids over to the nice side of the sea once in a blue moon.

“Honestly, I think he’s just nostalgic. His father died when he was in Auradon Prep, and all of the responsibilities of a new King didn’t exactly allow him to enjoy his time there,” Evie confided, scrunching up her nose in thought. Suddenly, she seemed to remember that we had a task to complete, and she shook her head to clear it. “Okay, so the goal is to climb as high as you can,” she explained, gesturing to the strange wall I had nearly forgotten existed. “It gets harder to climb the higher you get because gravity will be fighting with you. Just write down how many rows I get through,” she instructed.

I nodded in confirmation; the task seemed easy enough.

Evie bent her knees, a peg in each hand, and jumped. The pegs easily found their way into the holes in the first row. One by one, she moved her pegs into the holes just above them and climbed.

The reason why students needed separate clothes for this class quickly became clear; I would have been seeing a lot more than some ass cheeks at that angle if Evie still wore those dresses she used to love so much. After several rows, I could see the muscles in her arms twitching in protest.

With a resigned sigh, Evie fell gracefully to the mat on the ground below her.
I marked the row number and handed her the sheet and pencil. The wooden pegs were a little sweaty, so I wiped them on my shorts and prepared for my turn.

“Sorry,” Evie apologized, grimacing at the sight.

“It’s okay,” I reassured her with a small smile. It’s an exercise class; we were bound to get sweaty.

“Whenever you’re ready,” Evie offered, arms hanging down, thankful to be at rest.

I nodded and bent my legs, assessing the distance I needed to reach the board. My feet left the ground and quickly met it again. A scoff left my mouth before I could even register my annoyance. It wasn’t long before I was fully aware of my annoyance, however. After four unsuccessful jumps, I finally got high enough to reach the board, but the pegs missed the holes. Damn my short legs. Seven more attempts and I was about ready to throw the stupid pegs into the sea. I could feel my breathing quicken and my eyes burn, threatening to glow. A cold but soft pressure on my hand grounded me and carefully took the pegs. I remained standing, eyes closed, and breathing deeply to calm down like I had seen Evie do in the locker room earlier. When I opened my eyes, the pegs were in the first row, taunting me. “Isn’t that cheating?” I asked, exasperated.

“The only thing I need to record is how many rows you advance; it says nothing about how you start,” Evie replied with a nonchalant shrug, but her eyes shone with mischief.

I chuckled at the sight, happy to see a sliver of her villain descent shine through. When I leapt up to the pegs I could easily grasp them this time. “Ha!” I laughed in a mixture of disbelief and success. It was time to show this pegboard who was boss. Climbing things was one of my favorite pastimes back on The Isle, so I easily used my upper arm strength and light weight to my advantage and ascended the board. I made it an impressive halfway up the wall before my arms muscles were screaming at me to stop, and I could barely hold on to the slick pegs anymore. Then I was hit with a startling realization. How the hell was I supposed to get down? “E?” I yelled, only having enough strength in my lungs to squeeze out one syllable.

“You’re doing great, Mal, but if you want to stop you can just fall!” Evie shouted from below.

This was what I was afraid of. Did they really expect me to fall from this height and not at least sprain something? What was someone supposed to do if they actually made it to the top? This was insanity. Or stupidity.
“Don’t worry; there’s a mat. It’s completely safe!” came the gruff voice of what I assumed to be the coach. Why was he watching? Weren’t we supposed to be doing this on our own?

I took a deep breath and removed the pegs from the board in one swift movement. Purple hair whipped around my face as the air rushed by me. It felt like I was falling forever. The landing was rough, but not completely horrible. My legs and knees definitely did not come out unscathed. I groaned upon impact, but there was a rush of blue, and soon deft fingers were brushing the hair out of my face. Once unveiled, I was met with flushed cheeks and a beaming smile.

“Are you okay?” someone asked.

“That was amazing!” a student squealed somewhere in the distance.

“You beat the school record!” the teacher exclaimed with amazement.

“Not by much,” a male student grumbled in disappointment.

I vaguely registered the gravity of the statement, but I couldn’t take my eyes from the girl in front of me. Her pupils were blown, and her gaze kept flickering down to my lips. If we hadn’t been in the middle of class I think she might have jumped me right on the mat.

A large, brown hand was suddenly thrust in between our faces, and I took it. The teacher pulled me to my feet effortlessly, and it was then that I realized that the entire class had flocked to see me climb. I puffed out my chest in newfound pride.

“That was mighty impressive, new girl. We could put strength like that to use on the tourney field if you’re interested,” the teacher offered.

“Mal hasn’t even been here for two hours, and you’re already trying to recruit her? Let her breathe, Coach Jenkins,” Evie replied, brushing nonexistent dirt off of my clothing and lingering a little too long for it to be innocent.

“Alright,” he smiled, clapping me on the back and causing me to stumble a little. “You just let me know if you want to join!” he said before blowing the whistle to signal for the other students to disperse. All but one, a handsome boy with long, brown hair, left. I immediately recognized him as Jay, another one of my best friends from back on The Isle when I was little. He didn’t say anything.
to me, but his eyes and small frown indicated he was clearly sizing me up.

“Don’t be so jealous, Jay,” Evie purred practically right into my ear, her arms now draped over my shoulders. “Maybe you can beat her at the end of the semester.”

“Yeah right,” he scoffed before returning to his class partner.

My heart clenched a little at the lack of welcome, but I understood that their lives underwent a huge change when they arrived in Auradon. I probably would have tried to forget it all, too.

“So, what do you want to do next?” I felt Evie ask more than I heard it. Her breath was hot against my ear, and I could feel goosebumps forming in reaction.

“Um,” I stupidly started, glancing around at the other pieces of equipment. “Something that doesn’t involve my arms,” I decided on.

Evie’s giggle danced around my head. “You’ve got it, champ,” she replied, taking my hand and leading us to the smaller mats for sit ups.

* * *

The rest of class was much more uneventful than the pegboard, but the various exercises left me sweatier than I cared to be. I was pondering how much deodorant is too much when Audrey sighed obnoxiously loudly.

“Ugh, I can’t wait to shower!” she groaned.

I nearly stopped in my tracks, but the crowd of girls behind me pushed on until we were at our lockers. “Shower? We shower at school?” I asked, looking to Evie with wide eyes. The glance informed her of my apprehension, but she opened her locker calmly.

“Don’t worry, Mal; I can go with you,” she offered with a wink, pulling off her shirt in one swift movement.
“You all shower together?” I asked in slight shock.

Evie only laughed in reply.

“Most girls wear bathing suits or shower in the individual stalls, but this one here is an exhibitionist,” Audrey declared, pointedly nodding her head in Evie’s direction.

“I am not,” Evie argued weakly before pulling off her sports bra as well.

I averted my eyes politely.

“Put your boobs away, Eavestrough; you’re scaring the fetuses!” Audrey scolded playfully.

“Will not!” Evie argued more genuinely this time.

“Will, too! Look at her! She used to be so pale you could almost see right through her, but now she’s red as Ariel’s hair!” Audrey pointed out, causing me to blush even harder.

Evie scoffed and turned around. “This doesn’t bother you, does it? I mean, we’re all girls here,” she asked who I could only assume was me considering I was memorizing the floor tile pattern.

Searching for an out, I decided to comment on something else. “Why do you keep calling me a fetus?” I asked Audrey.

She barely glanced in my direction. “Because you’re tiny and insignificant, but you might become something worthy someday,” she replied easily.

“Well, fuck you, too,” I answered defensively.

“I’ve already asked, but she’s too straight to have any fun,” Evie complained, now fully undressed and gathering her shower supplies.
“Sorry, Eavestrough; you’re just not my type,” Audrey teased.

“I’m everybody’s type,” Evie gasped in mock-surprise.

Now that her towel was covering the front of her body, I felt comfortable enough to watch the situation in front of me once again.

“She’s got you there,” an athletic brunette girl piped up from across the locker room.

“Thank you, Lonnie,” Evie smiled, touching her hand to her heart and blowing the girl a kiss dramatically.

“At least I discriminate; you’ll fuck anything that moves,” Audrey argued, walking in the direction of the showers.

“That’s not true!” Evie gasped again, this time in serious offense.

“By the way, thanks for stealing my partner; I had to pair up with Jay!” Lonnie complained, walking alongside Audrey.

“Boohoo, lesbo; any other girl would have been thrilled,” the girl replied.

Evie looked like she still wanted to argue, but Audrey was already gone. “Don’t listen to her, M; she’s full of lies,” Evie started before noticing I had not changed out of her gym clothes yet.

I briefly wondered where the new nickname came from before recalling my embarrassing pegboard finale.

“I was just kidding about the shower before,” she said before nearly silently adding on “Kind of.”

I probably wouldn’t have heard it if I wasn’t part dragon, but my faery blood came with certain
Evie reached into her locker and fished out another towel. “Here, you can use this. You can change right in the individual showers; there’s a little bench just outside that you can put your clothes on. We only have fifteen minutes until class is over, though, so you have to be fast,” she instructed, and I nodded in understanding and let out a breath as she walked away.

Changing in front of people was something I could handle, but showering fully nude in front of a bunch of other girls I don’t know, girls from Auradon no less, was a little much.

“Let me know if you need any help,” Evie quipped, looking over her shoulder with that same glint in her eye.

* * *

Evie was already out of the shower and changed into her regular clothes by the time I was done. Years on The Isle had prepared me for cold water and little time to get clean, but I could see why Evie needed the extra time after as I took in the complicated layers and copious accessories she donned. She may have been living in Auradon, but her style was still easily identifiable as from The Isle. I took in the leather jacket, blue to match her hair, and her loudly patterned leggings. She must have been really popular here for students to not be off-put by her attire; most of the other girls were wearing pastels and dresses.

“You all set?” she inquired upon realization that I was standing behind her. I lifted her towel to indicate my confusion, and she nodded her head in the direction of a bunch of hooks along a wall. “You can hang that up over there; the help will wash and dry them” she supplied.

I nodded and did as I was told, although the mention of ‘the help’ settled uncomfortably in my stomach. Back on The Isle, goblins were often taken into servitude by more notable villains. I hoped things would be different in Auradon, which boasted itself as the perfect kingdom. Apparently, old habits die hard.

“Alright, now let me see your schedule,” Evie asked, reaching for my backpack and unzipping it without asking.

The schedule was right on top of all of the books I had been supplied with, slightly crumpled; I had shoved it in carelessly when I recieved it. Oops.
Evie smoothed it out on the corner of the wall and looked it over. “Okay, so, we don’t have our next class together, but I can still walk you there,” she decided. I knew protesting would be useless, so I simply gathered up my stuff and followed blue out of the door.

What I was not prepared for was a small, blonde, feeble-looking boy with glasses to be standing right outside of the girl’s locker room. I briefly considered calling him a pervert before I noticed the familiarity in his eyes when they fell on Evie. He extended his hands and took her backpack for her, lugging it over his shoulder alongside his own. I’m surprised his back didn’t break with the extra weight. Evie wasn’t the kind of girl to travel lightly, and the boy didn’t look like he was about to set any new records in exercise class.

“Thank you, babe,” Evie chirped. *Babe?*

“Who’s this?” the boy asked amicably, struggling to keep up with us with the added weight of her backpack.

“Doug, this is Mal; Mal, this is my prince charming, Doug!” Evie introduced, not bothering to look back at us.

“H-h-hardly,” he replied, demeanor changing in a second from friendly to worried and anxious.

I grimaced and nodded my head in his direction in some semblance of a greeting, but he suddenly wouldn’t meet my eyes.

“King Ben assigned me to help Mal, so I’m walking her to her classes today,” Evie explained.

“Uh, sure, but Evie, don’t you-“ he started nervously, but Evie cut him off.

“Be a dear and meet me in Chem class, would you?” the blue-haired girl said with finality, sounding more like her mother than I had ever witnessed. I would be lying if I said I wasn’t intimidated.

“Okay,” Doug uttered, our strides quickly taking us away from him.
Now I was the one struggling to keep up with Evie, in more ways than one.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Thank you all for the encouraging comments; it really helped me to write the next chapter so quickly!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

We didn’t talk on the way to my next class. Evie seemed to be in her own head, and I was trying my best to forget Doug and remember how to navigate the castle halls. As much as I hated feeling as helpless as the freshmen clearly looked, I was happy that someone was assigned to help me find my classes so I didn’t look like a total dunce. And the fact that that person had been my best friend for three years, birthday incident be damned, felt like fate.

Actually, everything kind of did. Evie never belonged on The Isle; she wasn’t cut out to be a fully-fledged villain. Evie had compassion, and her smile melted even the coldest of hearts. Seeing all of the grinning faces and genuine greetings passed to her along the halls made it clear that Auradon was her home. This was her kingdom, and she was ruling it well.

Her heels scraped along the floor as she turned to face me. “This is your next class, Artistic Expression 232. I specifically asked Fairy Godmother to put you here because I remembered how much you loved to draw, but if you want to transfer to something else, just let her know!” Evie informed me, and I felt my heart soften once more hearing that she remembered the little details about me. “As long as you don’t graffiti the school grounds you should do well,” she teased with a wink. “I’ll meet you here after class, and we can walk to lunch together – if that’s okay?” she asked tentatively. I could see the apprehension swimming in her eyes, begging me to not reject her request.

“Yeah, that’s fine,” I quickly agreed, wanting more than anything for that uncertainty to disappear.

“Okay, great! See you later,” Evie chimed, wiggling her fingers in a flirty little wave.

“Bye,” I mouthed before taking a deep breath. Suddenly, I felt small and alone. The heavy wooden door loomed above me, not inviting in the slightest. Why was I so nervous about class? It was drawing, for evil’s sake; I could out-draw any of these do-gooders.

“Uh, I’m pretty sure doors work the same way on The Isle,” a voice drawled, and I spun around at the unexpected noise. Stark white hair and dusty freckles greeted me, and I could feel my lips pulling into a smile.
“Carlos!” I exclaimed, pleasantly surprised to see another old friend, but still unsure as to where we stood after all these years. When my mother had banished Evie for not inviting me to her eighth birthday party, it was clear whose side Carlos took. Ever the pacifist, he preferred to avoid me rather than confront me, but that didn’t stop the disapproving frowns from appearing on his face whenever we happened to be together. Those frowns were long gone now, and the boy that stood in front of me looked happier than ever. The dark circles around his eyes were apparently not permanent, he wasn’t so bony, and his brown irises shone with newfound vigor. Auradon sure looked good on villain kids.

“Mal,” he greeted with a nod and a small smile. “Are you going to go in or are you already trying to skip class?” he teased.

The chuckle that escaped me was light-hearted. It sounded odd coming from my lips, but it felt...good. Suddenly, my chest tightened at my display of vulnerability. I studied the ground, wondering if I could really trust my former friends again. One more glance into his kind eyes, and I decided to take the risk.

“Is it stupid that I’m nervous?” I inquired, scrunching up my nose. A light pressure on my shoulder reassured me.

“It’s perfectly normal to be nervous, Mal, especially for a VK. Hell, you should have seen me when I first got here; every little noise made me jump, and I’m pretty sure I didn’t talk to anyone but Evie and Jay for the entire first year,” he confessed with a short laugh.

My body was already starting to relax at his words.

“The biggest thing is to open up and make friends. I know that’s not easy for you, but, Mal, being good just feels so...good. It’s not worth it to fight it and be alone. And you can always count on us to have your back,” he assured me.

The use of the word ‘us’ did not escape my notice, and the uncomfortable clenching feeling in my chest returned. I thoroughly expected to be ignored at best, especially by Evie and Carlos, but to hear that my old friends may still remain loyal, even after years of being apart, was almost too good to be true. Clearly, the signature goodness of Auradon was rubbing off on them. Carlos pushed the large doors open and gestured for me to go through them. This time, they were not so intimidating.

* * *
Carlos opened the same door for me after class as well. We had not had the opportunity to talk during class hours, but his presence next to me was reassuring enough.

“So, which projects are you most excited about?” he asked me as we made our way down the hall. I learned that he and I had the same lunch hour, so I instinctually followed his lead, hoping to end up in the right place.


To that, his head snapped back and he laughed whole-heartedly. “Mal!” he exclaimed. “What did you do all class?” he wondered, clearly amused that I had managed to zone out for over an hour.

Admittedly, I had spent most of it thinking about-

“Evie! Doug!” Carlos shouted, glancing behind us.

My heart leapt into my throat at the names.

“Hey, guys!” Evie greeted.

Doug trailed after her, backpacks threatening to slip off of his shoulder. All he could manage was a feeble wave as he caught his breath.

“How was art class?” the blue-haired girl asked with genuine interest.

“We didn’t do any art; we just read this stupid sheet of paper the whole time,” I grumbled, disappointed in the lack of fun.

“I hate to break it to you, Mal, but you’ll be reading syllabuses all day,” Carlos grinned.

“Syllabi,” Evie corrected.
“Then why did I spend all exercise class sweating my ass off?” I shot back. All I received was two sets of furrowed brows and a little grin.

“It’s actually called physical education, but they don’t really educate us about anything physical—” Doug piped up.

“Sadly,” Evie interjected with a wistful glance in my direction.

“So we generally just call it gym class – short for gymnasium, the room it takes place in,” the boy finished explaining.

That must be why the classroom was so odd looking; it wasn’t a classroom at all. “Huh,” I pondered.

“Did you guys hear that Mal beat Jay’s record on the pegboard?” Evie announced far too loudly for the middle of the hallway.

Many pairs of eyes were abruptly on me, and I wished I could bust through the ceiling and fly away.

“Only by two rows!” could be heard in the distance. All three of my companions snickered to themselves. Suddenly, there was way too much weight on my shoulders for my backpack alone, and my vision was marred by purple. I whipped around, equipped with a scowl, only to be met by Jay’s beaming smile.

“I will admit, it was really impressive, but I’ll get you in the spring; you’ll see,” he boasted, punching my upper arm lightly.

This was a much better greeting than this morning; I must have really hurt his pride initially. Now that he was feeling better about me, I decided to join in on the teasing. “If I beat one record my first day, what’s to say I won’t be breaking them all by the end of the year?” I goaded, raising my head in challenge.

His confidence faltered for a moment, and I could see Evie’s smirk in my peripheral. “You can break all the records you want, if you can without resorting to magic; just don’t go for my tourney captain title or my cheerleaders, and we’ll be fine,” he conceded.
I see he had not changed much; it was refreshing. “Your cheerleaders?” I repeated incredulously, along with Evie and Doug.

“Of course, not you, Evie,” he stuttered, throwing his hands up in surrender. “Sorry, Doug,” he added. I squinted my eyes at the couple, trying to make out what their relationship entailed. Evie appeared defensive at the thought of being owned by anyone, while Doug’s face was a mix of fear and anger.

“You know they can’t resist my charm!” he claimed, opening the door to the so-called ‘quad’ for all of us. Evie rolled her eyes, Doug smirked, and Carlos remained studying the floor. His shoulders were soon enveloped by Jay. “So, my man, what’s for lunch today?” he inquired, and Carlos’ smile made a reappearance.

“Chicken dippers!”

“Fuck yeah!” Jay exclaimed, doing a strange high kick into the air out of excitement.

“Let’s go, man; you know how the lines get on chicken dipper day!” he encouraged, the back of his hand hitting Carlos in the chest.

The younger boy turned to me with wide eyes and barely-contained excitement. “Mal, you’re gonna flip! The food in Auradon is like nothing you’ve ever had before!” Carlos claimed, jumping up and down on his heels.

Jay’s jaw dropped and he put his hands onto my shoulders. “Dude, oh my god! I’m going to get you one of everything; you just go sit!” he instructed, and I bobbed my head stupidly, not knowing what else to do.

Raspy giggles pulled me out of my shock, and an arm linked with mine. “They’re right, Mal; you’re not going to believe how good Auradon food is. My mother would have starved me to death if she had seen how much weight I gained the first year I was here. There’s a reason Audrey calls me Eaves trough,” she commented, and I wondered how she could joke about something so awful so casually. Doug was already moving to the lunch line at this point, but Evie called out to him. “Babe, can you bring us a bowl of strawberries, too?” she requested, batting her long, blue eyelashes at him.

His cheeks flushed, and he nodded. “Of course, princess,” he confirmed, and then he was off again.
My nose involuntarily crinkled at the nickname. That’s what I used to call her. When I glanced back at Evie, her eyes were carefully studying me.

“I think you’re going to find them to be absolutely delicious,” she husked, glancing down at my lips quickly before pulling us in the direction of a wooden table.

Just what was going through her mind? By the time we sat down at the table, my heartbeat had returned to a normal pace. That was, until a shrill voice made it spike again.

“Fetus,” Audrey greeted, sitting down at the table with a bowl full of lettuce, by the looks of it. Why anyone would choose that as their first back-to-school meal was beyond me, especially if everyone was talking up the food here.

Jane came around immediately after her, avoiding my gaze.

I groaned; was I going to have to deal with these two every day? It was already getting exhausting. “Hag,” I countered instinctively, fixing Audrey with my stare.

Jane’s eyes widened, and she looked like she was considering sitting at a different table.

Audrey simply looked pensive, her fork poised in the air. “Could use a little more creativity,” she commented before beginning to eat her food.

Jane slowly lowered herself into her seat, deciding she was probably safe next to Audrey.

Shortly after we were all settled at the table, a muscular boy with flowing blonde hair paused at our table, lunch tray in hand. His skin was tan and rough, like he had spent most of his life outside under the sun.

“Hey, Gil!” Jane greeted, finally seeming to relax for the first time since I had met her.

“Hey, Jane! Audrey! Evie,” he returned happily, expression only faltering when I caught his attention. “Oh, Mal, is that you?” he wondered, smile returning. “Wow! I heard you, Uma, and Harry were coming to AU this year! Welcome!” he exclaimed, thrusting a large hand over the table
for me to shake politely. “Wow! It’s going to be so nice having other VKs around! Sometimes AKs need to loosen up,” he joked jovily, shoving Audrey in the shoulder playfully.

“Yeah, I’ve noticed,” I muttered, pointedly glancing at Audrey, who most definitely saw what I had done. I wondered if he always spoke in abbreviations. Thankfully, I already knew VK stood for villain kid; it was a term we used frequently back on The Isle. AK, then, must refer to Auradon Kids. I could easily work out that AU was short for Auradon University. In the time it took me to figure that all out, Gil had continued chatting with Jane for a while before moving on to sit at a table packed with other guys, and Audrey had grown tired of my presence.

“Are you just going to sit there and waste space, or are you going to eat?” Audrey inquired, looking at the blank table space in front of Evie and me.

“Jay’s getting her a plate,” Evie replied for me.

Audrey scoffed. “Of course he is; he’s always been so fond of her, hasn’t he?” she growled, stabbing her bowl of lettuce more forcefully than necessary. A few flashes of red revealed there was more to the dish than just the leafy greens.

“Audrey-“ Evie started, but the air suddenly became colder as a shadow loomed over us.

I looked over my shoulder and there stood a tall, blonde boy who looked more plastic than organic.

Evie sighed next to me. “What do you want, Chad?” she drawled in obvious annoyance.

“Me? Oh, I just came to see your new pet,” he quipped, disgustingly chipper.

My eyebrows might as well have flew off my face. “Excuse me?” I asked, not sure if I had heard him right.

His eyes and smile widened. “Oh, you’ve taught it how to speak!” he laughed, bending down to get a better look at me.

“If you ever bother me again I will break your face,” I calmly informed him.
A snort echoed across the table, but Audrey tried to hide her amusement with a big bite of food.

His smug look faltered, and his eyebrows drew together warily. “It bites,” he stage whispered to Jane, which only worsened his fate.

The all too familiar burning returned for the third time that day, and I could see the fear slowly coming to the surface of his face as my eyes glowed. His stark-white shoes quickly carried him away from our table.

“That’s my girl,” Evie purred proudly, resting her head on my shoulder.

Audrey scoffed bitterly at the sight.

“What, Audrey? Spit it out!” Evie encouraged, holding the other girl’s gaze in challenge.

“Your girl? She shouldn’t be anything but your enemy, Evie, and you know it!” Audrey spat.

“Who I am and am not friends with is none of your business, Audrey,” Evie replied defensively.

“None of my business? I’m your best friend! It was my business when you spent all those years crying on my shoulder because-“ Audrey yelled, becoming increasingly upset. A couple of the surrounding tables had begun to stare.

Red-brown eyes hopped between all of the faces with uncharacteristic fear. “Audrey, please. Not here,” Evie pleaded, looking more defeated than argumentative.

To her credit, the other girl ceased her rambling. Her chocolate brown eyes glared daggers into mine before she stood up, bowl in hand.

“Don’t be so stupid, Evie. You’re better than that,” she whispered with finality. Her departure was silent, and the other students went back to their food, seeming quite disappointed that the argument did not escalate.
Jane was eerily quiet, picking at her food in obvious discomfort.

Evie was staring at the table intensely, mind clearly somewhere else.

“E? Are you okay?” I asked, nudging her arm gently with mine.

The motion snapped her out of her trance. Her eyes quickly found mine and searched them for something. Whatever she was looking for must have been there, because her body relaxed, and she nodded.

“Yeah, M; don’t worry about it. We have stupid fights all the time,” she assured me, but it was only half-hearted.

Before I could say anything else, three plates absolutely towering with food were placed on the table in front of me. My jaw dropped; not only was the amount of food ridiculous, but the colors were so vibrant! Fruits and vegetables on The Isle were never this beautiful. My lips pulled up into a childish grin before I could stop them.

“Did you guys literally get me one of everything? How the hell am I supposed to eat all of this?” I inquired with a pleased chuckle.

The boys were also grinning ear-to-ear, their plates stacked just as high. “Of course not! Just the good stuff!” Carlos laughed with a dismissive wave.

“And don’t worry about not finishing it all, the scraps all go to a pig farm nearby,” Jay explained while cutting into what eerily appeared to be a pork chop.

“As long as you’re not a part of the clean plate club no one’s going to get mad,” Carlos added. There was a chorus of snickers around the table.

“What’s the clean plate club?” I asked, sensing that I was missing out on some kind of joke.
“It’s just Ben’s stupid little attempt to get people to not waste food. No one actually takes it seriously,” Jay explained, stuffing food unceremoniously into his mouth.

“Except Ben,” Evie added, graciously accepting her plate from Doug, who had just arrived.

“Ben as in King Ben?” I inquired, eyeing the bright red and green fruits that Doug had placed between Evie and me.

“The one and only,” came a gentle voice from behind me.

The boys at the table suddenly became uncharacteristically quiet, clearly hoping they had not been caught trash-talking the King’s ideas.

I looked over my shoulder, and, from what I had seen on the few TV channels we could get on The Isle, it had to be him. He was tall with dirty blonde hair and a sweet, boyish smile. His soft green eyes seemed to linger on me longer than necessary. A hand was extended to me, so I took it because that was what I was supposed to do. His hands were unexpectedly soft, not rough like Jay’s or Carlos’. I wondered if it was because he never had to lift a finger; what a life that would be.

“Mal,” he greeted with a bow. It felt much too formal for the middle of the quad. Apparently, it was, because our table was garnering attention once more.

I awkwardly nodded my head a little, not wanting to offend him, but feeling way too weird about the situation to complete a proper bow.

“How was your morning? I appointed Evie to you, so I trust it has been going well?” he asked with a smile.

His hands never left mine, and I felt oddly trapped. “Uh, yeah,” I muttered before clearing my throat. “As good as it can go, I guess,” I offered.

“You know she’s well taken care of,” Evie interrupted, a strangely challenging look in her eyes that felt out of place, given the situation.
“But of course! Who better to welcome our honored guest than my loyal advisor?” he exclaimed, and my eyebrows raised in surprise.

I was not sure if I was more shocked to be referred to as an honored guest or to hear that Evie held such a high position in the royal court. My hands were finally freed, and I resisted the urge to wipe them on my jeans.

“You just let me know if you need anything,” he urged, gaze genuine.

I nodded again, giving him a polite smile.

“Have a good day, guys!”

I stood in place for a while as he left, unsure how to recover from the unexpected attention. Soon enough, fingers threaded through mine, and my body was being guided back into my seat.

“But of course! Who better to welcome our honored guest than my loyal advisor?” Jay mocked quietly, wearing a sickeningly saccharine smile. Carlos cracked up, and Evie rolled her eyes good-naturedly at the duo.

“Come on, Mal; I want you to try these!” she declared, grabbing one of the red and green fruits from the bowl.

“What is it?” I asked, eyeing the food as she brought it up to my lips. It felt childish being fed like a baby bird, but the discomfort quickly dissipated as the fruit entered my mouth. I could feel my already large eyes widen comically, and my eyebrows jumped up at the taste. It was so fresh and flavorful, and I was fully certain in that moment that it was my new favorite food. The feeling of soft fingers brushing against my lips nearly slipped my mind.

“Strawberries, M. They’re strawberries.”

Chapter End Notes

As always, please let me know what you liked and what I can improve on! Feel free to also post theories about what you think will happen next; I’d love to hear them! :D
Chapter Notes

I’m on spring break now, so I’m hoping to get a couple chapters done this week for you all! I hope you all are liking this as much as I’m enjoying writing it! Without further ado, the rest of Mal’s first day!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When the bell indicating the start of my next class rang, I sunk down into my chair and let gravity cradle my head.

“Eat too much?” Evie laughed, and I subtly opened one eye and glanced at her. Her eyebrow was quirked, and a smirk was plastered on her face.

My eye closed once more to hide the lie; I knew she would have easily found it there. “I’m part dragon; I can eat, like, twice my bodyweight,” I bluffed. In truth, she was right. I felt like my stomach might actually explode. I was definitely not used to eating even remotely large amounts of food; there just wasn’t enough of it on The Isle to be greedy. I couldn’t help it, though; the food was so incredible. Even if the customs were stupid and the people uptight, it was worth staying in Auradon for the cuisine alone. I was never eating fish or rotting fruits and vegetables again.

“Mhmm, whatever you say,” Evie hummed, not convinced in the slightest.

“Welcome back to Auradon University, students! I hope your summer went well!” A short, older lady announced. I recognized her immediately as one of the fairies that raised Aurora; as if my mother would ever let me forget them.

“Peachy,” I muttered from the back row, earning a snicker from one of the students that happened to hear me.

“I am Merryweather, the professor for Life Skills Without Magic 101, so if you’re in the wrong class, feel free to exit now,” she continued kindly.

My feet itched to take the offer. “Life skills without magic? What the hell kind of class is that?” I whispered, leaning into Evie’s space.
“Did you even read your schedule?” Evie chastised. One look at my face and the answer was clear.

“Why would I learn life skills without magic when I do have magic? This is stupid! Besides, I’m finally out of the barrier; shouldn’t I be learning how to use magic?” I grumbled while the professor passed out the cymbal busses or whatever the hell they were called.

“Not everyone has magic, Mal. Besides, it’ll be fun! I signed up just so that we could have the class together,” she insisted.

The breath from my dramatic sigh nearly sent my paper flying to the ground. A soft hand encased mine, and I looked over to its owner. Her kind smile began to convince me that maybe class wouldn’t be so bad.

* * *

“See, was that really that terrible?” Evie prompted, poking my arm as we exited the classroom at the bell’s signal.

“Excruciating,” I claimed with a teasing smirk. Sure, the class had been astonishingly boring, but the pleasurable tickle as Evie played with my fingers and traced patterns on my arm had made it bearable. I didn’t even grumble when I heard mention of atrocities like ‘cooking’ and ‘responsible decision making’, her ministrations putting me into some sort of serene trance.

“You are such a liar,” Evie accused fondly, blue locks bouncing around as she shook her head.

She didn’t buy it at all, and I didn’t blame her; I was practically purring throughout the hour.

“Oh, come on, Mal; class with Evie isn’t that bad,” Doug voiced, jogging a little to catch up to us.

“I was kidding,” I admitted, and his cheeks reddened. Did he actually think I was serious?

“Oh, right; Of course,” he stuttered. “So, what’s your next class?” he asked, apparently trying to
salvage the conversation. Oh, Audradonians, always so polite.

“Don’t know, don’t care,” I stated, and he chuckled nervously.

“It’s Grammar,” Evie offered, turning back to me. “Maybe after the semester you’ll be able to complete a full sentence,” she teased, her tongue poking out between her perfect teeth in obvious amusement.

All of the color drained from Doug’s face. I couldn’t help but laugh at his obliviousness; as if I would lash out at Evie over some lame insult. I briefly wondered how much she had told him about the two years following the birthday incident. For my sake, I had hoped it was less than she apparently shared with Audrey.

“Mal!” Evie urged as if I had not been listening.

All right, maybe I had zoned out.

“Your class is here,” she informed me, nodding her head in the direction of the open door. Inside, a gaggle of young faces could be seen. As soon as they caught sight of purple hair entering the room their expressions shifted to horror. They knew full well who my mother was and my reputation to back it. A few of them scrambled out of the back row as I approached. I tossed my backpack carelessly onto the table.

“See you after class!” Evie exclaimed with a little wave. Even Doug offered me a pleasant smile.

A heavy sigh escaped my throat, and I assumed my trademark slouch. Most of the students were purposefully avoiding my gaze, but a few couldn’t help their mindless gawking. I concentrated until I could feel my eyes glowing, and I was not disappointed. Some of them muttered some form of a cry, one dropped all of his materials, and one looked like he might have even peed his pants. I chuckled darkly; at least I wouldn’t be bothered.

* * *

My heart leapt into my throat and adrenaline coursed through my body as a blaring noise startled me. Green eyes darted around the room only to find students calmly packing their supplies into their backpacks and the professor beginning to erase the chalkboard. I must have fallen asleep, I realized,
and I sighed with relief. An untouched cymbal-bus started back at me from my table, and I shoved it into my backpack with a loud crinkle.

Before I had even made it to the doorway, I caught sight of familiar blue. An incredulous laugh escaped my lips. “Okay, either your crazy giraffe legs allow you to cover great distances in a short amount of time, or you’re using magic to get to me so quickly,” I accused, squinting my eyes at her accusingly.

“Wow, a compound sentence! You must have been paying attention in class,” Evie teased.

“Don’t change the subject,” I shot back, following her into the busy hallway.

“Hush, M; you know magic isn’t allowed on school grounds outside of class without explicit permission from the King,” she said quietly before winking at me.

“The King, who you just happen to be the personal advisor to,” I added.

A smirk remained on her face, but her lips were sealed on the topic.

I was definitely intrigued at the thought of more villain kids with magical abilities, but I would drop it for now. I’d get it out of her someday. “Where’s Doug?” I asked, changing the subject to get her to respond.

“Band. He has to get there early because he plays practically every instrument and needs the extra time to get them ready,” she explained. “He’s hoping to be a teacher’s assistant next year, but he’s totally got it in the bag.”

I nodded, feigning interest. At least Doug and Evie weren’t a package deal for the entire day. “So, what dreadful class do I need to sit through next?” I inquired, following Evie’s lead through the mazes that were Auradon University’s halls. When I didn’t receive an immediate answer, I began to worry. “Evie?” I goaded, but she continued walking and pointedly ignoring me.

“Um, just Remedial Goodness 101,” she muttered, but my dragon hearing easily picked it up. My feet refused to move, and I spun around in the direction that we had been coming from.
“Mal,” Evie groaned, catching me by the sleeve of my worn leather jacket and turning me back around. “It’s required for all the villain kids when they first arrive,” she explained quietly, careful not to make a scene in the middle of the hallway.

I could already feel my body heating up in anger. “That’s absolute bullshit!” I exclaimed, pulling my arm out of her grasp. “What, did they just make that shit up when they brought you guys over?” I asked with a scoff.

Evie’s body stiffened, and she averted her eyes.

I guess they did. “I’m not going,” I announced, crossing my arms in defiance. Students were definitely starting to stare. I guess I had to get used to being the center of attention.

“Please, Mal; Don’t make it a big deal. It’s not like we were brought up on decency and benevolence on The Isle; it’s not a half bad idea,” she spoke quietly, her eyes pleading.

A mixture between a scoff and a growl rolled out of my lips. “Decency and benevolence?” I deadpanned, hoping my ears were deceiving me but well aware of the great improbability of that. My eyes were glowing at the audacity. I was gently pulled into a separate hallway, one that was suspiciously devoid of activity.

Evie turned back to me and sighed. “Mal, please; it’s just a precaution,” she begged, cupping my face with her hands. “I don’t care what anyone thinks, M; I know you’re not evil,” she said, looking right into my inner dragon and challenging it with not aggression but compassion. “Just think of it as an easy A, okay? It’ll be over before you know it,” she claimed.

I don’t know if it was the verbal assurance or the distraction of her thumb gently tracing my lower lip, but my muscles started to loosen and my eyes dimmed. “I’m sorry,” I mumbled, suddenly feeling self-conscious. If I was reacting this strongly before even taking the class, perhaps its lessons were necessary.

“It wasn’t easy for any of us when we first got here, but at least we were still young and malleable. Hell, Carlos was just eight! You’re almost twenty, Mal. It’s going to be a lot harder for you to adjust.”

Evie’s words were like a caress to my racing heart. She was right. The culture change was a huge shift, especially when I had become so accustomed to life on The Isle. The cold air hit my cheeks as
her hands left my face and traveled down to my hands.

“Now, let’s get you to class before you make a bad first impression,” she suggested, and I nodded my head in reply.

Thankfully, the classroom wasn’t that far off, and I was the first one to arrive. A single table sat in front of a chalkboard, making it clear that there was no room for slacking off. I took the middle seat and sunk down into it as Evie hung my backpack onto the back of my chair.

“You’re going to have a hunchback worse than Quasimodo if you slouch like that all the time,” Evie chided as she got out my notebook for me.

“Good,” I answered, closing my eyes and enjoying the silence before Uma and Harry inevitably showed up and ruined it. Sensing a gaze, I opened my eyes to find Evie looming over my chair. Even upside down she was the most beautiful creature I had ever seen, the light streaming in from the floor-to-ceiling windows giving her a lovely glow that my fingers itched to capture on paper.

“Please behave,” she asked, voice steady but eyes conveying the seriousness of her request.

I had to close my eyes. “I’m not going to burn the classroom down, E,” I sighed. It was the best I could do.

“Okay,” she conceded. I felt a soft, warm pressure on my forehead, but in a second, it was gone. “I’ll see you after class so I can show you to your dorm room,” she said before finally heading out.

The next pressure I felt was much less gentle and directed at the back of my head. I didn’t have to open my eyes to know who it was. There were only two other companions on my trip to Auradon this morning, after all.

“Shrimpy,” I acknowledged.

“Bertha,” came Uma’s reply.

“Harry!” exclaimed Harry.
“Where the hell is everybody?” Uma asked, scanning the classroom as if there were terrified Auradonians hiding in the corners. Which, with the three of us in one room, wasn’t as unlikely as I had first considered it to be.

“Didn’t you hear? This is a VK-only class. Remedial Goodness 101,” I replied with a sarcastic smile.

“Remedial Goodness? What the actual fuck?” she drawled, pretty lips exposing her teeth in a scowl.

“That’s bullshite,” Harry exclaimed, the vibrations from the hook he held in his hand, much like his father’s, colliding with the table and making my pencil roll into my lap.

“That’s what I said,” I agreed, placing the utensil back on top of my notebook. “Evie said it was easy, though,” I added, more tentatively than I would have liked to.

“Huh, that’s funny,” Uma laughed unkindly, taking a seat to my right and throwing her braided teal hair over her shoulder.

My eyebrows furrowed defensively. “What’s that supposed to mean?” I asked, glaring at her.

“We just heard some juicy things about her, that’s all,” Harry supplied offhandedly, but clearly loving the drama of the situation.

My frown deepened as I glanced between them. “Like what?” I growled.

Uma finally met my gaze. “Ugh, look at you; she’s already got you wrapped around her finger, doesn’t she?” she scoffed, studying my face.

“She’s a goner,” Harry mumbled dramatically before draping a muscular arm around my shoulders.

“No, she doesn’t,” I claimed, feeling my face heating up despite myself.
“You’ve got candy apple red lipstick on your face, dumbass, and that is not Harry’s color,” Uma replied.

“Mmm, no it’s not,” Harry hummed in agreement.

I furiously scrubbed at my forehead with my sweaty hand. If anyone knew the person I had grown to be, it was Uma. Many years ago, I had practiced my villainy by picking on her, Harry, and Gil. But when Jay, Evie, and Carlos were summoned to Auradon when I was nine, I had no one. The fear of being alone drove me to make amends with Uma and Harry, claiming that together we could be an unstoppable force. And, for all intents and purposes, we were. Harry was quick to accept me and was quite open with his admiration and affection. Uma’s exterior revealed only tough love, but it was glaringly obvious that she really cared for me. Their love was the only kind I had received on The Isle, and for that, I was eternally thankful.

“Look,” Uma said, more softly this time. “Just be careful, all right?” She refused to meet my eyes. “If anyone’s gonna be puttin’ the hurt on you, it’s me,” she added, but I knew it was a front.

“You can take the girl off of The Isle but you can’t take The Isle out of the girl,” Harry mused, using his reflection in his hook to fix his eyeliner.

I didn’t have much time to dwell on it as Fairy Godmother’s nasally voice screeched my current process to a halt. Quite literally.

“Oh, gods,” Uma muttered in distaste at the sound.

“Oh my goodness, kids; I’m so sorry I’m late!” Fairy Godmother apologized, hastily approaching the front of the room. “We haven’t used this wing in so long, I had a hard time finding it!” she exclaimed with a saccharine smile and a straight-up giggle.

Uma leaned closer to me. “Is she always like this?” she inquired. “I thought she just had too much coffee this morning.”

“Welcome to Auradon!” I replied, feigning a smile.

* * *
Remedial Goodness 101 turned out to be even worse than I had expected. Every time Fairy Godmother asked a new question I was more and more convinced that they had not changed the curriculum to fit older students. The child-like wording and glaringly obvious correct answers of each inquiry were offensive at best. The promise I had made to Evie about not burning the classroom down became increasingly difficult as the class progressed. Eventually, the relief of sweet release came in the form of a bell. I don’t think I’ve ever seen Uma get up so fast, and I had once put a rotting squid onto her chair when we were little.

“See you kids tomorrow!” Fairy Godmother chimed, waving at us like we were toddlers.

I kept my clenched fists hidden in my pockets as I hastily made my way to the exit. As soon as Harry opened the door for us, Evie was standing there in the doorway. His face lit up in excitement.

“How the hell did you get here so damn fast?” Uma grumbled, moving to stand between Evie and me protectively.

“A magician never reveals her secrets,” Evie replied politely before holding my gaze. “Are you ready to go, M?”

Uma looked like she might vomit from the mention of the nickname. “And just where do you think you’re dragging Mal to?” Uma asked, furrowing her brows and crossing her arms.

“I was assigned to show Mal around; I’m going to take her to her dorm room,” Evie said sternly, daring Uma to challenge her.

“Of course you were!” Harry exclaimed, looking positively thrilled at the whole situation.

“Actually, princess, my information sheet says that Mal here is my roommate, and I was in our dorm room earlier today during lunch. Looks like she doesn’t need any of your help after all,” Uma said, batting her eyelashes at the blue-haired girl sweetly.

“Uma,” I started, but Evie cut me off.

“No, M, it’s fine. I’ve been hanging around you all day, I’m sure you could use a break,” she said,
eyes conveying a sliver of hurt. “I’ll see you in gym in the morning.”

Harry waved goodbye to her before she turned around and disappeared down the hallway.

“You didn’t have to do that,” I chastised Uma, but she just shrugged it off.

“She said it herself; you could use a break,” she pointed out. “Now come on, you’ve got to see our room. It’s, like, like size of Fish and Chips,” she claimed excitedly, comparing the room to her mother’s restaurant back on The Isle.

My eyes widened in disbelief. Now that was something I had to see. “Alright,” I relented. “Lead the way!”

It appeared as though Uma and Harry had a much easier time maneuvering the hallways than me. Then again, I had been somewhat distracted. Students gave us a wide berth as we walked, but it was nothing I didn’t expect. “How in the world are you not getting lost?” I inquired, following the two as they sauntered along, looking quite at home for people who were just plopped onto a completely different land. “Unless this is all an elaborate trap, and I’m just following you to my death.”

Uma smirked. “There’s a map on the back of your schedule, idiot.”

“And if pirates are good at anything, it’s reading a map,” Harry added.

He had a point. I hadn’t even bothered glancing at the information I received upon arrival this morning. But I hadn’t needed to; Evie had been there every step of the way. “So,” I drawled. “Who was assigned to show you guys around?” I asked, curiosity getting the best of me.

“Some vanilla douchebag whose last name was literally ‘Charming’. Can you believe that shit?” Uma asked rhetorically.

That explained why they had to figure out how to get around all by themselves. That airhead probably didn’t give them any useful information.

“At least we all got to look at pretty faces all day,” Harry sighed wistfully.
“Pretty faces who suck,” Uma clarified.

“Oh, I sure hope he does,” Harry hummed, a sly smirk in place.

“Ew, Harry, can you not? I do not need that visual,” Uma begged.

“Chad Charming? Yeah, I had the pleasure of meeting him earlier,” I admitted, rolling my eyes. “I considered eating him.”

Uma threw her head back and legitimately cackled.

I smirked at the sight, loving seeing her so carefree even here in Auradon. The students in the hallway did not have the same reaction, clearly disturbed that a newly arrived villain kid appeared so delighted.

“Me, too,” Harry purred.

Uma’s laughs quickly morphed into dramatic gagging. “Okay, that’s it! We’re going to our room! Goodbye, Harry!” she yelled, dragging me by my jacket sleeve up a set of stairs.

Various vocalizations could be heard down below, no doubt Harry scaring students just for the hell of it. I shook my head fondly at his antics.

Our dorm room was all the way at the end of the hallway. It made sense; I would put my potentially problematic students far away from everyone else, too.

There was a door handle with a key slot, but Uma opened it up without a hassle.

“No key?” I inquired, wondering if the staff really didn’t trust us that much.

“Oh, we got keys, but I don’t have the time or patience for that shit. It ain’t like anyone’s gonna try
to fuck with our stuff,” she explained, and I nodded in understanding.

She was right. I’d probably lose my key anyway. Upon entering the dorm room I was impressed but slightly disappointed. There was a set of beds, end tables, wardrobes, and desks, but it was certainly not rivaling Ursula’s Fish and Chips in size.

Uma must have sensed my lackluster reaction. “Okay, fine. It’s not as big as the restaurant, but c’mon; it’s pretty damn nice,” she urged, flopping down into her bed and nuzzling into the puffy blankets in a very un-villain-like fashion.

All of my clothing and my few personal belongings from The Isle were neatly placed on top of my bed, so there was no room for me. I didn’t feel like moving it. Naturally, I walked to Uma’s bed and unceremoniously dropped right on top of her.

“Ugh, Mal!” she groaned, trying to push me off.

I made sure to relax completely and call upon my inner dragon for added weight, just to make it that much more difficult.

After a few minutes of struggling, she gave up with a sigh. “You’re lucky you’re so damn tiny!” Her arms snaked around my back, and she began to relax as well. “I hate you,” she muttered unconvincingly.

“I hate you, too,” I responded with a smile, as I had many times before.

“Ugh!” a scoff echoed from the hallway. “You guys are gay, too? Are there any straight people in Auradon anymore?” a familiar voice cried in annoyance. “At least close the door!”

“I don’t want to hear that whore, do me a favor and close the damn door,” Uma recited. The door, amazingly, slammed shut.

My mouth dropped open in shock.

Uma grinned with pride.
“How did you-“

“Please, Mal, do you really think you need a spell book to do magic? You have magic coursing through your veins,” she insisted, grabbing my arms for effect. “Just make up a shitty rhyme, and let your instincts do the rest,” she explained.

Well that definitely gave me something to think about. “You know magic is forbidden on school grounds outside of class without explicit permission from the king,” I informed her half-jokingly, resting my chin on her chest.

“Whatever, Mal; I do what I want,” she declared, moving her arms back to hold me tightly.

“What if Audrey tells Fairy Godmother?” I goaded.

“Who?” Uma asked boredly.

“The girl outside, Audrey”

“Bitch please, I heard her asking Fairy Godmother’s own daughter to magically fix her hair for her this morning. I’m sure she won’t mind.”

Now that was an interesting tidbit. Now that I thought about it, the resemblance between Jane and Fairy Godmother was uncanny.

“I can’t believe we have to put up with them all year,” Uma added, and my head cocked.


“No, Audrey and Evie. Their dorm is right across the hall, and they never shut up,” she claimed.

I hoped she could not feel my heart beginning to race at the information. “How would you know?” I
asked, eyeing her suspiciously.

“I may or may not have taken a nap break during fourth hour,” Uma said, smirk revealing that she definitely meant the former.

I gasped in faux shock. “Uma, Uma, Uma,” I tutted. “Already broke two school rules on day one!”

“Please, they’re lucky I went to any of my classes,” she exclaimed, and our bodies shook together with our shared laughter.

“True. If Evie wouldn’t have been on my ass, I probably would have joined you,” I admitted.

Uma’s smile was swiftly replaced with a frown.

I threw her a pointed look, one that she fled from.

“Uma, would you just tell me what your problem with Evie is?” I requested with urgency.

She didn’t reply right away, searching the room for some kind of clue on what to say. “Look, if you want to make amends with Evie, don’t let me stop you,” Uma finally conceded. “Just be careful, alright? Knowing your stupid ass, you’ll get hurt and never admit it,” she accused, and I punched her upper arm playfully at the insult. “That’s more like it,” she replied with a soft smile and a small chuckle. “Don’t ever lose your fight, Mal. It’s all that we’ve got.”

Chapter End Notes

As always, please tell me what you liked and what I can improve on! Thank you for reading!
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

As you will quickly notice, the entirety of this chapter is past events, Mal's childhood memories. I'm sorry that I don't have anything current for you all for this chapter, but I assure you it will be interesting to read and integral to understanding the characters as they are now. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

All around me was darkness, infinite and green, like my mother. All around me was cold and unforgiving, like how I was raised to act. All around me was pressure, squeezing the life out of me until I did what she wanted. There were many times I had felt like giving up, like fighting was useless. It was never more true than in that moment. But then, everything changed.

A ti grip encased my tiny wrist, and I was being pulled upward. Pulled towards the surface, where I could finally breathe. Pulled towards the sun, which would bask me in light and warm my very soul. That’s what she did for me. That’s what Evie did for me.

It wasn’t easy; my eyes, throat, and lungs burned from the salty sting of the sea, frustrated she had not managed to take me. My muscles cramped and my teeth chattered from her cold embrace.

“You’re okay; it’s okay,” a soft voice assured as I expelled the rest of the unforgiving sea from my body.

How could someone say that? It was never okay, not on The Isle. Warm arms around my shoulders felt blazing and painful against my icy skin.

“W-w-what are you-” I managed to get out before my lungs clenched and I experienced another coughing fit.

“Shhh, you swallowed too much water; you’re going to hurt yourself! Just breathe, in and out,” the small voice directed, and I did as it said despite my discomfort.

“G-get o-off me,” I argued weakly, barely able to speak, but my body was in no position to fend off the strong grip of my savior.
“No! We need to hug, or you’re going to get hypothermia!” the voice commanded, and my head lolled against the body holding me.

“S-s-sounds fake,” I muttered, my body shivering violently against my will.

“It’s not fake! I read about it!” the voice defended. “It’s when you get too cold and then you die; just sit still!”

My eyes were heavy and still stung from the salt, but I pried them open anyway. At first, all I saw was blue. Dark blue hair: stringy, slick, and dripping. Dark blue clothes: shriveled and sticking tightly to her body. The girl was small, but still much bigger than me. That wasn’t saying much, though; I was always smaller than everyone else. I wondered how she could read if she was near my age; my mother had never bothered to teach me. Most villain parents never bothered to teach their kids.

Then she glanced down at me. Her eyes were brown, but also kind of red. Like the really good apples you could only find if you went to the food drop off station on delivery day. Her lips pulled into a shaky smile when our gazes met, and I momentarily wondered if I had, indeed, died. My heart skipped a beat, and I stopped breathing for a while, but then body convulsed from the cold once more to remind me that I was still alive. A stray water drop fell from the girl’s nose, and my eyes squinted in realization.

“Y-you’re all wet, t-too,” I noted, but she just shook her head in reply. Something shiny in her hair glinted into my eyes, and I closed them instinctively.

“We’ll be okay, we just need to warm up,” she said, but her eyes told me she was worried, too. She shifted her body so that I was sitting in her lap and her arms and legs were wrapped around me.

I couldn’t see her face now, but I could feel her body begin to tremble. It was fall, and there was no way the sun alone would shine bright enough to save us. How had this little girl jumped into the sea knowing she might die? Why had this little girl jumped into the sea to save me, someone she had never even met? That was certainly not the evil thing to do.

Inspired by her bravery, I decided to be good, too. I took some deep breaths and concentrated until I could feel my dragon within waking up. I focused so hard that my teeth hurt from being clenched so tightly, but eventually, I felt it. I felt my dragon heat creeping through my veins.
I didn’t tell her that I was part dragon. I didn’t tell her that this was my first hug, either. I just sat there in a puddle on the dock, clinging to the girl who had saved me as I did my best to return the favor.

* * *

“I’ll be the princess, of course, and you can be the prince!” Evie exclaimed, smile blinding and eyes twinkling with excitement.

My little nose wrinkled. “Ew, I don’t want to be the prince!” I complained.

“Come on, Mal, you have to be the prince! Who else is going to save me?” Evie whined, lower lip jutting out adorably.

“Not all princesses have to be saved, Evie,” I urged. “How about I’m the dragon that protects the castle?” I proposed, taking her hand to try to convince her further.

The blue-haired girl’s eyebrows furrowed as she considered my request. “Okay!” she agreed with a toothy grin.

We spent the whole morning building the castle out of various boxes and ratty sheets. Finally, it was fit for our game. Evie perched herself in the makeshift tower and admired her reflection in a small, broken mirror she had gotten from her mother.

I crawled around on top of the brick walls on all fours, scanning the perimeter for danger. After padding around and doing a few mighty roars, a scuffle could be heard just outside the alley. It was quiet, but it was no match for my dragon hearing. I dug my claws into the wall and waited. As soon as I saw movement, I took off, flying down to attack the intruder who dared endanger my princess. The landing did not go as smoothly as planned, and I ended up in a heap on top of Jay.

“Mal!” Jay cried, pushing me off of him. I had jumped on him plenty of times before; I knew he was fine.

“And the mighty dragon defeats the enemy, saving the princess!” I yelled, doing another roar just for show.
“My hero!” Evie swooned, looking down on us happily from the tower. That is, until her eyes went wide. “Mal, you’re hurt!” she shouted, scrambling to get down to us.

I examined my hands and knees, which were badly scraped and covered in a layer of dirt and blood. I would be okay; I had had worse.

“She’s fine,” Jay grumbled, not bothering to brush the dirt off of his clothes.

Small hands took mine as Evie looked over the damage. The next thing I knew, there were two soft lips on mine. I stood stock still in shock. My stomach was doing flips, and my heart felt like it had gotten two sizes bigger.

“What’d you do that for?” Jay asked, scowling at the thought of sharing mouth cooties.

“If you kiss someone when they get hurt they’ll get better faster,” she replied matter-of-factly.

“Sounds fake,” Jay mumbled.

“Nuh-uh! My nanny said so! She always kisses my boo-boos!” Evie cried.

“I don’t see a boo-boo on Mal’s face,” Jay challenged, eyebrows raised. He had her there.

“Well I’m not going to kiss her boo-boo, Jay, that’s gross!” Evie argued weakly. “Come on, Mal; let’s go play doctor and clean you up,” she said, pulling me by the wrist.

“Hey, wait for me!” Jay called.

I had never heard of anyone kissing boo-boos to make them better. But the feeling I felt when she kissed me was surely magic of some kind, so who was I to question it.
“Why aren’t you swimming?” I inquired as Carlos approached me wearing his usual black, red, and white attire. The freckle-spattered boy sat down in the sand to my right and started running his hands through it.

Evie squealed off in the distance as Jay splashed her good-naturedly with ocean water. They had been playing in the shallows happily for the past couple of minutes.

“I was at Ursula’s Fish and Chips and saw catfish on the menu. I asked Uma if it was real, and she said they meow and try to scratch you when you catch ‘em and gut ‘em,” he explained nervously.

“Oh?” I said, still confused as to why that would stop him from swimming.

“Uma said there’s dogfish, too,” he added, and the picture was complete. His mother, Cruella De Vil, had raised him on the lie that dogs were diabolical; he had been afraid of them his whole life.

“Ah,” I replied, imagining cats and dogs with fins and gills, just swimming around in the water. I thought it sounded cute, something I would never admit out loud, but with Carlos’ phobia of dogs, I’m sure it was a terrifying thought for him. He didn’t have to ask me why I wasn’t swimming. I never did, not since the day I nearly drowned and Evie had saved me. Thank evil she had been taking private swimming lessons and was the best in her class, something she was always sure to mention when telling the story. I was not interested in private swimming lessons; land was just fine to me.

“Evie’s really pretty,” Carlos commented, and my thoughts were brought back to reality.

What an odd thing to say. Her mother claimed to be the fairest of them all, but I knew Evie easily outshined her. “Prettiest girl I’ve ever seen,” I supplied, feeling safe admitting it in front of Carlos.

“Yeah,” he said quietly, watching Jay and Evie as they swam around happily. “Do you,” he started, hands busying themselves with the sand more aggressively. “Do you think Jay is pretty, too?” he asked tentatively.

I cocked my head, studying Jay as he shook his head like a dog. “His hair is pretty, I guess,” I offered. It was the one thing he never got dirty, and it was definitely in better condition than my own. It maybe even rivaled Evie’s, but I would never say that with Evie so close by.
“Yeah,” Carlos agreed. “It is.”

* * *

“If you don’t want to play prince and princess with me then I’ll ask Jay or Carlos instead,” Evie warned, crossing her arms and lifting her eyebrows in challenge.

“Okay, okay, fine. I’ll play prince and princess with you,” I quickly agreed, the thought of losing my time with Evie too much to bear.

“Yay!” Evie exclaimed, jumping up and down and clapping excitedly.

I chuckled at the sight. Who was I kidding; I’d do anything to see her happy.

“Okay, I’m going to go be trapped up in the tower, and you have to come rescue me!” she explained, but it was unnecessary. That’s how it always went, wasn’t it? Her little footsteps echoed as she hastily climbed the staircase up to her bedroom. Her mother was in town, so it was one of the few times we could play in her castle undisturbed. It was big, but not as big as my mother’s castle. It was nice, though; it felt more like a home. The house goblins were certainly much more welcoming than the tall, rude, and unfamiliar henchmen that patrolled my mother’s house. I even knew a few of the house goblins by name at this point.

“Lady Mal?”

I was shaken from my stupor.

“Do you need anything?” Fable asked expectedly. She was the head house goblin in charge of caring for Evie, something the Evil Queen couldn’t be bothered with unless it involved girly lessons or showing her off like some kind of treasure.

“Um,” I grumbled, trying to remember what I was up to. “Evie and I are playing prince and princess, and I’m the prince, so I’m trying to find a sword and a shield,” I explained.
The goblin exposed her pointy teeth in a kind smile and nodded in understanding. “I think I can find something to suit your needs,” she hummed before scuffling off to the kitchen.

I waited for what felt like forever, but eventually she returned, rolling pin and serving platter in hand.

“Thanks,” I whispered, still not used to saying it out loud. My mother taught me to never say ‘please’ or ‘thank you’, but Evie’s mother had very strict rules about manners.

“And any time,” she replied before gasping, looking to something behind me in alarm.

My heart raced as I turned around, rolling pin raised in preparation. Four house goblins were scattered throughout the living room, pillows tied onto their bodies and various kitchen utensils poised at the ready.

“Oh no, who will save the princess?” Fable asked dramatically, a playful glint in her eye. “If only there were a brave prince, or maybe another princess, to help!”

My eyebrows furrowed, and a smirk crept along my face. “Ahh!” I yelled in a fierce battle cry, chasing the armed house goblins around the room and smacking them lightly in the pillows in an epic sword fight battle.

We even hopped on the furniture and used it for cover, something they surely would have gotten a beating for if the Evil Queen had been home. One by one, the goblins would fall to the floor, clutching their battle wounds in faux-agony. “I yield!” some of them cried.

I smiled brightly in victory and sheathed my sword by stuffing it between my belt and my pants before beginning my climb to the tower. No wonder Evie felt like a trapped princess, her room was so far away from everything else. By the time I got to the top, I was a little out of breath. The door was already open, so I tiptoed inside. There, lying on the bed as still as a statue, was Evie.

“Did you fall asleep?” I asked with a snicker.

“Ugh, Mal! I’m the princess! I’ve been spelled to sleep forever, duh!” she explained in frustration before expertly schooling her features and pretending to sleep again. She was quite good at it and didn’t even crack a smile as I walked closer to her.
I knew that fairy tale; her mother had told us billions of times. I knew what I was supposed to do.

After that day, I never complained about playing prince and princess again.

* * *

Every time I saw the crown, I was more and more convinced that it was perfect. It was absolutely covered in sparkling jewels, sure to catch the attention of anyone near it. There was a large, beautiful sapphire in the middle, the same shade of Evie’s hair, and it was flanked by two smaller but equally gorgeous amethysts, like the purple of my dragon scales. It had to be fate. It had to be made just for me to give to her.

She didn’t tell me that her birthday was coming up, but she didn’t have to. Her mother had been planning the party for months, claiming nothing was too grand for her princess.

I held the same sentiment, and vowed to present the crown to my princess on her birthday. I spent days coming up with a foolproof way to steal it, and finally, I was ready. I strolled into the shop, hands in my pockets; I was the picture of nonchalance. My drawing pencil conveniently fell from my pocket, and I leaned down to pick it up. I closed my eyes and concentrated, feeling the heat of my dragon quickly rising to the surface. I coughed, shooting out a small flame into a wicker basket, and stood back up, continuing my shopping. Then I waited.

Soon enough, the entire wicker basket was on fire, and the store owner sniffed loudly. His eyes shot to the small stack of smoke, and he ran frantically to put out the flames.

This was my chance. My fingers gripped the crown protectively with one hand, and my other hand flew out to the back door of the shop. The doorknob didn’t budge. My throat went dry as my window of time shortened. I threw all my weight into it frantically, but a large hand encased my wrist and fastened some sort of bracelet to it.

“Where do you think you’re going?” the shopkeeper growled with a thick accent, and my heart leapt into my throat.

I tried to summon my inner dragon to do something, but she was strangely dormant.
“I don’t think so, little dragon,” he snarled, tapping the bracelet with his huge finger. “State-of-the-art stuff right there, blocks even inner magic. I paid a pretty penny for that,” he explained.

My pulse thundered so hard I feared I may crack a rib.

“A thief and an arsonist? Maleficent must be so proud. I’m sure she won’t mind if I teach you a lesson,” he bellowed, prying the crown from my tiny fingers and putting it back in place before grabbing the back of my neck with his other hand. He marched me over to the store counter and bent me over it. I knew other merchants and shoppers in the streets were watching, but I couldn’t stop the tears from blurring my vision. Mother had told me time and time again to never cry and that fear was for the weak. But I wasn’t scared of what the shop owner would do to me as his hand grasped a leather whip he had kept conveniently behind the counter. No, it couldn’t be worse than what mother and her henchmen had already done to me in the past. I lamented the loss of the crown, the perfect crown that was made just for Evie. Nothing else was worthy of her splendor, and I had botched the job. How would Evie ever love me now?

* * *

I lay curled up in my bed, my single pillow soaked with my tears. My back stung painfully, but a few more stripes added to the collection was not too bad. It could have been much, much worse. Suddenly, I could feel eyes on me, and I knew my mother was there. A small, blunt object collided with my shoulder, and I looked down to examine it. It was a tiny box.

Mother’s face gave away nothing, and she nodded at it. The box easily opened and inside was a set of colors.

I looked up at her looming figure in confusion.

“For your first dragon flame. Very impressive for being inside the barrier,” she praised. Well, as much as my mother could praise, her face remaining expressionless. “Don’t get caught next time,” she commented before leaving my room once more.

I couldn’t stop the smile from spreading across my face. Mother was not particularly thrilled with my infatuation with art, thinking it to be a completely useless endeavor, so to be given such gifts was a rare occasion indeed. I immediately ran to my cupboard and grabbed out some cardboard I had collected from the streets, excited to try them out. When I peered inside the box once more and found an Evie blue pencil and a purple to match my hair, I knew what I was going to do. Even if I did not get the real crown for my princess, I could put all my love into making one.
I slaved away making the little cardboard crown, my sore wrist and my stinging stripes slowing me down but not enough to stop me. Nothing could stop me from giving Evie the best birthday present I could make.

* * *

Apparently, something could stop me from giving Evie the best birthday present I could make. That thing being the lack of an invitation to the party. I was past excitedly waiting for the mail goblin every day. I was past waiting for Evie to show up at our favorite spots and invite me in person. However, I was not past feeling devastated that I did not receive an invitation. Evie was more than just my best friend. She had saved my life in more ways than one, and I could not believe that she did not invite me to her party. I sniffled, cursing the tears that threatened to slide down my face.


She was right. I was going to go to the party anyway; maybe Evie had a reasonable explanation for breaking my heart. I retrieved the makeshift crown from my room and headed out the door. Mother was much too busy to walk with me, as always, but I knew the way to the Evil Queen’s castle like it was my own home. Sometimes, it was. My feet took me up the steps and I reached, on my tippy toes, to use the door knocker. To my utter disbelief, the Evil Queen herself answered the door. She never did such lowly tasks.

“What are you doing here? You weren’t invited,” she commented, eyebrows raised in disbelief. The cheerful sounds of children playing echoed throughout the big house behind her.

“I-I know, but I thought maybe it was a mistake or something? I brought a present,” I offered weakly, holding up the crown I had spent hours perfecting.

The Evil Queen looked at it disdainfully, lips curled into a scowl. “Oh, it wasn’t a mistake, my dear,” she claimed. “Evie doesn’t want you here. Evie doesn’t even like you. In fact, Evie doesn’t ever want to see you again. She’s much too good for you. Now go on,” she commanded, shooing me off of the doorstep with frantic, flicking wrists.

I backed up off the steps to escape her motions. My throat burned, and my eyes watered. “Um, c-could you give this to her anyway?” I asked, holding out the crown.
“Don’t stutter, dear, it’s so off-putting. She doesn’t want that trash. Come back if you have a present befitting of your future queen. Good day,” she dismissed, closing the doors with a bang.

I managed to make it all the way home, walking in a stupor the entire way there. It felt like I was in a dream, one where it was possible that Evie, my princess, didn’t love me anymore.

Once the heavy doors of my own castle closed and I was fully out of the public eye, I broke down. Loud sobbing reverberated through the walls, and my body collapsed against the door. I slid down it until I was but a heap of tears on the cold, hard floor. My heart clenched painfully, and my stomach lurched; I would have taken drowning over this feeling any day. I knew my mother didn’t love me; that was nothing new. I had never felt it, so it was not really a loss. All of the smiles, the hugs, the kisses from Evie – that was what love felt like. Now that her love was gone, it felt like someone had ripped a gaping hole into my body.

“Stop blubbering, it’s pathetic,” my mother chastised, no doubt following the sounds of my agony until she found me here. Her words only worsened my crying. In an entirely unexpected gesture, I felt two arms awkwardly applying pressure to my shoulders. Was mother actually trying to comfort me? “What happened?” she growled.

“She said she’s too good for me and doesn’t want to ever see me again; s-s-she doesn’t even like me,” I choked out between sobs.

“Evie?” mother asked incredulously before scoffing. “That pompous, manipulative little bitch is not worth your tears, Mal,” she seethed. “Nothing is! Do you hear me? You’re a dragon; the fiercest of creatures. It’s time you show her that.”

I could feel the dragon inside of me shifting and my eyes began to glow. The agony I felt slowly morphed and bubbled up into anger. I glared at the stupid cardboard crown and the childish optimism it represented. I spat on it, the material quickly igniting and turning into a pile of ash.

“That’s my girl,” mother purred.

Chapter End Notes

How is everyone holding up? Do you need a tissue? A hug? I hope that it didn't hurt too much!
As always, tell me what you liked and what I can improve on! Feel free to give me insights and what you think might happen next; I love reading them! Thank you for reading!
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

I honestly felt bad for the sad feels I bestowed upon you all last chapter, so here is the next chapter to make up for it! I hope you find it to be more uplifting!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Every night in Auradon was another dream, another memory of a time long ago. Some of them left me smiling throughout the day, and some violently woke me from my slumber with half-wrecked sobs. By the end of September, Uma had given up on magically cleaning the scorch marks above my bed from half-asleep fireballs of anger or agony. She never asked what woke me so fiercely. There was some kind of understanding between most villain kids like that. But she was able to provide me with some sappy hugs and sarcasm-laced sentiments, which was more than I could ever ask from her.

Most of my waking hours were, unfortunately, spent grappling with a little thing called responsibility. Who knew that attending class and actually completing the homework for it would take up so much time? Dragon Hall classes had been a breeze; Auradon University was effectively kicking my ass. I had been spending my entire afternoons swamped with work, and I didn’t have a lot of free time. It was a learning curve, for sure, but I was starting to get the hang of it. Little by little I would gain a few minutes of free time as I learned how to manage my schoolwork.

Sadly, many of my friends’ schedules were packed with various extracurricular activities. Carlos and Jay were in tourney, an Auradon-exclusive sport that the school was absolutely obsessed with. The whole team was training hard for some event called Homecoming. Evie, the co-captain of the cheerleading squad, was also expected to practice excessively in preparation for this day. She shared with me her dream of opening up her own business someday, and I didn’t doubt her ability to make that happen; it was only a matter of time as far as I was concerned. Even Uma and Harry had wedged themselves right into the student body, quickly taking up a sport called fencing, which I had gathered was some type of sword fighting for wimps. It turns out Gil was the team captain for that, and it wasn’t long before the ‘Sea Three’ were back at it, just like old times. And then there was me. I wasn’t a part of some lame after-school program or working myself to death in a team sport. Most of the students in Auradon Prep ignored me or avoided me, and I was fine with that. I had six amazing friends, and Doug, Lonnie, Jane, and even Audrey were beginning to warm up to me. That was enough for now. Maybe even too much.

“Je…touche! Je…..touche! Je-“
“I swear to evil, Uma, if you stick a tentacle into my ear one more time I will chop it up and serve it to the good people of Auradon,” I growled.

Being out of the barrier allowed Uma’s magic to absolutely flourish, and it didn’t take her long to realize that she, like her mother, held the power of transformation. Her soul animal being an octopus, it wasn’t out of the ordinary for a tentacle or two to assist her in her everyday activities – as long as teachers weren’t paying attention, that is. The student body was either too afraid of her or liked her too much to do anything about it. “You’re no fun, Mal,” Uma grumbled, falling back onto her bed with a dramatic sigh.

“Yeah, well, neither is homework, but I have to deal with it anyway,” I grumbled, forcefully closing my textbook with a frustrated sigh and rubbing my head.

“I don’t know what takes you so damn long anyway; you have such easy classes,” Uma claimed.

I scoffed angrily “Yeah, like what?”

“Gym, art, life skills; it’s not like you have to do homework for those, right?” she wondered.

“Try again,” I suggested, grabbing my sketchbook from my bed and tossing it over to her.

It landed unceremoniously on her stomach, and she stared at it momentarily before picking it up.

I sat on the edge of my windowsill, forehead pressed against the cool glass to clear my thoughts.

“Wow, Mal, this is some serious stalker shit,” Uma laughed as she flipped through the pages.

“A hundred. I have to draw a hundred different people by Monday,” I grumbled, lightly banging my head against the window.

“Shit, seriously? Well, you can draw me right now if you want,” she offered, striking a pensive pose.

“I already did you,” I commented offhandedly, peering down at the students assembling on the
tourney field for practice.

“Yes, you did, and wasn’t I exceptional?” she joked, batting her eyelashes with a sweet smile.

I picked up the nearest pillow I could find and chucked it at her. It hit its target, but it only served to make Uma giggle more. We had ventured into uncharted territory once while back on The Isle, but we both agreed that it was best if we remained just friends. It wasn’t that we didn’t care about each other – Uma meant more to me than anyone for most of my life – but The Isle just wasn’t the place for romance to flourish. That didn’t stop her from bringing it up from time to time, though.

“I hate you,” I quipped, but it was weak and unconvincing, as it always was.

“There’s no one I’d rather hate!” Uma mused, sauntering over to me and planting a big, sloppy kiss on my cheek and collapsing into my bed.

I scrubbed the saliva off my face and wiped it back onto her shirt before going back to my windowsill. By now the cheerleaders were beginning to assemble on the outskirts of the field. It was always difficult to find Evie amongst the sea of blue and yellow. After my thorough search, I concluded that she must not have come out of the locker room yet.

“Plenty of people to do down there,” Uma muttered suggestively.

“What?” I asked, only half paying attention to my roommate.

She rolled her eyes. “Don’t act like I don’t know your window most conveniently looks over the tourney team and the cheerleaders. I’ve seen you and your googley eyes. Take a break from whatever you were reading and go draw some of them.”

My cheeks darkened, but the way that I was angled they were hidden from Uma’s prying eyes. “You’re right,” I agreed.

“Of course I am. Now get on out of here, ya girl needs some sleep,” she ordered, making herself quite at home under my mess of comfy blankets, one of which Evie had lovingly made just for me after I mentioned being too cold at night.
“Of course you do, Uma, my dear, make my bed completely disappear,” I chanted, retrieving my sketchbook from the other bed on the way out.

With a magical tinkling and an undignified *fwump*, Uma landed on the floor. “Mal!” she shrieked, but I was already in the hallway snickering to myself.

* * *

My boots crunched along the Astroturf of the tourney field in no time, and I held my hand up above my eyes to scope out a place to sit.

“Mal!” Doug shouted, giving me a little wave from about three rows into the bleachers.

I offered him a small smile in return. As I came around the edge of another set of bleachers, I immediately spotted Evie at the head of the group of girls alongside Audrey.

She smiled so wide that her face might split in two, and she waved at me excitedly.

My heart stuttered in my chest at the sight.

“Do you think this is a joke? If you don’t stretch properly you can get seriously injured! Do you know how much paperwork I would have to deal with if that happened?” came the bark of Audrey, no doubt harping on some freshmen already.

Evie tore her gaze from mine to offer less aggressive feedback to the young girl.

“You made it!” Doug cheered, clearing off a spot on the bleachers beside him for me. He was absolutely surrounded by papers and books. “With how close you and Evie are, I figured you’d be out here with me watching her practice every day!” he commented, finally offering a clean seat.

I chuckled mirthlessly. “Yeah, well, tell that to my professors. I honestly don’t know how you guys have time for anything with how much homework they assign,” I complained, the cool metal of the bench stinging my legs through my jeans. “Wow, uh, it’s really fucking cold out here,” I noted, dropping my sketchbook in my lap and rubbing my hands together.
“Well that shouldn’t be a problem for you, right?” he quipped, giving me an overdramatic wink.

For a moment I wondered if he was hitting on me, but then I remembered that, duh, I have magic. “Right,” I agreed, calling on my inner dragon to help me out. Soon, I was comfortably toasty once more.

Doug looked visibly jealous, donning a jacket, hat, and fingerless gloves. “Anyway,” he started, ”I usually do as much of my homework as I can out here, just so I can be here to support Evie.”

Well isn’t that sweet.

“What brings you out of your cave this fine afternoon?” he joked, his breath dancing visibly through the air.

“Yeah, yeah, tease the dragon; that sounds like a brilliant idea. And to think I was going to share my heat with you,” I tutted.

A nervous chuckle tumbled from his lips. “That won’t be necessary!”

I furrowed my eyebrows; I was only joking. “I have to sketch a bunch of people for my art class,” I eventually revealed, unzipping my leather jacket pocket to retrieve my drawing pencil.

“Oh, well, you’ve come to the right place!” he exclaimed, looking around at the cheerleaders, tourney players, and various students who had come to watch practice.

“That’s what I was hoping,” I said, picking out who was going to be my first victim. Because the cheerleaders were stretching and fairly still, I decided to start with them.

“You drawing Evie?” Doug asked, peeking over at my sketch, which I had barely even started.

“No, I already did her,” I replied, furiously scratching at my paper in an attempt to capture the figure before the model moved on me.
Doug cleared his throat awkwardly.

Oh, right. I really should think about how I word things. The tips of my ears felt a little hot, but other than that I managed to remain impassive, at least on the outside. We worked for a while in an uncomfortable silence. I felt compelled to start friendly conversation for some reason; I guess that’s what happens when you spend a month in Auradon.

“So,” I drawled, finishing up my twelfth sketch. “How did you and Evie meet?” I asked, feigning nonchalance.

Doug’s cheeks were rosy, and this time I knew it wasn’t from the cold.

“Well, I’ve known about Evie since King Ben’s First Proclamation of The Isle; heck, I’m sure everyone in Auradon has. But I never talked to her or anything; you know how it is,” he blushed.

I didn’t, but I continued listening anyway.

“We had Beginner’s Chemistry together freshman year at Auradon Prep, and she was assigned to sit next to me. I was so nervous, the first thing I said to her was ‘heigh ho!’” he admitted sheepishly.

If I was drinking something, I would have spit it out. I couldn’t contain the laughter that shook me at this boy’s misfortune.

“I know, I know; I definitely did not think that one through,” he laughed, still clearly slightly embarrassed about the ordeal.

“No, you really didn’t,” I agreed, still chuckling at the thought.

“Amazingly, she just laughed it off; I was obviously really nervous. But I learned that I didn’t have to be. She was very kind and intelligent, and I really couldn’t have asked for a better lab partner,” he mused.
“And she fell for your dorky charm and you lived happily ever after?” I estimated, eyebrow raised.

“No, no, it was nothing like that,” he said bashfully, looking down at his homework. “She was always dating some guy, sometimes more than one at a time. I couldn’t even keep track of them, honestly. But they were all douchebags, you know? They didn’t treat her right. I guess eventually she gave up on them and realized there had been a good guy in her life all along. Last semester here she asked me out, and I said yes, of course! My Advanced Chivalry professor would have had a fit!” he laughed, smiling brightly.

“I bet,” I supplied, but my mind was busy processing all of the new information. It didn’t surprise me that Evie had dated a lot of boys. Not really. That was to be expected with how the Evil Queen had raised her. It did surprise me that she decided to go for Doug, though. Although he was undeniably sweet, he didn’t seem like quite the right fit. Sure, she was way out of his league in the physical appearance department, but I knew Evie wasn’t that shallow. What confused me the most was how affectionate Evie was with everyone but Doug. I realized I had never once seen her and Doug touching in any way. Maybe he was a germophobe, or maybe he just preferred to keep stuff like that private. Either way, I couldn’t see how Evie could be satisfied with it, especially for so long. From how Doug was talking, it seemed like Evie went through boys fairly quickly before him. Maybe she already had her next target lined up.

A wistful sigh caught my attention, and Doug was staring adoringly down at Evie while she did some kind of flip. “She’s the best, you know? She’s so driven and clever; she’s the smartest girl I’ve ever met,” he said, his hands cupping his face. He was certainly smitten.

“Yeah…” I agreed. Of course, all of those things were true, but with the way she was bent over, ass directly pointed at the two of us in such a short skirt, my thoughts were a little misguided. Sue me.

I managed to hunker down and focus on my art, for the most part. Incredibly, I finished the rest of my required sketches before practice was even over. This gave me some time to watch my friends. At first, I turned my attention to Carlos and Jay on the tourney field, running around and doing completely unnecessary flips just for the hell of it. Although it was entertaining, my eyes kept getting drawn to the blue in my peripheral, and I soon found myself in a trance.

I don’t know what exactly Evie was doing, but it was impressive. The way she could bend and contort her body was giving me ideas, ideas that I definitely should not be having while sitting next to her current boyfriend. But his nose was buried in his book, and her eyes were boring into mine, not making any effort to capture his attention instead. If the grin on her face was any indication, she knew exactly what she was doing, too. Why did she have to make things so complicated?

Eventually, the telltale blare of coach Jenkin’s whistle sounded throughout the field, indicating the end of practice.
“All right, shitheads, you’re free for the weekend! That doesn’t mean you get to slack off, though! You better be practicing your thigh stands or elevators with your teammates! But don’t be stupid; always use spotters! I need you all for the homecoming game!” Audrey yelled.

Some of the girls simply laid out on the Astroturf, spent from all of the exercise. A few of them were downing water like they hadn’t drank anything in days. Many of the team members scurried off to the locker rooms, Audrey hot on their trail.

Evie made a beeline for Doug and me, easily vaulting up the bleacher steps with her long legs; she was the picture of ease and gracefulness. “You came to see me!” she cheered, practically jumping into my lap with way more energy than she should have considering she just spent two hours exercising.

Doug scooted out of the way to make more room for her than was necessary.

“Oh my evil, you’re so warm!” she exclaimed, burying her face in my neck and wrapping her arms around my shoulders. “I love dragons,” she sighed contently.

I chuckled at her antics, my skin becoming even hotter at the unexpected proximity. “Of course I came to see you! I said I would when I had the time!” Her bare arms were cold against mine, so I hugged her close.

Doug didn’t seem to mind; in fact, he looked quite pleased with the interaction.

“Which, apparently, is never! If Doug can make time for me by doing his homework out in the brisk October air than so can you!” she chided, tapping me on the nose.

“Brisk October air? Evie, it’s freezing! I can’t even believe they let you have practice when it’s this cold!” I complained.

“It’s not so bad,” she urged, although her rosy cheeks and nose were telling me otherwise. “When you’re practicing it’s refreshing!”

“Mhmm,” I hummed, unconvinced.
“Unless it’s thirty-two degrees or below they’re allowed to practice outside,” Doug explained. “And everyone’s excited about Homecoming, so no one’s been complaining so far.”

“Ugh,” I groaned, letting my head hang back. “I don’t even know what Homecoming is, but I’m sick of it!”

“You don’t know what Homecoming is? Mal, I’ve been talking about it all month!” Evie gasped, pulling away just to show me how dismayed she was at the new information.

“Oh, here we go,” Doug grumbled.

“Yeah, so has everyone, but that doesn’t mean I’ve been listening,” I admitted.

“Homecoming is a huge week, celebrating the existence of the school and all of the people in it! We have one every year at both the prep school and here at the university!” Evie started excitedly.

“It’s a whole week?” I asked, eyebrows raised.

“Shush, Mal, yes! It’s called Spirit Week, and every day there’s a dress-up theme!” she continued.

“Which Evie goes all-out for,” Doug added.

“Naturally,” I figured.

“And Friday there’s a pep rally, where the band plays and gets everyone jazzed up for the tourney game that night! Everyone who has ever studied in Auradon is invited to come! It’s a giant party of friends and family!”

“That I don’t know,” I coughed.

“No, wait; it gets better,” Doug assured me playfully.
“Hush! And then, after the game is the Homecoming dance! And every year they select two students to be crowned the Homecoming King and Queen; isn’t that incredible?” Evie asked, stars in her eyes.

That explained it. “I assume you have a nice collection of crowns by now,” I commented, naturally assuming she had excelled in popularity at Auradon Prep. As soon as her face fell dramatically, my stomach twisted, and I immediately felt guilty for the assumption.

“Well, at the prep school kids never voted for the descendants of villains. You know how judgemental they can be,” Doug started, and my heart broke a little learning that my old friends had not always been as popular as they were now. “Here at the university people are much more accepting, but they never pick underclassmen for that kind of thing,” Doug explained. “But now that Evie’s a junior, everyone knows it’ll be her,” he finished, smiling at his girlfriend.

Her smile grew a little, too, but it didn’t meet her eyes. “I hope so! But even if I don’t I will have enough money from dress and suit commissions to buy my own crown,” she joked half-heartedly.

“Of course you’ll win, E; you’re the fairest of them all. It’s in your blood,” I coaxed, bumping my shoulder against hers lightly.

She smiled sadly and nodded. “Thanks, guys,” she whispered, looking between us with gratitude. “I better go shower now; sorry I got you all gross!” she apologized to me.

I scoffed. As if anyone could sweat in this weather. Besides, there wasn’t a hair out of place on her head.

“Hopefully there’s enough hot water left!” she exclaimed, rising from my lap and smoothing out her skirt.

“If there isn’t, you can always call Mal; I’m sure she could heat things up for you,” Doug jested, busy gathering his homework.

“I’m sure she could,” Evie purred, holding my gaze with a raised eyebrow.
My throat went dry, and my eyes were drawn to her quirked lips. “Yep, because I’m a dragon,” I chuckled stupidly, shaking my head to gather my thoughts.

“See you guys tomorrow!” Evie sang, already off in the direction of the locker rooms.

“Bye,” I called weakly. This wasn’t going to get any easier, was it?

* * *

Things certainly did not get easier. In fact, they got even more difficult. The entirety of my Saturday was spent in Evie’s dorm room, helping her in and out of outfits and trying not to touch her bare skin too much or drool all over her floor. She had claimed that she couldn’t decide which dress she was going to wear to the Homecoming dance, but her permanent smirks and lingering touches – for support, of course – suggested otherwise.

“This one isn’t fully acceptable per the dress code, but I want to try it on anyway,” Evie told me, and I tried to calm my already racing heart as she put the material into my open hands. It wasn’t poofy or long, like the other dresses. In fact, it didn’t even look to be complete.

I wondered what she was up to as she held her arms up, and I did my best to slip it on her the right way. With all of the holes, it was kind of confusing, but we got it eventually. It was in her signature blue, of course, and it didn’t leave much room for the imagination. My mouth watered as I took in the sight before me.

"Are the cut-outs too much?” Evie asked in faux concern. “I was thinking about covering them with sheer, but what’s the fun in that?” Her body spun slowly as she took in her reflection in the full-length mirror.

My gaze betrayed me and immediately went to her ass, which was flanked by two long cut-outs on the sides of her thighs. When my eyes flickered up, however, I could see that she wasn’t looking at herself at all, but gauging my reaction instead. My hands were sweaty and my clothes felt too tight. I couldn’t even speak.

A hardy knock on the dorm door momentarily saved me. Evie strolled over and opened it.

“E-Evie! You look, um, nice,” none other than King Ben coughed, looking visibly shaken at the
unexpected attire. “Trying on dresses for Homecoming I take it? That seems to be what everyone is up to!” he laughed nervously.

“I’m not wearing this one to Homecoming, Ben, relax,” Evie assured, putting her hand on his shoulder.

A large sigh escaped his lips. “Oh, good. I’m doing my best to bend traditions, but I don’t think I can do that much,” he chuckled, wringing his hands together.

“So, to what do I owe the pleasure of the King’s presence at my very doorstep?” Evie asked, leaning against the doorframe casually.

“Uh, actually I am here for Mal,” he admitted, looking past Evie to see me. “Audrey told me you two would be in here all day, and I wanted to do this in person,” he explained.

I couldn’t see Evie’s face, but I would have bet my next meal that she was either confused, pissed, or both. “Oh?” she asked calmly. Yep, she was pissed.

“Mal,” Ben started, stepping past Evie and into the dorm. “Would you go to the Homecoming dance with me?”

To say I was completely and utterly shocked was an understatement. I was fully intending on going to the dance, considering Evie practically begged me to, but I didn’t even think about finding a date. And the King of all people? That wasn’t exactly low-key. “Uh,” I drawled, not sure what to do.

“It doesn’t have to be a date-date,” he assured, hands up in surrender. “I mostly want to do it as an act of good faith in my proclamation. Not everyone in Auradon believes the sons and daughters of villains should attend Auradon Prep, but I want to show everyone that it doesn’t matter who your family is, it matters who you are,” he explained, which was funny coming from a kid who took the throne when his father died simply because he was his only heir. Despite the hypocrisy, I was happy to hear that the King believed so strongly in us. I’m sure the success of the first wave of villain kids had something to do with it. What the heck, I figured.

“Sure, why not,” I said, swinging my arms out in some sort of a shrug.

“Great! I will pick you up from your dorm room at seven-thirty!” he declared, smiling widely and
clasping his hand together. “Have a good evening, ladies!” he wished, nodding his head politely at us before leaving.

Evie slowly closed the doors, gazing into the wood far too deeply. When she turned around, her face was pensive, but her smile was excited. “Well, it looks like you need a dress!”

Chapter End Notes

As always, tell me what you liked and what I can improve on! Feel free to tell me what you think is going to happen as well; I love hearing from you all! Thank you so much for reading and commenting!
Also this is a PSA that art classes can be serious business. I spent WAY more time on art class homework than any other class in college!
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Here's another chapter for you all! Just a heads up that my Tumblr is under the username of iconthingthelion, so feel free to chat with me there or ask for my Discord if you want to chat! I don't have many Descendants friends, so I'd love to make more!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Did you get your clothes on sale? Because in my dorm, they would be one hundred percent off,” was breathed into my ear, unexpected and hot.

I knew who it was, of course, but when I turned around to face her, my fingers lost all of their strength, and my books clattered noisily against the hallway floor.

There was Evie, leaning up against the lockers casually and looking much different than usual. She wasn’t wearing any makeup, for starters. Not even the sheen of lip gloss could be found. Her hair was slick and straight underneath a Fighting Knights flat-brim hat that was positioned backwards on her head. A baggy, blue and yellow Auradon Prep letter jacket was the next thing I noticed before looking lower and finding boyfriend jeans and crisp, white sneakers like the ones the preppy boys around here were obsessed with.

If my heart was pounding then, I might have fainted at the next thing to come out of her mouth.

“You seemed to have dropped your books, maybe while you’re down there on your knees you could s-“

“Hey! It fits!” Jay interrupted Evie’s hushed comment. I wasn’t sure if that was a good thing or a bad thing. He threw his muscular arm around Evie’s shoulders and tugged lightly at her jacket sleeve.

Looking over at him, I started to realize this day was going to get even weirder.

Jay, who had never once given in to Evie’s constant pleading of a makeover when we were little, was sporting a short, pink dress and a bra stuffed with evil-knows-what. His hair was impressively styled into an up-do, and eyeshadow and glitter framed his eyes. To complete the look, he was wearing a plethora of Evie’s accessories and her signature shade of red lipstick. He looked utterly
“Yep! And how are you holding up?” Evie teased, eyeing his ensemble with pride.

“Pretty good apart from the heels. I had to put those away after I nearly broke my ankle. Can’t have the captain of the Fighting Knights out for the big game!” he admitted, wiggling his now-bare toes.

I had finally gathered enough air to speak. “E-Evie, what are you wearing?” I stuttered, standing back up with my books in hand.

“I’m not Evie; I’m Ethan, your local fuckboy,” Evie claimed with a boyish head-nod. Jay provided her with a well-timed high five.

“And I’m Kay, bitchy princess extraordinaire,” Jay added with an airy tone and a sassy pose.

I did my best to come of as casual when I said “I’m pretty sure most of the fuckboys around here wear polos and sweater vests.” My locker closed with a slam. What the hell were these two up to?

“Carlos!” Jay yelled, motioning for our other friend to join us.

I turned around to look at him and found that my two friends were not the only students dressed oddly today. How had I not noticed earlier? Did I really ignore everyone else that much?

Carlos looked reluctant but eventually walked over next to me. “What the hell, man, it’s Spirit Week; why aren’t you dressed up?” Jay asked, slapping his hand onto Carlos’ chest gently.

“Opposite Gender Day is outdated and stupid. Gender is a social construct, and the fact that they call it ‘opposite gender day’ implies that there’s a binary in the first place,” Carlos complained, watching some ants walk along the ground.

“Okay,” Jay drawled, clearly missing the point. “It’s just Spirit Week, dude; have a little fun!”

“Maybe tomorrow,” Carlos offered. “I’ve got to get to class,” he mumbled before walking back into
A frazzled Fairy Godmother took his place. “Jay! Office! Now!” she demanded, pointing a finger in the right direction.

Jay threw his arms up in protest. “What, why?” he whined, already following behind her. “Is this about the water balloons? Plenty of girls stuff their bras every day and they don’t get in trouble for it!” he argued, disappearing around the corner.

Evie’s sultry laugh brought my attention back to her. She was staring at me expectantly, and her smile was genuine.

“Sorry I didn’t dress up; I didn’t know what the theme was,” I apologized, biting my lip. Had I known, I definitely would have thrown something together.

“It’s okay, M; I recall you making a fine prince without all the extra stuff anyway,” she mused, leaning her head against the lockers in a very non-masculine way. Her eyes shone with adoration, and I suddenly felt exposed. “Come on,” she urged, taking my books for me. “I’ll walk you to class.” It was an odd thing to suggest considering we did it every morning, but I didn’t complain. I didn’t complain when her fingers threaded through mine, either. And I certainly didn’t complain when she took her clothes off in the locker room to reveal she had chosen to wear boxers and go braless for the event.

* * *

The following day I was much more prepared. I had learned that Tuesday’s theme was Toga Day, and although I was fully capable of clipping a bedsheet to my body with clothes pins or magically poofing together an outfit, I went to Evie for assistance. I knew she would be more than happy to help, and I was not disappointed. Even when her dorm was covered in fabrics and half-sewn last minute Homecoming commissions, she managed to squeeze me in Monday night.

“I’ll always make room for you, M,” she had assured me.

She still had my measurements from my Homecoming fitting, so she quietly worked on sewing together my large, wool toga while I was given the task of weaving our matching laurel wreaths. We spent the rest of the evening figuring out a system of how to help each other into the togas in a timely fashion for after gym class, which was not as easy as it sounds. Evie was very adamant that the
garments were to be worn in a historically accurate manner, which was a hassle to say the least.

Her serious demeanor quickly wore off as she pulled my toga onto me for the first time. The heavy wool absolutely enveloped my tiny body. She couldn’t stop the giggles from bubbling up as I stood there looking like a giant toilet paper roll. At first she had tried to cover them politely with her hand, but the more I pouted the worse it became. I had threatened to use force if she didn’t stop mocking me, but that only seemed to fan the flames. Soon enough, she was full-blown laughing, doubling over even.

That was the final straw. My body gently collided with hers, the plush wool softening any real blow I could have attempted. Her bed was always covered with a ridiculous amount of pillows, so I didn’t have any qualms about tackling her onto it. Looking down at her with her blue hair sprawled out around her head and her smile wide and carefree, I couldn’t help but share in her joy. Our laughter bounced around the room for a moment, unbridled and pure. It didn’t take long for the tension to become too much, and I found myself battling between the urge to flee or give in and finally kiss her. My heartbeat quickened as she leaned in, only to leave a chaste kiss on the tip of my nose. “C’mon. Let’s get that off so I can make it less cumbersome for you.”

***

I had never felt more regal than walking through the halls with an Evie-exclusive toga. Maybe it was the chic design and superior craftsmanship of the garment. Maybe it had something to do with the way Evie strutted, tall and elegant, beside me throughout campus. Perhaps it was due to the many jealous eyes that watched me, lingering and longing, and the way Evie’s chest puffed out with pride at the sight. Either way, there was no doubt which two students were best dressed for the day.

Jay and Carlos were much less glamorous, opting for the traditional bedsheet and clothes pin look. It appeared as though they didn’t even bother using clean sheets, various food stains littering their togas. Evie was barely finished admonishing them before Fairy Godmother came scooting through the hallways, holding up a clothes pin and threatening to use it if she found anyone with an exposed nipple. Jay, predictably, promptly fled the scene before he got himself in trouble for the second day in a row.

Everything was going well until some genius decided to put the Life Skills Without Magic class in charge of the baked goods for Friday’s dance. This wouldn’t have been a big deal apart from the fact that we had to make cupcakes on toga day, which was really a recipe for disaster, pun intended.

The first obstacle was the damn togas themselves. Historical accuracy meant basically giving up all
use of your left hand, which was fully encased inside the draping fabric.

“You can still use your hand, M; you just need to keep it under the toga,” Evie had quipped with a suggestive wink.

The wool, while helpful to stay warm outside in the fall air, was much too hot for working in a kitchen. Or being around stupidly attractive friends who say stuff like that casually. Eventually, history be damned, we had to improvise and turn our togas into undignified and heavy strapless dresses so we wouldn’t pass out. I let Evie take control of the important things, like measuring ingredients and setting temperatures and timers. My skills were entrusted to mundane but necessary actions such as sifting and stirring ingredients. I also appointed myself the official frosting taste-tester, which apparently left me with blue lips and teeth.

“Who’s the Blueberry Princess now?” Evie teased, and my heart fell at the nickname. Yes, it was something I had called her when we were little, but it was from after her eighth birthday. It was never intended to be sweet. In fact, I could still vividly recall the times she had ran away from me with tears in her eyes, not letting me see them slip down her cheeks. But it was different now; Evie was smiling, and there was no malice in her words. All I could offer was a phony smile. I think Evie sensed my apprehension once the cupcakes were out of the oven, so she handed me the tube of frosting with a smile.

“You’re the artist here; let’s see what you can do!” she challenged.

So I did what I do best; I made a mess. Frosting tubes are not docile instruments to be easily manipulated. Equally surprising was the fact that I managed to get a sizable glob of bright blue frosting on Evie’s pure white toga. Frosting that would most definitely leave a stain. My jaw dropped in alarm, and I wracked my mind for some sort of spell to do to reverse it despite being well aware that I would get detention for it. But alas, my brain was in overdrive due to panic that I had ruined her garment before the day was even up.

“Oh my god, E, I am so sorry!” I rambled.

Evie was disturbingly calm while wiping off the offending substance with a paper towel. Suddenly, there was a small, white stick in her hand.

My head cocked in confusion. “I don’t even want to know where you were hiding that,” I stated, and she let out a little chuckle while uncapping it. With a little pressure, she scribbled onto the blue patch until it miraculously disappeared right before my eyes. My eyes widened in amazement. “What, did Ben give you a magic wand or something?” I asked, leaning over to inspect the toga more closely.
Evie chuckled in amusement. “No, Mal, just the magic of modern science,” she claimed. “It’s a stain-removing pen. You just rub it on the stain, and the chemicals inside the pen break up the molecules from the food until they’re too small for our eyes to perceive as colored. So, technically, the food is still there, but we just can’t see it,” she tried to explain.

I shook my head; it was way beyond me. “Sure, E; whatever you say,” I said, handing her the tube of frosting.

She looked at it for a moment, confused.

“Clearly, frosting cupcakes is way too advanced for me,” I admitted.

“Hm, you’re right; maybe it’s safest if I do it,” she hummed in faux-contemplation. Suddenly, her eyebrows furrowed and her gaze focused. “You have a little bit of frosting…right…” she started, leaning into my space. “Here,” she finished, punctuating her façade with a well-placed smudge of frosting onto my nose and a smirk on her face.

A scoff erupted from my throat, surprised and amused. “You must have a death wish or something,” I threatened, eyes glowing just for show.

“Yeah?” Evie purred. “What are you going to do to me?” she probed, moving even closer.

My hands gently encased her arms and followed them down to her hands, my gaze never leaving hers. “This!” I growled, swiftly grabbing the tube of frosting and squirting it all over her.

She let out a little shriek, holding up her hands in a useless attempt at a shield.

“Let’s see your magic wand fix that!” I boasted.

She managed to grab my hands and direct them towards me, showering me in a layer of blue frosting as well. Soon, we were smiling so wide it hurt and succumbing to a fit of giggles.
“Ladies!” professor Merryweather chastised, scurrying over to our kitchen and assessing the damage.

Evie managed to sweet-talk us out of a detention with a promise to clean everything up before the class time was up. There wasn’t enough time to get the frosting out of our togas, but I never minded a splash of blue anyway.

* * *

“Villain Day?” I asked incredulously. “Are you shitting me?”

“It’s tradition,” Carlos tried to explained.

“Uh, an offensive tradition; I’m surprised King Ben allows this anymore,” I countered.

“It’s not so bad, Mal. After all, you can mock the heroes tomorrow in return,” Evie alleged.

“And I doubt anyone will be dressing up like your mom now that you’re here to kick their ass for it,” Jay laughed, grabbing a muffin from the breakfast cart in the dorm hall.

“Are you guys going to dress up for today?” I asked, looking between my three old friends. They all shook their heads in reply.

“I made my outfit a little more wicked for the occasion, but it’s not like I’m going to dress up like my mom or anything,” Evie replied easily.

That explained her smoky eyeshadow and dark red lipstick choice for the day. She was gorgeous every day, but damn if I wasn’t just a little bit more excited about this look. As if I needed any more encouragement to stare at her mouth. I shook my head to try to clear it and pondered what I could do to participate. I wondered if I could master full dragon transformation by first period. Now that would really be an entrance!

“Mal,” Evie scolded, giving me a warning glare.
“What?” I asked, already calling on my inner dragon to test her out.

“You are not going to class as a dragon,” she declared.

I scoffed unconvincingly. “I was not—“

“It’s too dangerous to do that kind of magic so quickly; you need time to master it.” Evie said with finality.

“Oh dude, can you really turn into a dragon like your mom?” Jay asked, bumping into my shoulder in excitement.

“Honestly, I’m not sure,” I admitted. “I mean, I’ve been able to breathe fire since I was, like, six, but the barrier around The Isle prevented any big magic like transformations, so I haven’t had time to try it out,” I explained.

“Ugh, that is so cool,” Jay whined. “I wish I had magic.”

“You know, Mal, you should talk to Fairy Godmother about it,” Carlos suggested, finally catching up with the group from his breakfast cart stop with an armful of bagels.

“Oh, come on! She helped Evie!” Carlos continued, capturing my interest in an instant.

“Yeah, that is not happening,” I stated. I could barely stand seventy minutes of the woman for five days a week.

“No, seriously,” he urged, taking a huge bite out of one of the breakfast foods. “She’s the most powerful magic user in Auradon; she could really help you master transformation if it’s something you want to do,” he said through a mouthful of food, crumbs flying onto the floor.

“I don’t know,” I mumbled, watching my boots scrape across the wood.

“So you do have magic!” I exclaimed, looking excitedly to my best friend. I knew there had to be
some logical explanation for her being everywhere so quickly.

“This all comes back to reiterate my point that you need more practice before trying anything crazy; so just chill for today, please,” Evie urged, increasing her pace to speed ahead of us. She clearly didn’t want to talk about it yet.

“Like a villain,” I surrendered.

* * *

Villain Day wasn’t as horrible as I anticipated it to be. Most students simply donned the signature colors of their favorite villain, but a few of them carried homemade props in addition. Regardless, I spent all day and night pondering what I could dress like to piss the Auradon kids off on Hero Day. Every situation I imagined wasn’t offensive enough, so I finally decided Prince Mal should make a comeback instead. I snuck into the theatre and borrowed a set of light armor. They didn’t know I was borrowing it, but I wasn’t intending on keeping it, so it was definitely not stealing. When I emerged from my dorm room the next morning to find Evie waiting across the hall, I knew something was off.

I was fully expecting her to be dressed as either a queen or a warrior. Instead, she was wearing only thick-rimmed glasses and a lab coat that was definitely too short for dress code considering her pants were mysteriously missing. On top of that, there was a generous amount of cleavage visible. However, if I was drooling, Evie was gawking.

For once, I managed to snap out of my leering first only to find myself the object of her full attention. Her eyes were raking along my armor-clad body and lingering on the slivers of muscle left exposed between the large pieces of metal. White teeth bit into a crimson lip, and I realized she was just as much of a goner as I was.

“See, *someone* knows the true meaning of hero day,” the nasally voice of Audrey came from behind Evie. My eyes flicked to her and, predictably, she was dressed as her mother, Aurora.

“Scientists are perfectly acceptable heroes, Audrey. Last time I checked, the only thing your mother did was lay uselessly in a tower until some boy came and kissed her inevitably chapped lips,” Evie quipped.

I couldn’t contain the laugh that burst out of my lips, but, to my own credit, I did try to hide it with my hand.
“Yeah, I’m pretty sure that outfit meets the safety qualifications for a real lab. Nice try, Evie; I see right through you” Audrey scoffed, lifting up her dress to walk more easily down the hallway.

Evie watched her go with a shameless smirk.

I cleared my throat and extended my hand. “M’lady,” I said, bowing to her.

“Prince Mal,” she returned, taking my hand daintily and doing a curtsey.

“I am here to escort you to the land of Physical Education,” I announced. “Are you ready to depart?”

Her eyebrow quirked and her grin turned wicked. “You can take me anywhere you want.”

* * *

If I thought people looked ridiculous for most of Spirit Week, I was not prepared for Friday. I figured most students would just wear their Auradon Prep merchandise, so I threw on my complimentary t-shirt with my normal leather pants and called my outfit done. It turns out I was very underdressed. As soon as I left the dorm halls, my eyes were assaulted with blue and yellow, which was to be expected on school spirit day. What was not expected were tutus, flashy thigh-high socks, crazy wigs, and face paint. Some kids messily attached random blue or yellow objects to their outfit. I searched the sea of students for Evie, but it was difficult considering every other person had blue hair for the occasion.

One moment I was safely on the ground and the next I was being lifted into the air. I didn’t even have time to think about socking whoever dared pick me up before I could hear the muffled voice of Jay. I twisted my body to look at him, but was only met with the sight of a human-shaped form covered in some kind of skin-tight, full-body, blue and yellow suit. Not an inch of skin was exposed, and he looked utterly terrifying if you ask me. Evie’s clothing mannequins had always freaked me out, and this was basically a living, breathing version.

“What the actual fuck are you wearing?” I accused, looking for buttons or a zipper to no avail.

“The real question is what are you wearing? The only blue and yellow you have is on your shirt!” he
scolded, placing my feet back on the ground softly.

“You can actually see out of that thing?” I inquired, chuckling as the form crossed his arms angrily.

“Duh, why would I wear something I can’t see out of?” he fired back.

I held my tongue from bringing up the many times he had done just so as a child and, consequently, earned a few battle wounds.

“Carlos, my man!” he suddenly yelled, waving excitedly to our friend behind me.

“Jay! Broke out the ol’ body suit, eh?” Carlos replied, doing some kind of handshake with the other boy. His normally stark white hair was colored half blue and half yellow and his face paint matched. Cluttered freckles peeked through the thin yellow coating on his skin.

“You know it!” Jay exclaimed, doing some high kicks and spins enthusiastically.

I rolled my eyes in amusement.

“Evie!” he abruptly shouted, running around me to pick up his other female friend.

I turned around just in time to see the lift, which looked effortless with muscles like Jay’s.

Evie’s smile was huge, and she let out a little squeal of delight as he twirled her around effortlessly. Her dress was reminiscent of Belle’s iconic garment but with extra blue embellishments. The way it moved as they spun was elegant and entrancing. Leave it to Evie to create an entire dress intended to be worn for a single school day.

“You should really join the cheerleading team, Jay; we need strong guys like you to spot and help with lifts!” she prodded as he set her down.

“We practice at the same time, Eves; I can’t give up tourney!” he argued lightly.
“But think of the great view we have on the field and all of the great hands-on experience you could get,” Evie quipped with a wink.

“I think I do okay with that off the field,” he goaded, chuckling along with Evie like two cocky bros.

Carlos remained suspiciously quiet as he watched the exchange.

“What about you, Carlos?” I inquired, looking his way.

Jay and Evie continued their conversation on their own. I could only imagine Jay’s smug grin under this bodysuit.

“What?” he asked, clearly not expecting to be addressed.

“Why don’t you join cheerleading?” I questioned. I had seen him on the tourney field. Even though he could hold his own, he was definitely not what most people considered to be a strong player. He was more often on the bench than in the field for real games. In all honesty, I figured he had taken up the sport just to spend more time with Jay. Cheerleading seemed like it might be a better fit for him.

“Oh, I don’t know,” he drawled, hand reaching for the back of his neck nervously.

“You’re strong enough to do lifts and help with spotting, and it isn’t as taxing as tourney…I think you should at least give it some thought,” I said, careful not to suggest that he was too small or weak for the latter sport.

“You know what? I will,” he decided, a small smile in place as he considered the option.

“C’mon, Mal; we have to get to gym!” Evie exclaimed, doing a spin to weave her arm through mine.

I tried my best not to step on her dress as we walked. “Ugh, don’t remind me,” I grumbled.
“Bye, boys!” Evie called, bending backwards slightly to wave to them.

“Bye, Malvie!” Carlos shouted back.

Jay’s snicker could be heard shortly after.

My eyebrows furrowed. “What did he say?” I wondered.

Evie just smiled and looked at the ground. “Oh, it’s nothing,” she brushed off. “I’ve been calling them Jaylos since we got here because they spent so much time together, so they’re just returning the favor. Apparently Mevie is too close to my name, so Malvie is less confusing. Although, I will admit, Eval has a nice ring to it,” she mused, pulling me along.

I chuckled, shaking my head. “Whatever you say.”

“Well, what I say is that your shirt is much too boring,” she claimed, pulling lightly at the material.

“Is that so?” I played along, wondering what she had planned.

“Mhmm. Good thing we have shorter classes today which means absolutely no learning will be taking place apart from what I’m going to teach you about how to spice up a t-shirt,” she hummed.

“We’ll see about that.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry I didn’t get to the Homecoming dance yet; I couldn’t resist having some fun with spirit week! It brought back a lot of fun high school memories! I hope you liked it! Please tell me what you liked and what I can improve on! Thank you for reading and commenting!
Four hours later, I found myself being herded into the gymnasium for the so-called pep rally. I personally thought most of the people in Auradon had enough pep, but apparently this little school-held event was going to get them even more excited about tonight’s events. I will admit, I found myself much more animated than usual today. Our class lengths had been cut in half to give us time to enjoy the festivities, and the teachers made it seem as if there was no way they could teach a lesson in just thirty-five minutes. This meant that all of my classes were basically a free-for-all, and I spent a lot of time drawing happily and pranking fellow classmates when that got boring. It had been a fantastic morning.

There were now bleachers taking up an entire wall of the gym, and we were told to sit wherever we would like. Naturally, Evie was frantically pulling me by the arm to the very middle, which I presumed was the best seat in the house. Jay and Carlos sat right behind us, not wanting to sit next to Audrey, who had taken residence on Evie’s other side. We spotted Doug down in the mix of band members on the floor. He was smiling widely and waving at our group, who kindly returned the gesture.

A tap on my left shoulder had me turning to face Evie, but she was busy chatting with Audrey. My eyebrows furrowed in confusion and I turned to my right, catching sight of Uma and Harry, who burst out laughing.

“You fall for it every time!” Uma cackled, leaning back with the force of her laugh.

I rolled my eyes in annoyance; I most definitely did not fall for that every time. Not anymore, at least. Truth be told, I was surprised she had decided to sit next to me considering her and Harry spent a lot of school hours with their fencing teammates. It was nice to see her branching out, even if that meant I would be on the receiving end of some teasing.

Once Uma settled down a little, she began to scope out the gym in boredom. “What happened to your shirt?” she asked curiously, poking her fingers through the newly-made holes to touch my skin.
It tickled, and I squirmed a little at the feeling. “Apparently, my shirt was too boring, so Evie cut the sides and tied them back together,” I explained.

“And I assume you had to take off your shirt to do that?” Uma said pointedly.

Harry wiggled his eyebrows suggestively behind her.

“Yeah, so? We have gym class together; we take off our shirts in front of each other all the time,” I argued. I conveniently left out the part that one of us was apt to take off much more than just her shirt.

“Mhmm,” Uma hummed, not convinced in the slightest that that was all there was to it.

I didn’t blame her; I wasn’t fully convinced, either.

“How did you even have time for that? We only had five minute passing time today,” she wondered. “Or did you just strip down in the middle of class because she asked?”

“No, we did it during passing time,” I answered, ignoring her insinuation that I’d do anything for Evie. Now that I thought about it, how did we manage to revamp my shirt and make it to class on time?

“Did she really wear a poofy princess dress to school today?” she inquired next, peeking around me with a scowl.

I knew exactly who she was talking about, considering my entire left leg was covered in overflowing yellow tulle. I threw Uma a warning glare. “Be nice,” I reminded her.

She frowned in response.

“Oh! Harry, Uma, I didn’t see you guys!” Evie suddenly said, looking to the duo with guarded enthusiasm. “Are you excited about the pep rally?” she inquired amicably.
By now, Jay, Carlos, Audrey, Jane, and Lonnie were all looking to them for an answer.

Uma’s scowl remained in place as she looked between all of the cheerful faces. “Uh, I don’t know? What even happens at one of these things?” Uma wondered.

“Oh, dude!” Carlos started, facial features lighting up.

“Well, we kick off with the school song,” Evie joined in.

“And then the cheerleading squad does a performance,” Audrey supplied.

“Then it’s whatever the school board planned,” Lonnie added.

“Sometimes we do races or tug-o-war or a hypnotist or donkey ball!” Jay went off, bouncing in his seat, and getting increasingly pumped.

“Donkey what?” Uma asked incredulously.

“Donkey ball; every player is attached to a donkey, and you have to try to make baskets,” Carlos explained.

“Which is not easy because those things are stubborn!” Jay exclaimed, laughing at the recollection of the event in the past.

“And you can’t hurt them, of course,” Jane quietly chimed in.

“But you can ride them if you think that might be easier,” Lonnie said.

“Which it is not,” Jay confessed.

I’m sure all three of us newbies were looking at them like they had multiple heads.
“Okay, that’s it. I’m convinced. Y’all are actually crazy,” Uma said, throwing her hands up in the air.

None of the others looked offended at all, a hint of pride visible in all of their smiles. A few of them laughed good-naturedly. It was nice to see everyone getting along.

The smooth sound of a trumpet led to the crowd settling down. Soon, everyone was completely silent as Doug played his first instrument in an impressive solo. When it was over, the rest of the band began to play, and the crowd began to stand and clap their hands along to the beat.

Not wanting to stick out like a sore thumb, I clapped along as well, but not hard enough to actually contribute to the sound.

Beside me, Harry was swaying and clapping along with the crowd happily while Uma was purposefully not participating.

When the song was over, there was cheering and a chant of “Go Fighting Knights!” before the students took their seats once more. Evie, Audrey, and the rest of the cheerleading squad scooted out of the rows of bleachers and made their way into the locker rooms while Fairy Godmother approached a podium. She went on for what seemed like forever about how special Homecoming was for Auradon, and I couldn’t be bothered to pay attention.

From the glossy look in her eye, it appeared as though Uma was zoning out, too. Harry looked invested for a while before deciding nothing about this speech would be interesting. He spent the rest of it looking at his reflection in his hook.

“And now, I present to you with great pleasure, your Fighting Knights cheerleading squad!” Fairy Godmother finally announced, and the crowd went wild. There was cheering, clapping, whistling, and stomping abound as the squad pranced out from the locker rooms with blinding smiles. Many of the members did some sort of gymnastic move as they made their way to the floor in front of the bleachers. Evie’s was a round-off that ended in the splits, if I had my terminology correct.

After I caught sight of blue, I didn’t really see anyone else. The routine they performed was the one that they had been working on for the past couple of weeks, and I think this was the first time I had seen them do it without anyone screwing up and getting an earful from Audrey. Then again, I wouldn’t put it past the cheer captain to yell at them as soon as they made their way back into the locker room. Regardless, the crowd was, amazingly, even more enthusiastic when they finished the routine. Even I may have clapped until my hands hurt.
“That’s my girl!” Jay shouted, pointing indiscriminately towards the squad and cheering.

“Who’s your girl?” Carlos wondered, sounding completely lost.

“None of them. But now they all think it’s them and feel special,” Jay quipped, chuckling at his plan.

I could practically hear Carlos’ returning eye roll.

The cheerleaders snaked their way back into the bleachers in their uniforms, much to my surprise. I guessed they would be performing again later. Evie’s cheeks were rosy, and she was a little winded when she took her seat next to me. I could feel the heat radiating off of her now that her bare leg was pressed up against my thigh.

I didn’t even notice people scurrying around and placing cones on the floor until King Ben took the podium and cleared his throat. “Wow! What an amazing performance! Give it up for our Fighting Knights squad!” he yelled, waiting for the crowd to give them another round of hoots and hollers. “Our next event is a crowd favorite…” he drawled, waiting for students to call out their guesses in anticipation. “Big wheel racing!” he finished. There was an abundance of cheers in reply.

I wondered how fun it could be to watch giant wheels race; the crowd seemed more excited than they should be. But then, to my surprise, four of the school teachers ran onto the floor holding tiny, short, multicolored, three-wheeled bikes of some sort and lined up at an orange string of tape. The teachers had a ridiculous amount of padding on considering how close to the ground they were when they finally mounted the bikes. Well, they tried their best to mount the bikes, which were much too small for most of them.

“You know the tradition; every teacher has been assigned to represent a class standing. The class standing that wins will be able to get one free concession at the game tonight!” King Ben continued, and my ears rang with how loudly Carlos and Jay began yelling. “Are you all ready?” King Ben hyped, and the crowd cheered once more. “GO!”

I expected the bikes to start moving because that’s what bikes tend to do when you peddle them. Despite the hard efforts of the teachers, all but one bike refused to move. Fairy Godmother was small enough to fit properly on her bike and took off instantly. By the time she crossed the finish line, only one other teacher had made it more than five feet from the starting line.
Jay angrily threw his beanie, which ended up in my lap. “JENKINS, YOU LET US DOWN!” he yelled, angry than the junior class representation had failed.

“Come on, man!” Carlos added, trying to calm Jay down.

“Congratulations, freshman! Be sure to bring your school ID to the game to redeem your free snack! Give it up for Fairy Godmother!” Ben announced as Fairy Godmother did some modest bows.

“This is bullshit; I want a rematch,” Jay mumbled, being pulled back into his seat by Carlos.

“Dude, calm down; you can have my free snack,” Carlos suggested, reaching over my shoulder to take the hat back.

“Really?” Jay asked, sounding taken aback as well as excited.

“Of course, man; I’ve got you,” Carlos assured.

I couldn’t resist leaning my head back and taking a peek at them.

Jay was just as amazed as he sounded, and Carlos was beginning to blush.

I couldn’t help but smile at the interaction.

Evie must have noticed my odd position and looked back at them, too. Her curious eyes softened at the sight of the boys before she turned back to me. A small smile was growing on her face, and she tried to hide it in my shoulder, knowing the boys would get defensive if they saw her swooning over them. She must have found it to be comfortable because her head remained nestled onto my shoulder for the duration of an entire skit as well as coach Jenkins’ speech.

He went on and on about how hard the team had worked and how he was proud of them no matter what happened tonight. That was nice and all, but the feeling of her fingers gently tracing my bare skin though the holes of my shirt was too distracting for me to fully comprehend it. Despite all of the residual energy in the room from the sufficiently peppy students, I quickly became calm and relaxed, maybe even a little sleepy. My heartbeat spiked as the crowd clapped and yelled, presumably at the
The band began playing again and Evie, as well as the rest of the cheerleaders, migrated back down to the floor for another performance. It wasn’t a full dance like their first; they merely provided enthusiastic chants we were expected to repeat. As hard as I tried, my claps were syncopated as my body attempted to catch back up to reality. A hand collided with my arm, and I turned to my right.

Uma was looking up at me, concern evident. Her eyebrow raised in a silent question.

I shook my head to inform her that I was fine, but one look at my foggy gaze and she was unconvinced.

Her hand pulled me down until I was sitting, and she wrapped an arm around my shoulders protectively. It remained there even as we exited the gymnasium and walked back to our dorm after the event.

* * *

The big tourney game took place shortly after the pep rally. I didn’t really want to go, but I knew I should be there to support my friends. Jay was the captain of the Fighting Knights, after all, and Carlos had probably worked harder than any other player to prove his worth. Evie had been providing extra assistance outside of practice to her squad members on top of creating a plethora of dress clothes for the eager student body. Even Doug had been keeping his roommate awake practicing his various instruments for the band’s halftime performance. If they could support me when most of the students were still apprehensive, then I could spend an hour or two cheering for them on their big day.

Because they were all busy with the game, I got to hang out with Uma and Harry, which I rarely had the pleasure of doing due to their rigorous fencing training schedule and my homework. I followed them as they climbed the bleachers, making their way over to sit with their teammates.

Gil was quick to say hello and pull me into a hug even though we had rarely interacted since we met. It was unexpected, but not unwelcome. I didn’t know the rest of the team, but if they accepted Uma and Harry then they shouldn’t have had a problem with me. A few even offered me friendly smiles and introduced themselves. I never had to introduce myself; that’s what you get for being the daughter of Maleficent.
“Thank evil it’s actually warm out for once; I was going to zip you up into my coat and make you my personal heater!” Uma jested, smiling widely at me and poking me in the sides.

“Oh, I get it! Because she’s a dragon, right?” Gil commented, giving Uma a hardy pat on the shoulder. She didn’t verbally answer but nodded her head in reply instead.

“I’d like to see you try,” I retorted, crossing my arms.

“Don’t kid yourself, love; you’re about as intimidating as a bunny,” Harry cooed into my ear, tucking a strand of hair behind it with his hook.

I shoved him away playfully.

“Oh, I don’t know, Harry,” Gil drawled. “I’ve seen some pretty scary bunnies!”

I wasn’t sure if he was joking or serious.

The first half of the tourney game was fairly exciting if you’re into sports. The Auradon Fighting Knights and Sherwood Forest Falcons basically went back and forth scoring points, much to the crowd’s chagrin. Even Uma and Harry were yelling at the team members in dismay, expecting the Fighting Knights to effectively blow the other team out of the water.

I was never one for regulated sports, so I spent most of my time watching the cheerleaders attempt to keep everyone positive. It was almost laughable seeing their bright and shiny smiles trying to get friendly chants to catch on when the crowd was a sea of furrowed eyebrows and frowns. As the game went on, Audrey’s smile became increasingly forced, and it was obvious she was just as angry as the crowd, if not more so, at the failure of her squad to bring optimism and cheer to the people. At least it was providing me with adequate entertainment.

Eventually, the buzzer indicating halftime sounded, and the crowd chittered amongst themselves as the tourney players exited the field and the band started to set up in their place. A bunch of Auradon alumni had come for the occasion, and the field was absolutely full of people poised to play their instruments in a linear formation. Once the music began, it was clear why Doug had been spending so much time practicing. They didn’t just sit and play like they had done at the pep rally; there was a dance of sorts being performed. It was all spectacularly synchronized movements that formed moving patterns on the field, and I found myself appreciating the art behind it even if the music was not to my particular taste.
The crowd seemed to have simmered down to enjoy the show and was quite enthusiastic during the band’s few songs. After the band was finished, it was time for the cheerleading squad to perform again.

I had fully expected them to perform the same routine they had done at the pep rally, but I was pleasantly surprised when pop music began playing from the speakers instead of the band.

This routine was not full of stunts, lifts, and yelling. Sure, there were a few kicks and other small tricks, but it was definitely a dance routine and not, well, whatever they considered their regular routine to be. I had to admit, this was way sexier than the previous one. I wondered if they had even gotten approval to perform this, considering I had never seen them practicing it, and it was getting a little racy. Whatever they were doing was working; the crowd was going absolutely wild.

Well, everyone except Uma, who simply mumbled “They’re just shaking their asses; I can do that!”

By the time the routine was over, my heart was beating rapidly in my ears. I could have sworn Evie threw me a wink, but I didn’t trust my head to be thinking rationally after being exposed to that. If Evie was going to be moving similarly at the dance tonight I was in trouble.

Expecting the tourney game to start back up, I excused myself to hit up the concessions because my mouth was suddenly dry, and I needed some air. It wasn’t difficult to find the concessions, but the line was a little ridiculous by the time I got there. That’s what I got for leaving during halftime, I suppose.

King Ben’s voice rang clear and familiar over the speakers, commenting on the band’s talent and the squad’s novel performance.

That was one way to put it, I thought, and I smirked at how taken off-guard he had sounded.

“And now the moment you’ve all been waiting for,” he started, and the crowd was already getting riled back up. “Homecoming court!” he shouted, and the cheers became even louder.

Oh shit; that’s what Evie wanted to be in, wasn’t it? I bounced on the heels of my feet, torn between staying in this stupid line just for an overpriced drink and running like an excited child back to my seat to see Evie inevitably walk up.
“Your Homecoming princesses are…” he drawled, and I promptly left the line.

Evie’s name was being called right as I turned the corner of the bleachers. I ran up to the fence to watch instead of going to my seat, not wanting to miss her expression. My fingers wrapped around the cool metal as her face lit up in absolute delight. With her wide smile and her raised eyebrows, she seemed genuinely surprised to be nominated onto the Homecoming court. It was ridiculous when you consider her popular standing with most of the student body and, of course, her devastating beauty. She skipped up to King Ben to accept a little tiara and took her place next to Audrey and two other girls I vaguely recognized from the cheerleading squad.

My brain didn’t recognize the boys’ names that were being called for homecoming prince, although I did manage to realize that Chad Charming had made the cut. Past that, I didn’t care to do anything but gaze upon Evie. Sure, the harsh, fluorescent field lights weren’t the most flattering for anyone. But when you shined as bright as Evie, wearing a pleased blush and a little tiara like the princess she was, everything looked good.

The rest of the game did not go very well for the tourney enthusiasts. The Sherwood Forest Falcons really upped their game for the second half, and the Fighting Knights were really struggling to recover. Carlos remained benched the entire time to make room for more talented players. Jay began to lose his team spirit and was trying to do everything himself. At least the Auradon cheerleading squad’s leaders were peppy as ever, still on a high from being crowned Homecoming princesses.

Everyone could see the loss from a mile away. As talented as the Auradon Fighting Knights were, there was no way they could score as many points as they needed to win in the time frame that they were given. Not even the teachers attempted to get the crowd to be more sportsmanlike. It was honestly hilarious to see the so-called good guys so upset about a loss on their own turf. So much for being proud of their team no matter the outcome. The student-only band played the school song as the teams shook hands and the crowds dispersed. Their enthusiastic rendition only furthered the bitterness of the loss for most people.

Game officially over, Evie was free to do as she pleased. Apparently, that was to make a beeline for me. One that didn’t appear to be losing any momentum.

I realized just in time that she wasn’t going to slow down, and I called upon my dragon strength and braced myself for impact. I was expecting a bone-crushing hug. What I was not expecting was that bone-crushing hug to include legs. An excited squeal was muffled by arms around my head, and if I wasn’t concentrating so hard on not dropping her, I may have passed out from the up close and personal experience I was receiving with her boobs and thighs.

After more exclamations of glee, she leaned back slightly to look at me, breathing heavily and
smiling ear to ear. “I’m a princess!” she yelled happily.

I rolled my eyes good-naturedly. “You’ve literally always been a princess, E,” I reminded her with an amused grin.

Her smile faltered, and her eyes left mine. “Not in Auradon,” Evie replied softly.

My head cocked in a silent question.

“My royal status is only valid on The Isle,” she explained sadly.

My jaw dropped. “Are you kidding me?” I asked rhetorically, my eyes already beginning to glow.

A soft hand cupped my cheek while the other held tightly around my neck to balance. “Hey, hey,” she cooed softly. “It’s okay; calm down,” she tried to reassure me, but it was clear that it still bothered her.

Regardless, my heartbeat began to slow and my eyes returned to their normal shade of green as her thumb gently passed along my skin.

“I just have to find other ways to be a princess, like Homecoming!” Her smile returned at the mention of her new title.

A long-suffering sigh escaped my lips. My gaze bore into hers so she understood the sincerity of my words. “Evie, if anyone I know is a princess it’s you, whether they recognize your royal status here or not. And even if someone rigs the voting and you don’t get Homecoming queen, which would be the only logical explanation,” I emphasized.

Evie let out a watery laugh.

“You’ll always be my queen,” I finished, nearly whispering towards the end, a little taken aback by my own words.
“Stop it, Mal, you’re going to make my mascara run,” Evie chastised, lightly slapping my shoulder before wiping at her glossy eyes.

“I mean it,” I urged seriously.

Her red-brown eyes flicked between mine, searching for any hint of falsity. Pretty red lips parted slightly when she found none, and she suddenly looked ten years younger: innocent and full of hope.

“We get it, Mal; you’re a dragon. You don’t need to flaunt your superhuman strength all the time! Evie has legs; she can walk!” Audrey harped playfully, strutting past the two of us.

Evie was quick to recover from our moment. “Princesses shouldn’t need to walk on their own, Audrey; you’re just jealous you don’t have anyone to carry you,” Evie quipped, wrapping her arms around my neck again and resting her head on mine.

“Please, as if your boyfriend could pick you up; I’d pay to see that!” Audrey called, already nearly at the locker room door.

“Oh! Doug!” Evie hissed, snapping her head around to search for him on the field.

From what I could see, the band members were nearly finished taking down and putting away their equipment.

“Um, I better go,” Evie apologized.

I nodded in understanding, holding her a little closer while she unhooked her legs from my waist and slid down my body.

She smoothed out her skirt and fidgeted in place. “Doug is taking me to dinner before the dance, so I probably won’t see you until then. You’ll find your dress on your bed. Ben will no doubt take you out to eat, too, so you should probably get to your dorm and get ready; there’s never seems to be enough time!” she laughed nervously. “Um,” she drawled, and I wondered what else there was to say. Two soft lips pressed against my cheek before she breathed out a “See ya!” and skipped off towards the remaining band members.
A sad smile grew on my face as I tried to hold on to the memory of her lips on my skin for as long as I could. By now, I was the only person remaining by the bleachers besides the help, who were busy picking up trash. I didn’t have to think about whether I wanted to go or stay and watch Evie reunite with her boyfriend.

Chapter End Notes

Is it the homecoming dance yet or what?! I think I may be even more excited about it than you all! As always, let me know what you liked and what I can improve on! (and I'd love to hear your Evie magic theories considering there are quite a few hints this chapter!) Thank you for being such wonderful readers; I hope to have the next chapter up more quickly than this one!
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

I am SO EXCITED to finally post this, oh my GOD. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Throughout the week, I heard girls in the hallway discussing their plans to get ready for the dance together. The way they talked about it made it seem like it was nearly as fun as the dance itself. I guess most girls loved the thought of caking on makeup and doing each other’s hair while chatting about their dresses and dates. Maybe I would have changed my mind about it if I had experienced it, but that was certainly not going to happen this year.

I had been banned from Audrey and Evie’s dorm for the night. The two girls were getting ready together, and they had less time than other girls because they needed to change out of their cheerleading uniforms and take a shower beforehand. On top of that, Evie was even more rushed because Doug was coming to pick her up for their dinner date, which needed to be over by seven forty-five to make it to the dance on time. Audrey was surprisingly dateless, so she used her extra time to help Evie get all gussied up. Not that I was using my dragon hearing to eavesdrop on them or anything…

“Damn, Mal. Eyeliner isn’t that hard to apply,” Uma commented from over on my bed. Her long, teal hair cascaded down the side of the mattress as she watched me from upside down. She wasn’t planning on going out to eat before the dance, so she was waiting to get ready until later.

I must have been concentrating too hard on our neighbors because my stick of eyeliner had been poised next to my eye for a suspicious length of time. I glanced at it in the mirror and shook my head, clearing my thoughts.

“Do you need some help?” Uma teased, smirking up at me.

“I’m fine; thank you,” I said, squinting my eyes at her threateningly.

“Yeah you are; you even managed to snag the King as a date!” she exclaimed, wiggling her eyebrows.
“We’re just going together as a sign of good faith in the proclamation,” I recited, deepening my voice in my best impression of the King.

“Yeah, okay, whatever you say. All I know is if I were him, I’d definitely be trying to get into your pants tonight,” she declared shamelessly.

I rolled my eyes at her, not able to hide the small smile that had formed from her comment. “I’m not wearing pants,” I retorted, finally leaning in and putting my eager eyeliner to use.

“Even better,” Uma countered with a wicked grin. After a while, she spoke up again. “So?” she drawled expectantly.

“So, what?” I asked, staring at the various containers of makeup Evie had laid out for me earlier and trying to remember the tips she had passed along.

“Are you gonna bone him? Spell him and take over Auradon?! What’s the plan?” she inquired, sitting up in anticipation.

I laughed off the accusations. “Yeah, because pretentious pushovers really get me hot, and all I’ve ever wanted is a kingdom full of wannabe heroes,” I replied sarcastically.

“Oh, come on, Mal. He’s totally a virgin; he’s probably really eager to please,” she suggested, flicking her tongue sexually.

“Ew, Uma!” I exclaimed, grabbing a makeup case and throwing it at her.

Her deft hands caught it easily, and she fell back onto my bed with an airy laugh. “So why did you accept Mr. Nice Guy’s proposal?” she wondered, unzipping the makeup bag and looking through it with mild interest.

A moment passed as I thought about how to word my answer. Ben appeared sincere in his assurance that it didn’t have to be a date. He was a nice guy, and I knew he wouldn’t try anything on me that I didn’t consent to. Although he was a royal, he seemed like a fairly normal human being, if not slightly more polite. He was capable of having a good time, which was what I was looking to do despite the circumstances. The circumstances that included my best friend, whom I have had a crush on since we were six, being on a date with her boyfriend in the same room as me. A sigh escaped my
lips.

“Why not, you know?” I decided on. My reflection revealed that there was much more to the answer than that. Of course, Uma could tell, too, but she didn’t push me for answers. For that, I was grateful.

She got up from the bed and set the makeup bag back on my desk gently. Her fingers ran through my hair as she studied my face in the mirror.

When I was certain she was about to ask me to elaborate, she said something else instead.

“Can I do your hair? You can’t go with it looking like this,” she said seriously.

I let out a breath of relief before half-heartedly scoffing. “What’s wrong with my hair?”

* * *

True to his word, King Ben came knocking on my door at six-thirty on the dot.

Uma begged me to let her answer the door with her tentacles, but I suggested she wait until we get to know him a little better before subjecting him to a heart attack.

He was sweet and chivalrous, as expected. Every door we encountered was held open, and he even pulled out my chair for me at the restaurant he had brought me to. The wait staff was quick to take our orders, not getting a visit from their King every day. While we waited for the food to be prepared, Ben struck up a polite conversation. At least, that is what it seemed to be at first.

“How are you liking Auradon so far?” he inquired, taking a sip from his drink.

If only I had a dollar for every time I heard that question. “It’s fine. My dorm is big and comfortable, and the food is really amazing.” I answered honestly.

“And the people? Have they been making you feel like an outsider in any way?” he wondered, leaning forward and intertwining his fingers.
“Uh, it depends,” I began, sighing and examining the grooves in the table. “Some people don’t treat me any differently, but some people will give me a wider berth in the hallways, if you know what I mean…”

“I’m sorry to hear that, Mal. I’d be lying if I said Evie, Jay, Carlos and Gil were quickly accepted when they arrived, but I think it was because they were still so young; children can be cruel. I wish I could have taken you, too, but I couldn’t get approval for the more…sinister villain’s children without proof that the proclamation could succeed. Please forgive me,” he pleaded, reaching out his hand to cover mine.

My eyes flicked up to meet his. His gaze was swimming with regret and sincerity, and I felt a pang in my chest at the request. As much as I loved befriending Uma and Harry out of the situation, it had always been a heavy burden to carry knowing that my first three friends had been so suddenly plucked from my life. Had I been given more time, I was confident I could have patched the wounds I had created with Evie. It had been, and will always be, my biggest regret in life.

“I understand,” was all I could offer him.

He nodded politely. “What about your classes; how are they going?”

A sigh of relief escaped me at the change of subject. “The classes are kind of boring, and the homework is…a lot…but I’m getting used to it,” I admitted. If my voice was going to be heard by the King, I may as well be honest.

“Yeah, I bet it’s a difficult transition from Dragon Hall. I have been trying to pass a proclamation to alter the curriculum there. There have been concerns that the classes are corrupting the children’s young minds,” Ben explained.

I barked out a laugh. “Yeah, you could say that.” It surprised me that we even attempted to run a school on The Isle in the first place, but how else were our parents going to get rid of their little nuisances for most of the day?

“Understandably, there has been a shortage of volunteers to take positions there…”

“Understandably,” I repeated, nodding my head in slight amusement and taking a sip from my drink.
“Which is why a lot of my efforts have been going into making the Second Proclamation of The Isle a success. For the Third Proclamation, I’d like to bring as many kids over to Auradon as possible so their lives can be more...enriched,” Ben revealed. “What do you think?”

My eyebrows raised in surprise. Apparently the conversation was not going to get lighter. I mean, life on The Isle was no walk in the park, and many children did not have loving parents, but to take them away from their families when they were so young seemed a little...extreme. I couldn’t help but feel a small attachment to the place I had called home for most of my life, the place that allowed me to forge an incredible bond with the people that meant the most to me.

“Uh,” I drawled, eyebrows drawing together in visible conflict.

“It’s okay if you still need time to think about it, but I would like to hear from you as soon as possible. Evie has been really passionate about the Isle Proclamations; that’s why I’ve appointed her head of Isle Affairs in the royal court. As my advisor, she’s told me some horrible stories about what you kids had to go through on that island, and she really believes that the children will fair better simply being raised in Auradon,” he disclosed. “After everything I’ve heard, I have to agree with her.”

My heart dropped, hoping that my two years of being a vicious bully was not included in Evie’s ‘horrible stories’. It was a lot of information to process, especially at what I expected to be a light-hearted dinner. At least it was clear now that this was indeed more of a business transaction than a date. I wasn’t sure yet if that was going to make tonight better or worse.

Ben must have sensed how overwhelmed I was becoming, and his eyes widened in realization. “Oh my goodness, where are my manners? I apologize for being so forward; I’m not used to being off the job,” he rambled, running his hands through his hair. That one simple action made him look so young. Sometimes it was easy to forget that Auradon’s King was only twenty-one years old.

I wasn’t going to say it was okay, because I still didn’t feel like it was, but I did my best to reassure him anyway. “I think we both deserve a night off,” I supplied, sighing and stirring my drink with my straw.

He chuckled amicably and nodded. “Yeah! I suppose we do.”

The rest of the dinner was much less tense. We spent the time swapping homecoming stories and chatting about our current classes. I couldn’t imagine the kind of stress Ben had to deal with being a
student and a King; I could barely handle my homework even though I lacked any extracurricular obligations.

As time went on, his shoulders gradually slumped and he allowed his face to relax more. It was nice to see him unwind.

At the end of the meal, a strawberry shortcake was presented before me, and who was I to decline such a delicacy? I wondered what little birdie told him that my favorite food was strawberries. I bet it was blue.

* * *

Amazingly, we made it to the dance before eight o’clock. Being the King, Ben was allowed to enter early, and, by association, I was, too. Immediately upon entering the room, Ben was pulled aside by Fairy Godmother to look over everything and make sure it was perfect. There were a few people flitting about; Audrey was standing in the middle of the dance floor with her hands on her hips.

“Did you break in early to steal the Homecoming crown?” I called out, approaching her from behind.

“I’m on the Homecoming committee, dork,” Audrey answered, admiring her hard work.

The gymnasium was nearly unrecognizable at this point. The entire floors and walls were blue, for starters. Holographic fish were swimming along the walls via some sort of projection technology. Blue and green streamers hung from the ceiling in abundance, and there were blue and white balloons forming various archways along the doorways. I had to admit, it was very impressive, but I highly doubted they managed to pull some of that off without magical intervention.

“It’s magical,” I commented, stressing the last word so she knew I was on to her.

She turned to me with a sly smile. I couldn’t help but laugh at the exaggerated wink she threw me next. “Fairy Godmother can be easily persuaded to contribute some wand flicks for a good, clean party,” she revealed. Auradonians were so funny. God forbid they use magic outside of class but for school-sponsored events? Why not spice it up a little bit?

“I’m surprised they let you on the Homecoming committee and be a Homecoming princess at the same time,” I commented.
Her mouth dropped in offense. “Are you implying that I would cheat to win Homecoming queen?” she gasped. “Mal, if I don’t win fair and square than I don’t want the title at all! Besides, I’ve been spending the entire semester rallying support for Evie. If my projections are correct, it’ll be a landslide!” she announced proudly.

My head reeled at a few things. First of all, this was the first time Audrey had called me by my name instead of some mildly offensive nickname. Second, Audrey had been working to get Evie votes. Third, Evie was more than likely going to win Homecoming queen. Purple blurred my vision as I shook my head in confusion. “Why would you do that?” I wondered out loud.

Audrey’s eyes rolled, and she turned to face me fully. “Because I don’t care what people think about me. Homecoming queen? It’s just a title and a stupid plastic crown. But to Evie it’s everything. And she deserves everything,” she said with finality.

Before I could react, Fairy Godmother’s shrill voice echoed through the walls. “Places everybody; we’re going to open the doors now!”

Audrey clapped excitedly and skipped off to join her at a small table by the main entrance. Music began playing, and Lonnie gave a thumbs-up from the turntables. Jane returned the gesture by the snack tables and so did someone I didn’t recognize by what appeared to be a photo station. Students entered two-by-two and were checked in at the table. Some groups went and got their photos taken immediately, but most went and claimed a table to set their stuff down on. Because it seemed to be important, I found one for myself and my friends and waited patiently for some company.

I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t searching the growing crowd for a certain shade of blue. Even though everything was a little blue due to the lighting, I easily picked Evie out when she and Doug arrived; it was if my body could sense when she was close. Her wavy hair bounced as she jumped up and down excitedly. She was clearly awestruck with the decorations, looking around with her jaw slack and her eyes wide. Doug seemed impressed as well, but he had a much more underwhelming way of showing it. Evie’s mouth dropped open further in what I assumed to be a squeal, and she began animatedly pointing in the direction of the photographer.

My inner dragon couldn’t resist and honed in on her voice.

“Doug, there’s a photographer! Oh, can we get a picture or two? Pretty please?” she begged, reaching for his arm but stopping herself before it made contact.
“I don’t know…” he drawled, looking everywhere but her eyes.

“Please, Doug? We don’t even have to-” I caught before the King found his way back to my side.

“Hey, there you are! I’m sorry about running off, but it seems I am never truly free of my responsibilities, even for a few hours,” Ben apologized. The legs of the chair squeaked along the floor as he scooted next to me.

“It’s okay,” I assured him.

“Do you want me to get you a drink or something?” he inquired, motioning towards the snack bar with his thumb.

“I’m good for now, thanks,” I replied.

“Do you want to get some pictures taken,” he asked before quickly shaking his head. “What am I saying? It’s really crowded over there…” he commented, furrowing his eyebrows and looking off into the distance. He was clearly nervous, but about what, I did not know. Yeah, my mother was the Mistress of all Evil, but I was just a girl. I was sure he had had to talk to much more important people in his lifetime.

“Sure, we can get some pictures later. Will you autograph them, too?” I jested, hoping to lighten the mood.

His mouth fell agape stupidly, and he paused for a moment before breaking out into a smile. You could see the tension leaving his body as he chuckled. “You think you’re funny, huh?” he teased, eyes shining as the DJ’s lights hit him momentarily before quickly fleeing.

“I am funny,” I corrected him, smirking and resting my head in my hand confidently.

“You know who’s funnier? Me!” a voice boomed, and Jay swooped out of nowhere to claim a chair at the table.

“That’s debatable,” Carlos added, walking to his chair like a normal human being and shrugging off
his coat.

“Bro, I’m hilarious,” Jay insisted, pointing at himself and grinning as if that proved his point.

“Yeah, your face is hilarious,” I quipped. It was childish, but I couldn’t help it. I knew it was just the thing to say to get a rouse out of him.

Jay’s face fell and he furrowed his eyebrows. “Your face is hilarious,” he lamely shot back, removing his coat with more force than necessary.

“Jay! Be nice; Mal’s face is wonderful!” Evie’s smooth voice came to my defense. Tan arms snaked from my shoulders to around my neck as she hugged me from behind.

I leaned back into her instinctively.

“She started it!” Jay argued, pouting like a kid.

“And I’m finishing it; no fighting at the dance,” Evie said with finality, not bothering to move.

I didn’t have to see her to know she was giving him a stern, motherly glare.

“I’m getting some snacks,” Jay mumbled, crossing his arms as he rose from his seat.

“Dude, we just ate,” Carlos reminded him.

I found it interesting that Carlos and Jay had gone out to eat together alone before the dance. I wondered how that went; they didn’t seem to be acting any differently around each other.

“Yeah, but this is free,” Jay countered, as if it was obvious.

Carlos’ eyebrows furrowed as he processed the information. Soon enough, he was scrambling out of
his seat and on Jay’s heels.

Ben simply sat back and watched, clearly amused and strangely unsurprised. Then again, he had technically known Jay and Carlos longer than I had. What a strange thought.

“Are you ready for a night you’ll never forget?” Evie purred into my ear, nuzzling my neck with the tip of her nose.

My cheeks flushed at the wording, and I glanced over to Ben awkwardly.

Thankfully, he was busy watching Jay and Carlos shove food into their mouths.

“You’re the Homecoming princess; I think this will be a little more exciting for you than me,” I replied weakly.

“Homecoming king and queen aren’t announced until a half hour before the dance is over; we have plenty of time to make the night exciting beforehand,” she countered, resting her chin on my shoulder and giving my body a small break from the overwhelming intimacy. “And I, for one, am ready to dance until I collapse!” she exclaimed, followed by a contented sigh.

That caught the King’s attention. “Oh, speaking of—Evie, is Doug here? I’ve never seen him at one of these things,” Ben asked, looking over at Evie and me with sudden curiosity.

Her embrace loosened slightly, and her hair tickled my neck as she nodded her head. “Yeah, I managed to convince him to tag along. He’s putting our stuff in the band room so it stays safe,” she explained.

“Do you really think it’ll get stolen?” Ben questioned, tilting his head and smiling slightly.

“Why take the chance?” Evie defied, muscles tensing.

I couldn’t help but smirk at her sudden attitude. I hid my mouth behind her arm politely. Ben was just curious; she didn’t need to be so defensive. The worst part of it was the fact that her passive aggressive tendencies seemed to go right over his head most of the time.
“Fair enough,” Ben settled, nodding in understanding.

After a few moments of silence, I spoke up.

“So,” I drawled. “Is it customary for people to not dance at dances?” I inquired, looking to the barren dancefloor. Most of the students had found tables by now and were either sitting at them or standing around the dancefloor and nodding to the beat.

“They’re just scared to be the first ones out,” Evie claimed, finally releasing me from her embrace and standing up fully.

As soon as she was gone, I missed the pressure and warmth.

“But we’re not scared; are we, Evie?” Ben called, wearing a big, dopey grin.

“Never!” Evie agreed.

I tilted my head back to gauge her expression, and it mirrored Ben’s.

Suddenly, both of them ran off to the middle of the dance floor together, Evie arriving first simply due to proximity.

I could feel a blush creeping across my chest from secondhand embarrassment.

They looked ridiculous out there with no company but each other, and I’m pretty sure the dance moves they were attempting to execute were not most students’ idea of what was cool. Not that they cared; their smiles were wide and carefree as they laughed and had a good time. It wasn’t long before Jay and Carlos slid onto the dance floor to join them, candy in hand. Their dance moves were a little less lame, but still over the top for what I expected most students were going to do. Seeing a crowd beginning to form, other students began slowly inching towards them.

“No much of a dancer either?” I heard from behind me, and I turned to see Doug finally arriving in a
tidy, white suit. He smoothed it out before taking Ben’s seat at the table.

“I don’t really know,” I admitted. I hadn’t done much dancing in my life, and it felt a little odd to think about doing it surrounded by people that I already knew judged me.

“I’m no good at dancing, especially next to Evie. I’d look like a fool,” he confessed, chuckling awkwardly.

“Maybe. But aren’t we here to have fun?” I prodded. “You can’t possibly be more embarrassing than the King of Auradon,” I joked, offering him a kind smile.

Doug’s eyes jumped to our group of friends just in time to see Ben do a series of stupid little kicks. Evie doubled over laughing at his ridiculous moves. By now, Jane, Audrey, and Lonnie had joined the group as well.

“You’re right about that,” Doug agreed, smiling more wholeheartedly now.

“Mal, Doug, come on!” Jay yelled, holding his hands up to his mouth to amplify the sound so we could hear him over the music. The others in the group all offered more encouragement, their voices blending together.

I looked over to Doug for confirmation, and he sighed with a small smile and stood up. We walked over to the group, who graced our arrival with enthusiastic whoops and cheers. Evie immediately took my hands and started moving them with hers to the music. I knew I was blushing, and my eyes were on the floor as I tried to get comfortable with all of the attention. Looking around me, more and more students were joining us and dancing, making me feel less exposed. Doug was doing an awkward head nod along to the beat, but that was the extent of his participation.

We danced like that for a while, all of us in a huddled circle and jumping, swaying, and stepping to the music. Jay and Carlos spent most of it attempting to teach Ben rhythm and Doug how add a little two-step to his arsenal. Doug quickly caught on, getting increasingly confident. Ben, however, seemed to be a lost cause, but he was no worse off for it. He probably wore the biggest smile out of all of us, clearly pleased with getting to let loose for a little while. Jane and Lonnie danced together happily, also doing the hand-holding moves that Evie had tried with me earlier. Jane was apprehensive at first, but with Lonnie’s energy and patience, she was soon singing along just as loudly as everyone else.
I was left dancing with Audrey and Evie, who were clearly more experienced due to their cheerleading involvement. I was proud to say I could keep up, albeit a little hesitantly. They took turns dancing with me, and I found myself sandwiched between them a few times. They were balls of energy, and they were making up for my lack of knowledge of lyrics by singing them much too theatrically.

Everyone was having a fantastic time, and none of us seemed to be able to stop smiling. That was, until a slow song finally interrupted the streak of friendly, upbeat songs. Jay immediately scoped out the first willing girl he could find and coupled up with her. Carlos excused himself to go to the bathroom. Evie looked to Doug with wide eyes and a hopeful smile, but he brushed her off, claiming he needed a drink and a rest from all of the dancing. Her face fell, but Audrey quickly hugged her from behind and spun her around gracefully.

“I’ll dance with you, Eavestrough!” she announced, and Evie’s smile slowly returned as Audrey placed a friendly kiss on her cheek.

Even Jane and Lonnie had paired up at this point, holding each other suspiciously close.

Before I had time to analyze it, Ben’s voice piped up from behind me.

“Mal, could I please have this dance?” he inquired with a polite smile and an extended hand.

I rolled my eyes kindly. “Of course; as long as you don’t step on my toes,” I teased, poking out the tip of my tongue between my teeth.

He laughed and confidently placed his arms around my waist. “I’ll have you know I have been taking royal dance lessons since I could walk,” he claimed, beginning to sway with the music.

“And you’re still this bad?” I grimaced. “They should have fired your teacher.”

He shook his head and chuckled. “I’m trained in classic ballroom, but that isn’t exactly university dance material,” he tried to explain. To his credit, he was doing fairly well with the slow dance thus far.

“And you thought it would be cooler to have a seizure on the dance floor?” I joked, recalling his earlier attempts at dancing.
He scoffed again. “Wow. You are really mean,” he accused, but his smile told me he didn’t take any of it personally.

“Well I am evil,” I stressed, tossing my hair over my shoulder.

Ben’s eyes became softer then. “No, you’re not,” His gaze was too intense, so I traded his eyes for resting my head against his chest. It was a lot to take in knowing the King of Auradon didn’t judge me solely based on who my mother was. He could really see who I was as a person, and my heart swelled thinking about the good he could do for Auradon while on the throne. We didn’t talk for the rest of the song; he just held me close as we swayed. It was nice.

When the song was over, most of our group congregated back to our section of the dance floor. When Ben and I parted, I immediately went looking for Evie. I found her nodding solemnly as Audrey wiped her cheeks for her and spoke softly. A swift inhale on Evie’s part suggested she was getting over tears, and an uncomfortable clenching in my stomach began. What had I missed during one song? I waited until the two had separated before approaching my blue-haired friend.

“You okay, E?” I wondered, reaching for her hand and taking it softly.

She looked down on our entwined fingers while she thought about her response. “I will be,” she decided on, offering me an unconvincing smile.

My eyebrows furrowed, unsatisfied with that answer.

“Dance with me?” she requested, eyes glancing up and boring into mine. Her lips were parted with the anticipation of my reply.

“I have been-“ I started, but she shook her head slightly and cut me off.

“Alone? “ she clarified, flicking her head in the direction of the now dense mob of students in the middle of the dance floor.

“Um,” I replied, not quite sure what to say considering we both had dates. I didn’t want to make the situation weird for any of us.
“We don’t have to do it now, but maybe later?” she bartered, eyes shining with hope.

I didn’t see the harm in that. “Sure, E,” I agreed.

Her breath hitched during her inhale, and she nodded animatedly. Thankfully, it only took a few songs for Evie’s mood to improve. Soon enough, everyone in our group was just as peppy and carefree as we had been before. After a few songs, the rest of the girls decided to make a trip to the snack table for some refreshments, and I politely declined to go with. It was kind of nice to hang out with just the boys; they seemed comfortable saying things in front of me that they may not have in the other girls’ presence.

“You tired already, Douggie?” Jay asked, looking at the other boy with surprise.

“Yeah. I’m just not cut out for this kind of exercise,” Doug replied, and the other boys laughed kindly at him.

“Dude, you can go sit down,” Carlos suggested.

“I-I just might,” Doug surrendered. He looked pensive for a moment before turning to leave the group. “Thank you for all your help tonight, guys!”

“Hey, Doug!” I called, running up behind him so he could hear me better. I lifted my hand to grab his shoulder, but he turned swiftly before I could follow through. My hand dropped awkwardly to my side. “Do you mind if I dance with Evie?” I asked, not wanting to take him completely by surprise even though I had already agreed to do it.

“Not at all! She’ll probably have more fun with you than me,” Doug assured with an amicable laugh.

Well, that was easy. “Okay, thanks,” I muttered before returning to the rest of the boys.

“What was that about?” Carlos wondered, missing the conversation due to the noise.
“Oh, I just asked Doug if I could dance with Evie; he told me to go for it,” I explained.

Carlos shot me a knowing look and shook his head. What was that about?

“Good thing!” Ben exclaimed, chest heaving a little bit. “I actually have to go – royal emergency – I am so sorry!” he apologized, taking my hand in sincerity.


“Yeah, we just had a diplomat arrive early, and I need to be there to greet him. I’ll make it up to you, though, I promise!” he assured me, covering our hands with his other one.

“Ben, it’s fine; go be a good King,” I urged.

“Thank you. I had a great time!” he said, pulling me in for a hug, which I graciously returned.

“I did, too!” I told him honestly.

Ben offered a little wave to Jay and Carlos before making his way towards the exit.

“How convenient,” Carlos mumbled, only loud enough for my dragon hearing to pick up.

My head tilted in question, but he didn’t say anything else. He probably didn’t even know that I had heard him.

The girls in our group finally made their way back over, looking rejuvenated and ready to keep dancing. Jane and Lonnie immediately veered off into the crowd of people together, earning an “Oooo” from Audrey in their direction. Audrey then gave Evie a hug and parted from our group as well to “Make some freshmen boys’ night”.

“Where’s Ben?” Evie asked, leaning into my space so I could hear her, which was completely unnecessary due to my magical abilities.
“He had to leave. You know, King stuff,” I explained. “Where’s Doug?”

She sighed. “He said he’s done enough dancing for the night. He’s going to hang out at the table until the Homecoming king and queen are announced.”

My lower lip jutted out a little at the thought of Doug sitting all by himself. A glance in his direction proved that he was perfectly content people-watching and sipping his punch, however.

“You know what that means?” she asked, a wicked smirk creeping across her face.

My heartbeat increased as she moved in closer.

“You’re all mine until then!” she breathed into my ear, nuzzling it with her nose afterwards. Her hand slid down my arm and intertwined our fingers before she nodded her head in the direction of the mob of dancing students.

Jay and Carlos exchanged a concerned look after seeing the group dissipate so quickly. Their eyes widened in panic as they realized they would either have to dance with each other or find new partners.

As much as I didn’t want Carlos to have to deal with that kind of rejection should Jay abandon him, I found myself unable to do anything but give in to Evie’s eager tugging on our hands. I threw Carlos an apologetic look before wiggling bodies interrupted it.

While I had definitely gotten close to my small group of friends, I couldn’t say I had literally gotten this close to anyone in Auradon until now. Evie and I weren’t just weaving between people, no, they were much too closely packed together for that. I felt like I was violating someone every time I had to slide past them, and more than once I could have sworn I felt a stray hand taking advantage of our proximity. Eventually, Evie was satisfied with our location. From the size and direction of the lights shining down on us, I figured we were in the middle of the dance floor, just a couple feet in from the DJ’s turntables. The pounding bass vibrated my very bones, and the music was deafening, but no one seemed to mind. Looking around, students in the crowd were intently focused on dancing with their partners; everyone was in their own little bubble just letting the music move them.

In the time it had taken us to push our way through the other students, the song had changed to something much less friendly than what the DJ had been playing for the former half of the night.
Although there were technically people touching me from all sides, all I could concentrate on was Evie, who had taken the liberty of bending over as much as she could in the huddled space in order to back her ass up into me. My hands found her hips, mainly to steady myself, and it only seemed to spur her on. I had seen various male-female pairings at the dance doing similar things, and now that I was an active participant I was thankful I was not born a guy and could therefore convincingly convey some semblance of nonchalance.

That idea quickly went out the window when Evie stood back up. She reached for my hands, which were on her hips, and placed her own over them. What seemed like a cute gesture at first was revealed to be anything but innocent as she guided our hands along the curves of her torso. Her dress was thin, and I could easily feel her body through the material. Among the destinations were her hips, her stomach, and just below her bra. Her head fell back slightly to lean on my shoulder, and her neck was just centimeters from my lips, tempting me to lean forward for a little taste. I could see a hint of a smile on her painted lips from the angle I was at. Just when I thought that would be the extent of the teasing, she brought our right hands to her thigh, which was exposed due to a high slit in her dress. My breath hitched as she led our hands along it, getting dangerously high once in a while.

Even though our height different made it a little awkward for me to be behind her, Evie bent her knees as she danced so that our bodies could fit better together. The next song was just as sexual, and Evie let go of my hands this time, giving me free reign to touch her as I pleased. While I wasn’t about to do anything too crazy in public, I couldn’t resist tracing patterns along the places I had already been given explicit permission to touch. Every time I neared the borders of those locations, she would let out a sensual little sigh or a whine that I was sure only I could hear. It was driving me absolutely crazy, and I ached to explore her more.

A couple songs in, I was beginning to wonder if we had a completely different playlist for the second half of the dance. Every song that played had been only furthering students’ inappropriate dancing, and Evie and I were certainly no exception. At this point, we had traded places. She now found herself behind me and was taking full advantage of her new position. Her hands were slow-moving yet full of energy, soft but eager and purposeful. Every touch was lighting my skin on fire, and I knew I wasn’t sweating due to the body heat from the crowd alone. Our bodies were melded together as one, and our movements were fluid and synchronized. The more songs that passed, the bolder we got. For all we cared, it was just the two of us.

This kind of attitude was getting dangerous, I realized, as I felt Evie’s lips brushing against my neck and shoulders fleetingly. My heart was steadily hammering, loud and clear in my ears, drowning out any sense of rationality I should have mustered up. My hands reached up and moved my hair to the side without thinking twice. Her next move was much less tentative, reading my action as permission. The telltale feeling of her hot mouth on my neck sent a shock right to my core, and I couldn’t help the whimpers of pleasure from escaping as she worked along my skin. That, paired with her fingers purposefully pulling my hips back into hers as we danced together, was making me lose control. I could feel my eyes beginning to burn with need while my eyelids kept them hidden.
It took every ounce of motivation I had to turn and face her. I was fully prepared to tell her that we needed to stop when a body suddenly collided with hers. She stumbled forward, grabbing my shoulders for support. But that was not the problem. The problem was that she had extended her leg in order to steady herself. That leg happened to end up between mine, and with her height advantage on me, it was providing friction exactly where my body craved it. My hips surged forward on their own accord, and my mouth fell open at the relief just one movement had caused. When I finally looked up through my eyelashes, I knew my eyes were glowing intensely in the dark. In their shine, I could see Evie’s pupils had overtaken most of her iris, and she was gazing hungrily back at me. Her hand quickly enveloped mine, and I found myself being dragged through the densely packed bodies of students once more.

Chapter End Notes

Who else is freaking out?! I know I am! This chapter is getting really long, so it will be split up into two for now. I'm sorry for leaving you all hanging like this, but I'm still working out what exactly I want to go down (pun intended) between Mal and Evie after this cliff hanger. I've already spent days thinking about it, but I'm still unsure. What do you guys want to see? ;)

ALSO I know Uma and Harry are suspiciously missing in this chapter; they were not about to spend their time dancing with Mal's friends, so they picked their battles there. They will be in the next chapter, though, no worries!
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

This chapter is brought to you by Mollie and Toasty Brian, my guinea pigs, who sang me lovely songs as I wrote this.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It didn’t take long for us to make our way out of the mob of students. As soon as we were free, the cold air hit me hard. Goosebumps crawled along my skin as Evie pushed open the door of the vacant bathroom. Her heels echoed along the walls as she pulled us to a large stall at the very back with purpose. Once we were hidden from potentially prying eyes, the door’s lock clicked loudly into place, and I was swiftly pushed up against the nearest wall. It was even colder than the air outside, and I found myself shivering involuntarily at the feeling. All of this cold air was sobering me quickly, and I suddenly knew we were making a grave mistake.

Although the heat of her lips and tongue on my neck felt incredible, with every kiss she landed I could feel my stomach drop further. “E-Evie, we,” I stuttered. Teeth scraped along my pulse point, and I whimpered at the feeling. “Fuck-we,” I attempted again, but her hands began to move along my body. It only made me feel worse. “Evie, we need to stop,” I finally ordered, my voice breaking as I took her hands in mine to still them.

She pulled back abruptly, and her eyes leapt to mine in concern. A pang of fear pierced my heart as I registered that her eyes were glowing crimson in the dark lighting.

“What’s wrong?” she inquired, rubbing her thumb along my hip bone in what was supposed to be a comforting gesture.

A scoff rushed out of my lips. “What’s wrong? E, what isn’t wrong with this? You have a boyfriend – a really sweet boyfriend. I’m not going to take part in this if it means we’re hurting someone else to do it,” I defied, pushing her away from me gently.

The glow of her eyes dimmed while her mouth parted in hurt.

Suddenly, the music from outside of the bathroom was much more audible, and Audrey’s voice boomed through the mostly empty room. “Evie, are you in here?
Evie took a deep breath and nodded even though Audrey couldn’t see her. “Yeah!” she called once her voice was steady.

“They’re announcing Homecoming king and queen soon; you better get your royal ass out here to accept your crown!” Audrey shouted back.

A small smile left as soon as it appeared, and a curtain of blue washed over her face as she nodded solemnly. “Okay!” she answered.

“Now!” Audrey demanded.

Evie’s eyes flicked between mine in conflict for what felt like an eternity before she opened the stall door and squeezed out without a word.

My head fell back against the stall wall, and I let out a sigh as Evie made a show of washing her hands to convince Audrey she had just taken a bathroom break. The bang of the door closing eventually informed me when I was alone. I could feel my eyes beginning to burn, but it was with unshed tears this time. I don’t know how long I stood there, eyes closed and trying to get my breathing under control. Apparently, it was long enough for someone to come looking for me.

“Mal?” Uma’s voice came like a beacon of hope, and my heart soared at the sound. Uma had made it very clear that she wasn’t going to be hanging out with me at the dance if I was with Evie, but I couldn’t be more thankful that she had been keeping tabs on me regardless. I quickly fumbled with the lock on the stall door until it was open, and I ran towards the sinks.

“Oh good; I thought you might be in here,” Uma said before her eyebrows shot up. “Dang, girl, you did get it on with the King,” she chuckled, taking in my appearance.

My heartbeat pounded in my ears as I turned to the mirror. I took in all of the hickey’s that marred my pale skin and my stomach lurched at the sight. A sob clawed its way out of me, and once I allowed one to escape, it made room for plenty more.

“Shit!” Uma hastily ran to me, taking me in her arms.

I buried my face into chocolate skin.
“Hey, hey, it’s okay,” she tried to assure me, rocking us side to side.

Her comfort pushed me to cry even harder.

“What happened Mal; do I need to bust some skulls?” she growled, leaving no room for jokes.

The worst part was that I knew I couldn’t tell her. I couldn’t possibly tell her that it involved Evie, knowing full well how much she already disliked the girl. As guilty as I felt for indirectly hurting Doug, oblivious as he was, I couldn’t bear to think of hurting Evie. My heart already constricted with the memory of her expression when I had stopped her. All I could do in the moment was shake my head to call Uma off. She was better off here, providing a shoulder for me to cry on, than out there, making a huge scene.

Over time, I managed to calm down enough to stop crying. Uma cast a minor healing spell to make my hickeys less noticeable, and she carefully helped me fix my makeup so I didn’t look like such a mess. I softly requested that we go back to our dorm immediately, and she agreed that it might be best. With my okay, we finally exited the bathroom. Thankfully, no one was at our table anymore; I assumed they were congratulating Evie on her win. I gathered my jacket and bag as quickly as I could, and Uma and I walked out of the gym hand-in-hand.

* * *

Six days. I made it six days without talking to any of my friends apart from Uma, Harry, and Ben. Three of those days were spent carelessly shrugging when addressed, eating lunch in my dorm, and skipping my Physical Education and Life Skills Without Magic courses just to avoid Evie. I was doing an admirable job until Professor Merryweather noticed me in the halls Wednesday afternoon and pulled me aside.

At first, her tone was condescending. “Mal, dear, are you feeling any better today?” she questioned, clearly not believing for a second that I had a legitimate reason for being missing.

I let out a sigh. I could only skip so many classes. “A little,” I mumbled.

Her expression turned more serious as she registered how lifeless my response was. “Okay dear, you just get plenty of rest tonight, alright?” she suggested with a light tap on my shoulder that was probably supposed to be comforting.
I nodded silently in reply and held my breath, waiting for her to leave me alone.

“I hope we get to see your shining smile tomorrow, or Evie’s going to have to make her birthday cake all by herself!”

My body tensed at the comment. I knew it was Evie’s birthday tomorrow; how could I possibly forget? Year after year it had been a sore spot for me, a day I longed to right. But now that I had the opportunity, it couldn’t have arrived at a worse time. I wasn’t ready to work it out with Evie. Not yet. However, I didn’t want to be the one to ruin her birthday again.

Professor Merryweather must have slipped out during my inner monologue because suddenly I realized that I was alone once more. Well, as alone as you could be in a crowded hallway. I remained there for a while, just standing and pondering what exactly I wanted to do with my afternoon—where I wanted to retreat to. Of course, my thoughts drifted back to Evie, and soon enough, I was on my way to the kitchen.

* * *

It was Thursday, October twenty-second, Evie’s twentieth birthday. I had gathered up the courage to actually go to class, but getting through the door was an entirely different story. I knew Evie was in there; she was always in there early. As I stood there in the hall, awkwardly holding a plate, I debated if this idea was a good one or if I should pat myself on the back for the effort and make a run for it while I still could. When Professor Merryweather spotted my purple hair through the small window on the door, however, I knew it was too late.

“Mal! Good to see you’re feeling better, dear!” she greeted after opening the door for me.

I attempted a smile, but it probably came out more like a grimace. As soon as she said my name, I could feel Evie’s eyes on me from our kitchen station in the back corner. My shoulders depressed as I let out a sigh, and I watched my boots take me down the familiar path to our corner.

“Hey, Mal,” Evie breathed tentatively.

I was still looking at my boots. After a few moments, I remembered that I had brought food, and I extended the plate in my hands in her direction. On it sat two caramel apples covered in blue sprinkles.
“What’s this?” she inquired, taking the plate with slender fingers.

My eyes finally betrayed me and glanced up at her; her expression was guarded. “Happy birthday,” I replied quietly, shifting my weight between my feet.

A small smile spread across her face. “Are these caramel apples?” she wondered, examining them a little more closely once I had broken my silence.

Now that we were on speaking terms again, it seemed my mouth wanted to make up for all of the words that had gone unspoken in that time. “Yeah! Uh, originally they were just regular caramel apples, but then I thought why not make them blue, you know, because that’s your color. But then when I put the blue food dye in it they turned, like, black, and that wasn’t pretty, so I improvised and covered it in sprinkles instead. They had glittery sprinkles, so I used those because I thought you’d like them, but I don’t know if you’re supposed to eat glitter. The kitchen goblins said it was fine, but if you don’t want them, I’ll just-”

“You remembered they were my favorite,” she noted with an awestruck smile.

“Of course I di-“

“Can I hug you?” she requested suddenly, cutting me off.

My heart panged. On one hand, I was really grateful that she didn’t want to overstep any boundaries. On the other hand, it hurt to realize that the great dynamic we had fallen into upon my arrival had been disrupted to the point that she felt she needed to ask permission to hug me when it had once been so effortless.

One look at her revealed she had no ill intent. Her gaze was soft and pleading, and her fingers drummed nervously on the plate in her hands as she waited for my reply.

The decision was weighted; whatever choice I made defined where we stood at this moment in time. As much as I craved the comfort that came with our closeness, I couldn’t ignore the twist in my stomach at the thought of her interpreting a yes on my part as complete forgiveness. I wasn’t ready for that quite yet. Maybe I had deserved some form of punishment for the part I had played, for all of the times I didn’t turn down her affections or flirted back. But Doug, as far as I knew, did nothing to deserve her betrayal. That wasn’t okay.
“Evie…” I drawled, not quite sure how to approach the subject.

Her chest rose with a stuttered breath. “It’s okay, Mal; you don’t need to say anything,” she answered, looking down at the plate. “Thank you for the birthday treats.”

I stood there, unsure of what to do, as she began flitting about, organizing our kitchen station for today’s lesson.

With Professor Merryweather’s insistence, we all chipped in to make a big birthday cake for Evie. It didn’t leave much time for private conversation. The cake was fluffy and delicious, but Evie’s smiles never reached her eyes and her ‘thank you’s never quite felt sincere. She left class right at the bell, and I was left wondering how we were going to fix this.

* * *

After Remedial Goodness, Uma and Harry made a beeline for our dorm, intending on taking a long nap together. Not tired enough to join them or quiet enough to leave them undisturbed, I decided it was in everyone’s best interest for me to take a walk. It was much too cold to go outside in my tattered old leather jacket, so I settled on aimlessly wandering the castle. True to my villain nature, my feet mindlessly took me to the darkest corner of the nearly-abandoned wing, and I pushed open the heavy door to the last room with a little elbow grease.

Bookshelves twice as tall as me loomed along the walls, their shelves full of dull, old books. Fine particles of dust were dancing through the air as I explored the surprisingly large room. My best guess was that this was a library at some point in time. As I came around the corner of a large bookshelf, my senses quickly picked up on another occupant, and a ball of green flame appeared in my hand out of instinct. The last person I was expecting to see in here was King Ben himself.

“Mal! Are you trying to burn the castle down? Put that away!” he ordered in a fatherly manner, gesturing to my open palm.

“Ben? What are you doing here?!” I demanded, lowering my hand slightly, flames still ablaze.

“Paperwork! What are you doing here?” he asked rhetorically. Open books and papers were scattered along the table in front of him. He had probably been enveloped in his work until I scared the hell out of him.
Leave it to me to find the room with the most kindling and accidentally start a fire. Or to do magic, which was strictly prohibited, in front of the King himself. My shoulders shook with laughter as I finally pulled my hand into a fist and extinguished the fire. “I’m sorry,” I apologized.

“No harm, no foul,” he granted me, chuckling along to the ridiculousness of the situation. “I don’t suppose you’re here for a bit of light reading?” he teased.

I scoffed. “As if.”

“That’s what I thought. So, either you owe Evie a favor and are here to help me in her place, or you’re here because you have nowhere else to go,” he guessed, eyes sparkling in the warm light.

My mouth opened and closed stupidly.

Ben hummed in response. “It must be the latter then. Well, pull up a seat,” he offered, patting the space next to him encouragingly.

I expected a puff of dust to jump into the air at the action, but no such thing occurred. I sighed at his intuition and gave up, plopping down into the seat and resting my head in my hands. It was surprisingly comfortable for abandoned furniture. I wondered if Ben had had nicer chairs moved in.

“This is one of the places I go when I need to get away, too. Only Evie knows about it, though, so I have a hunch she spilled our little secret?” he revealed.

“Nope, I found it all on my own,” I admitted. Our conversation relayed in my mind for a bit before I couldn’t help but ask. “Was Evie supposed to come help you? I figured she’d have the day off because of her birthday…”

“Oh, she’s released from her duties for the day, but she usually comes in anyway,” he started, scribbling away at some official-looking form. At my inquisitive stare, he clarified. “She’s not big on birthdays. She refuses to let anyone buy gifts for her or throw her a party, but my family always takes her out to eat for lunch. It’s the least we can do; she’s done so much for us.”

My gaze went vacant as I processed the information. “What does she usually do then—on her
birthday?” I wondered.

“Oh, you know,” Ben sighed. “If the weather’s nice she’ll hike to the Enchanted Lake. If it’s not, she usually just sits in her room and reads.”

“By herself?”

"Yeah, we’ve all kind of learned to give her some space,” he nodded, still working away diligently.

My lower lip jut out in response. Evie had always been so social; it was difficult to imagine her intentionally spending a day alone. I couldn’t help but feel responsible for her annual solitude. It couldn’t be simply coincidence that it was on her birthday.

“However,” he suddenly spoke up, noticing that I had burrowed into my mind for a while. “There never seems to be a lot of space between you two. I’m sure she wouldn’t mind if you stopped in to see her. And if she does, it won’t be a long walk back to your dorm,” he suggested, eyes boring into mine knowingly.

I did what I do best and deflected from my feelings. “Already trying to get rid of me?” I half-heartedly joked, leaning my back against the chair and letting my head relax.

“Not at all. She just needs a pick-me-up on days like today, and I don’t know anyone that can make her smile like you do,” he commented, holding my gaze with a soft smile.

My heart selfishly swelled with pride at the remark before I had time to suppress it. Purple bangs danced around my forehead as I blew at them in exasperation. It didn’t feel right to leave Evie on the sour note we had forged earlier. If Ben thought I should go visit her, perhaps he was right. I let out one last sigh before springing to my feet.

“You’re welcome to come here whenever you’d like, granted you keep it a secret,” Ben called as I approached the door.

“My lips are sealed.”

* * *
The abandoned wing and Evie’s dorm were on opposite ends of Auradon Prep, so the walk back was long enough for me to gather up the courage to actually knock. The wood was smooth and hard against my knuckles as I quietly rapped on the door. There was no immediate response, so I called upon my dragon hearing to see if there was anyone inside. From where I was standing, I could make out the steady breathing of Uma and Harry, asleep across the hall, and the nervous thrumming of a heartbeat behind the door in front of me. “Evie? I know you’re in there; I can hear you,” I commented, scrunching my face up after realizing how creepy that sounded.

In the next instance, the door was gone, and Evie was in front of me instead. “Mal?” she whispered, as if not believing me to be real. Her eyeliner was slightly smudged under her eyes, but otherwise, she looked picture perfect, as usual. Her accessory-laden school clothes had been swapped for a baggy, one shoulder sweater and plain leggings. It was strange, but nice, to see her in something so comfortable.

“Can-Can I come inside?” I managed to ask after not-so-subtlety giving her a once-over.

“Yes, please,” she insisted, gesturing for me to enter the dorm. Now that Homecoming was over and her commissioned clothing had gone home to their new owners, her room was finally spacious once again.

“Uh,” she uttered, eyes hopping around the room in search of a place we could be comfortable. Her and Audrey’s only furniture were their vanities, nightstands, Evie’s sewing station, and their beds. It didn’t leave us many options.

“We can sit on the bed,” I suggested despite my initial reservations.

Red-brown eyes full of worry searched mine to ensure I was truly comfortable with that decision. When they found nothing but honesty, we walked over to her bed, whose blankets were already tousled and cradled a book.

“What were you reading?” I inquired, picking up the book carefully and paging through it. Long, incomprehensible words and mysterious acronyms assaulted my eyes, and I promptly set the book down on her nightstand. My expression must have conveyed how overwhelmed I was with just a glance, because Evie’s raspy giggle followed right after it.

“Chemical Substances and Behavior. It’s a textbook that Doug’s cousin is lending me. I’m considering taking the class and wanted a sample of the material,” she reported, climbing up onto her
bed with ease and tucking her leg underneath her comfortably. That explained why it was nearly incomprehensible. “It’s absolutely fascinating, Mal! So much is happening in your body in a single point in time, and a lot of it we can’t even see! It’s like magic!” she gushed, smiling fondly at the book.

The way the evening sun was shining in through the window and illuminating her from behind seemed more magical to me. Evie’s soft bed sank as I sat on the edge of it awkwardly. The glint of the Homecoming princess and Homecoming queen crowns sitting happily on a little shelf caught my eye from across the room. “So,” I drawled, anxious to start mending some of our broken ties. “How was crowning?” I asked, figuring the subject would lift her mood.

Her body tensed and her eyebrows furrowed uncomfortably.

I cringed at the sight. Apparently, the night had not gotten any better for either of us.

After a few long moments, she finally spoke. “I won Homecoming queen,” she offered, attempting to smile. It didn’t meet her eyes.

“Well, of course you did,” I relayed, waiting patiently for her to continue.

A sad little smile appeared on her face as she held my gaze. For a second, it looked like she longed to comment but ultimately decided to keep it to herself. A clearly faux smile replaced the sweet one. “Chad was elected King.”

Yeah, he was obnoxious, but why was it such a bad thing? I waited quietly for additional information, leaning forward to coax more out of her.

“The first dance after crowning is always between the Homecoming king and queen, but he refused to dance with me. And, because he’s Chad, he made a big show out of it,” she growled softly.

“What? Why wouldn’t he dance with you?” I inquired, pulse quickening in concealed anger.

Her shoulders slumped in a sigh. “We dated for a long time in high school, but it was never good, you know? Nothing like the stories you read. We broke up on pretty bad terms, so he likes to rub salt in the wounds whenever he can,” she admitted, looking down at her fingers, which were cleaning nonexistent dirt out from under her nails.
My body instinctively moved closer to her, and my hand rubbed her arm comfortably.

She leaned into my touch.

It wasn’t a big surprise that they had dated, and it certainly wasn’t shocking to hear that he was a douchebag during their time together. Regardless, it still made my blood boil with the audacity of it all. I didn’t really want to bring it up, but I couldn’t help but wonder. “Why didn’t you just dance with Doug?” I whispered.

Her resolve was breaking; I could see it in the way she couldn’t look at me and the involuntary twitching of her dimpled chin.

My fingers reached up to trace it lovingly, as if such a small gesture could make all of the sadness go away.

“He doesn’t-“ was all she got out, shaking her head and trying not to let tears fall. “It was so embarrassing,” was the last thing she said before her eyes betrayed her. Dark rivers of blue flowed down her cheeks as her colored mascara ran.

I was there in an instant, pulling her into my chest. Gravity pulled us down until we were sinking into her soft bed, locked in each other’s embrace. I didn’t even care that my shirt was growing wet or that their might be a big, blue stain on it tomorrow. All I could do was be there for her as her best friend, sticky situation or not. The intensity of her emotions were palpable in the way that she held me. This wasn’t just about the crowning ceremony; it never was. I could feel her body loosening over time, greatly relieved to be on physical contact terms again. Her fingers clung to the fabric of my shirt, wordlessly telling me that she was sorry and that she was not expecting to be forgiven so quickly. I couldn’t say that, in that moment, I had totally forgiven her. But being in her arms reminded me of how right it felt when we were together, and that had to count for something.

Chapter End Notes

That didn't hurt too bad, right? I hope you all cried a lot less than Mal and Evie did this chapter! I'm sorry, but it's necessary! I promise there will be fluff and things to smile about soon! Thank you for sticking around until then!
“Move it, butt chin; you’re taking up the whole aisle!” I growled at the blue figure in front of me. It had been the first time I had seen Evie since her birthday. A sparkle had brought my attention to her as she was browsing a merchant’s tent. With the way her pretty new dress caught the light, it was as if she had been cloaked in glittering sapphires. Sapphires like the ones on the crown – the crown that had earned me a whipping that still burned with every move I made. She had played me, and I had been hurt in more ways than one. She had to pay the price.

With a spin of her heel, she had turned to face me. Her eyebrows were furrowed and her lips parted in confusion once she realized who had been speaking to her so harshly. “Mal?” she whispered incredulously.

“Oh, now I’m worthy of your attention? I don’t think so, Blueberry Princess!” I snarled, my hands taking the liberty of shoving her small shoulders.

Her Isle reflexes kicked in, and she managed to catch herself before she fell over, but the hand that flew out to save her smashed a pair of eyeglasses on display. Thankfully for her, the shopkeeper had not noticed, but a small pool of blood quickly began forming under her hand. A hiss of pain passed by her lips, and she examined the cut on her palm with wide, worried eyes.

Sufficiently distracted by surprise and pain, I took the chance to get closer to her. Our chests were nearly touching when I finally spoke again. Even though she was much taller than me, I glared up at her with every spark of fire I could muster, and I knew my eyes were glowing menacingly. For the first time since we met, I saw it. I saw raw fear gazing back at me, the look that most other kids on The Isle had adopted but never Evie. No, we had been too close for that. Too bad it was all a sham. “Didn’t you hear me before? I said get out of the way! Your fat ass is blocking the whole aisle, and some people have places to be!” I jabbed, knowing her mother was already always on her about her weight. She was my best friend at one point, or so I thought. That meant I knew exactly what to say to hurt her the most.

That was all it took for the waterfalls to start. A lip wobbled dangerously and eyes became glossy
until the tears poured out, uninhibited. Every sob that she couldn’t hold in provided me with the rush of victory, even as her form retreated into the distance.

I couldn’t help but follow her home, knowing what would happen once she got there. It took me a little longer because my legs weren’t as long as Evie’s, but I arrived just in time for the show. The exterior of her castle was rough and cold as I leaned against it, my lungs burning and my ears straining, using my dragon hearing to get past the thick walls.

“Ugh, Evie dear, don’t cry; you know what stress-Evelyn! What is that?” her mother had screeched.

My lips quirked in amusement. I knew full well that Evie hated it when her mother used her full name. It was reserved for times when she was especially upset with her.

“Mommy, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to-“ Evie had blubbered, still crying too hard to explain herself properly.

“You’re bleeding all over the rug! Do you know how much I paid for this? Get off! Get off!” she chastised. I could practically hear her shooing her daughter away. “Go up to Windsor at once so he can stitch you up!” she insisted.

“Yes, mommy,” Evie muttered, her footsteps becoming increasingly quiet as she fled.

“You better hope that doesn’t scar or no prince will take that marred hand in marriage!” The Evil Queen had yelled after a moment.

I had never intended on drawing blood from the girl, but it was the icing on the cake. If I could harass Evie and get her mother to do the same, it would be twice as torturous for her. Nowhere would be safe.

* * *

It hadn’t been my idea to banish her; my mother had thought that one up. Even though I had met my goal of making Evie cry at least once a day, my mother’s spies had seen her smiling too often for her to be fully satisfied with my work.
“I’ve seen how those two operate, primping and preening so they can go out and flirt their way into discounts and handouts. They thrive on attention, even worse than Tinkerbell. Let’s see how they like being cut off from all of their pawns. Let’s see how long they can look at no faces but their own until they want to throw themselves off of their towers,” she spat with a hatred even I had rarely seen from her.

And as it was spoken, it was done. With the influence my mother held on The Isle, the Evil Queen and her daughter had been effectively banished to live in their own castle, with no house goblins to order around, indefinitely. It wasn’t completely evil; at least they still received weekly deliveries of food – what was left after the rest of The Isle had taken their pick. It was enough to sustain them but not enough to indulge – like they would want to anyway with how far gone much of the scraps had become by the time they showed up at their door. At least they would remain skinny, how the Evil Queen preferred herself and Evie to look.

It was clear that the punishment of banishment was intended to isolate the mother-daughter duo, to deprive them of people to dote on them and fall into their traps. I understood that, I did. But it was just so much more satisfying to terrorize Evie in person than to simply imagine her grief as she sat alone in her tower. So I found ways to do so.

One morning, an unauthorized package of fabrics found its way into the Evil Queen’s castle, despite my mother’s goons keeping a close eye on the place. I could have easily intercepted them once I found out about it, but where was the fun in that? Instead, I climbed a nearby tree and waited for Evie to bring them up to her bedroom. From my vantage point, I could easily see through a large window on her tower. Her smile was bright as she sifted through the fabrics, her small fingers brushing over each one lovingly. Just when she had them all out in the open, I readied my weapon. Jay had helped me make it. I had been admiring his homemade incapacitation bombs for some time now, and we had finally become close enough for him to reveal some of his secrets. He didn’t know I was going to use it on Evie, however. My tongue poked out of my lips in concentration as I threw the lightly bound sack of soot through the castle’s open window. As expected, it broke open as soon as it came into contact with the hard castle floor. In the blink of an eye, Evie’s entire bedroom disappeared into a cloud of black smoke. A shriek echoed through the walls.

“Evelyn! What was that commotion?” the Evil Queen called from the bottom of the staircase in annoyance.

The cloud dissipated enough to reveal Evie, only the whites of her eyes and the pink of her mouth visible in the sea of black. Her body was bent over, lungs trying desperately to expel the soot from her body.

“Ladies don’t scream, Evie, we suffer in silence! Evie? What is going on up there?” the Evil Queen
wondered, becoming increasingly impatient.

Evie was too busy coughing to answer, so her mother’s footsteps quickly ascended the stairs to find out for herself what had happened. Soon enough, the door to Evie’s bedroom clicked open to reveal the catastrophe I had caused.

My ears perked in sweet anticipation.

“Evelyn! What on earth is going on in here? What have you done?” the Evil Queen shrieked, surveying the room in horror.

“M-Mommy, I didn’t-“ Evie tried to explain, but she was interrupted by another round of coughing.

“Your dress, your bedding, and are those your new fabrics? Evelyn, you’ve ruined everything!” she yelled angrily.

Sometimes, I didn’t know what was worse – the Evil Queen’s earth-shattering shouting or my mother’s passive silence. Regardless, I was happy that I was not Evie in this situation. My body shook with barely-contained giggles of absolute glee.

“You are not leaving this room until you’ve scrubbed every particle of dirt off of everything. I want this room spotless, do you hear me? And you can forget about food until the job is done!” the Evil Queen announced with finality, coat gracefully flying through the air as she spun to close the door.

Evie frantically scrambled to intercept it, but it closed with a slam before she could get there. Instead, she fell to her knees and cried, tiny fists resting on the heavy door. She cried and cried until her tears washed the soot from her face.

* * *

Mother said that I would never tire of hurting Evie, that every tear would delight me as much as the first, but she was wrong. Eventually, Evie stopped crying, stopped reacting altogether. The longer she stayed in her castle the more her body and spirit deteriorated. She was thin and lifeless, her sunken-in face barely reminiscent of the luminous girl I had once known. There was no fight left; I had broken her.
My wounds stopped stinging and became scars, just dormant reminders of my difficult past. As sweet as revenge had tasted, it was nothing compared to the taste of Evie’s lips and the warmth of her embrace. Nothing could compare to that. Jay would rather wrestle than talk about feelings, and Carlos could barely look at me anymore, knowing exactly what I had put Evie through. Sure, I had mother’s approval for once in my life, but what could she offer me? A seat at her side, to be her second-in-command when she took over the world? I didn’t want that; I didn’t want follow her orders for the rest of my life. Without Evie, I might as well have had no one.

So I stopped. I stopped calling Evie names, stopped pulling pranks on her. I even stopped going to see her altogether. I had done too much, and I felt absolutely horrible about it. Every day that passed I tried to muster up the courage to apologize to Evie, to defy my mother and attempt to revoke the banishment and make amends. But, of course, things could never be that easy.

“Good riddance,” mother grumbled, gazing into our only working television with enough intensity for it to begin buzzing angrily.

My hands stilled, and the grip on my pencil loosened as I looked up at the television curiously. My mind shifted from concentrating intensely on capturing mother’s staff in excruciating detail to trying to gather what Auradon’s news channel was going on about this time. There, on the screen, was The Isle itself. Specifically, there was a big, fancy Auradonian boat on The Isle’s docks. What could they possibly want to come here for?

“They were allowed to pack their modest belongings to accompany them to Auradon – Oh, there the kids are now!” the announcer said, pointing to four small figures walking along a dock, flanked by a small crowd of royal escorts from the looks of their clothing.

The second I saw the kids, my mouth became dry, and the blood drained from my face.

There, dragging containers of luggage, were my three best friends. Or, at least the three people that used to hold that title. Carlos was clinging to Evie, who was speaking softly to him while Jay stomped ahead of them with determination. Along with them pranced Gil, the smallest member of Uma’s group of friends. A little red box at the top of the screen read ‘live’.

“-their new lives in Auradon! Newly appointed King Ben’s first official decree-” the announcer continued, but I had already abandoned my artwork and headed towards the door. Mother be damned, I was going to do whatever I could while I still had the chance.
I had never ran so quickly in my life – not when I had poured a bucket of raw shrimp on Uma’s head and had to face the wrath of the entire Pirate Crew, not when I had fallen asleep in Evie’s arms one night and her mother had almost caught us together, not when I decked a full-grown man for saying vile things about my Evie. No, this was definitely the fastest I had ever run. In fact, I would have believed I was flying if it weren’t for the burning of my legs and lungs as I pushed my body further than it had ever been pushed. It begged me to stop, told me that I needed to lay down and never move again. But the chance – the sliver of a chance that they would still be there when I arrived, allowed me to continue.

A horn blared, loud and piercing through the fog surrounding The Isle, and I knew I was close. Just a little bit further and I could intercept them. I could stop the boat and apologize to Evie and make everything good again. I needed everything to be good again. But that’s not how life worked, not for the child of a villain.

As I came around the corner, I could see the boat, not yet completely cloaked by the surrounding fog. My heart crashed violently against my ribs as it competed for space with my lungs. The old, weathered floorboards of the docks groaned in protest as my boots pounded against them. I nearly made it to the sea herself before my legs gave out, and I collapsed into a heap on the dock. My body was trembling with all of the effort I had expended, but with every last ounce of breath I had, I called out “Evie!” All I received in reply was my own voice, blown back to me by the unforgiving wind. “Evie, I’m sorry!” I called out again, my voice cracking with the effort. What I could see of the boat was quickly disappearing, both from fog and from the tears blurring my vision. “Please,” I choked, a sob breaking out and quieting my call. “Evie, please don’t go!” I screamed, my vocal chords on the verge of giving up. But it was no use. She was gone. She was off to live in Auradon, and she would never know that I was sorry and that I still loved her. And all I had left was the shell of myself that she had left behind.

* * *

The fog around me thickened, and the burning of my muscles lessened, despite the fact that I was still screaming. A soft pressure enveloped my body, and I could faintly hear her voice.

“Shhh, Mal. It’s okay. I’m here; I’m not going anywhere,” Evie whispered.

Knowing it wasn’t real, my sobs only became more violent.

“What the fuck? When did you get in here? What are you doing to her? Get out!” another voice joined, absolutely seething.
I looked around, but there was no one to be found. My head shook in confusion, and suddenly the dock below me was becoming smaller and smaller, like I was ascending into the clouds and leaving the island far below me.

“I’m calming her down! I heard her yelling my name, so I rushed over to see what was wrong! It’s more than you were doing, I see!” Evie countered. Her embrace was becoming increasingly solid, and her voice rang louder in my ears.

“How dare you!” Uma growled, making my heartbeat spike as I was suddenly thrust from my dreams and into reality.

All of the pent-up emotions from my memories coursed through my veins intensely, and as countless nights prior, I was too weak to hold them back. It all happened in a second, but it was as if time had been slowed down. Evie’s face snapped back to mine and her eyes began to glow red as she felt the surface of my skin heating up alarmingly quickly. My tear-stained face appeared green in the glow of my own eyes, and my mouth dropped open to release the ball of flames that always accompanied such intense dreams.

It was fast, but Evie was slightly faster, pushing off of the bed and throwing her hands up to cast a crimson-tinted, translucent shield before it got to her.

As soon as the fire left my lips, a cry of her name followed it. My limbs scrambled to free themselves from the confines of my blankets, and I rushed to take her into my arms. It was difficult to see through the thick tears that never seemed to clear from my eyes, but it appeared as though she was fairly unharmed. Not a thread of her pyjamas was singed, but the flames had managed to do a number on the palms of her hands, where she had cast the protection ward from. “Oh my evil, E; I’m so sorry, I—” I sobbed, barely getting out my words. It was supposed to be different this time, but here I was, hurting Evie all over again.

“It’s okay, Mal; I’m okay,” she tried to assure me, her lip quivering in well-concealed pain.

“No it’s not! I burned you! You could have died!” I cried, looking deeply into her eyes.

They were glossy, but not nearly as teary as my own.

“And that is why I don’t intervene,” Uma stated matter-of-factly, gesturing from Evie to the permanent scorch-marks on the ceiling above my bed.
“Well she clearly isn’t fine, Uma; you can’t just leave her alone when she’s like this!” Evie argued, her arms wrapping more tightly around me. Her hands were still extended, a conscious attempt to keep them from touching anything.

“Guys,” I tried to interrupt, but they wouldn’t hear it.

“She’s not a child, princess; she can take care of herself! And from what I heard, her nightmare was about you, so you’re just making it worse by being here!” Uma accused, stalking closer to Evie and me.

“Guys, please!” I tried again, moving between the two of them.

“I’m her best friend; it’s my job to be here for her when she needs me!” Evie claimed, stepping in front of me protectively.

Uma’s eyebrows shot up at the comment. “Oh really? You’re her best friend? Don’t make me laugh,” she replied through gritted teeth, invading Evie’s personal space. “All you did was break her heart and then leave her last time. And who had to pick up the pieces? Me. I’ve been Mal’s best friend way longer than you, honey, and I will not let you manipulate her again,” she warned, her nose nearly touching Evie’s.

A red glow was cast upon them as Evie’s eyes illuminated again in silent fury.

I finally managed to squeeze between them and shove them away from one another. “Guys, stop!” I pleaded, gaining enough strength to yell.

Their eye contact finally broke, and Evie threw me an apologetic glance. Uma’s expression remained the same, but she backed up to give us some room.

“Uma, can you heal her?” I requested, begging her with wide eyes.

“Fuck no! She’s the one who busted in here and caused a scene! No one would have gotten hurt if she just would have stayed in her place!” she snarled, eyeing the other blue-haired girl with disdain.
“Uma!”

“No, it’s okay, M. I don’t want her to heal me anyway; she’s far too inexperienced,” Evie commented.

A scoff erupted from deep within Uma. “You just think you’re so much better than everyone else, don’t you?”

“Not at all, I’ve just been trained in magic for ten years, and I wouldn’t even attempt to heal myself. Restoration is a very tricky field, one certainly too advanced for someone who’s been using magic for three months,” Evie explained not unkindly.

“Whatever,” Uma dismissed, trudging back to her bed and unceremoniously dropping into it. “You just better not be here when I wake up in the morning,” she threatened from underneath her covers.

Evie decided not to entertain Uma by giving her an answer.

“Okay, uh, what-do you want to do?” I asked her, straining my eyes to see her face in the dim lighting now that our eyes weren’t giving off additional light.

“It’s likely only a first-degree burn, which isn’t super serious, but because it’s on my hands, it’s best if I go to the infirmary,” Evie replied analytically, as if she wasn’t the one that was injured.

“Okay, I’m going with you,” I declared, slipping my arm around her waist.

“Mal, really; I’m fine. You don’t have to-” she protested weakly.

“Well who’s going to open doors for you, huh? You can’t open them like that,” I argued, eyebrows raised.

The corners of her lips quirked at my frantic attempt at a justification. “Okay, Mal. You can be the official door-opener,” she relented.
“I’m going to be the official gut-opener if y’all keep standing around and chitchatting,” Uma grumbled.

It didn’t take particularly long for us to make our way to the infirmary. It was odd to be walking about the castle after curfew. The walls loomed taller, and ominous shadows danced along the stone from the moonlight streaming in through the windows. The air was chilling against my slightly sweaty skin, but I was too scared to call upon my inner dragon this time after what I had just done with it. It was almost as if we were back on The Isle.

A cheery, if not slightly surprised, young man greeted us when we finally arrived. He seemed to be the only one working this late at night. “Good evening, ladies; what can I do for you?” he inquired with a genuine smile.

“Hi! I need you to look at some burns,” Evie piped up, holding her hands up for him to see.

“Oh, please, come right in,” he gestured to usher us inside. The room was fairly spacious. Beds were lined up along the walls, and a few students were asleep in them. One was groaning dramatically and clutching a bucket. “Flu season,” the nurse explained with an amused smile and a head-nod in the student’s direction.

My nose wrinkled in disgust. I sincerely hoped we didn’t need to spend our time here being serenaded by the boy expelling his stomach contents.

“So, how did this happen?” the nurse wondered, more out of curiosity than suspicion by the sound of it.

“I-“ I began, completely ready to admit that the whole endeavor was entirely my fault.

Evie wouldn’t allow it, however. “I was adding some wood to the girls’ common room fireplace, and I was just standing too close to the fire,” she lied, feigning embarrassment. A warning glance in my direction when he wasn’t looking told me to keep my mouth shut.

“You’re not the first to get injured by those fireplaces, and you won’t be the last,” he sighed, shaking his head as he closely examined Evie’s hands. “I’ve been trying to get them to switch to gas, but they’re too bent on tradition and ‘preserving the original aesthetics’.”
My eyes rolled, and my foot tapped, eager to skip the irrelevant conversation and hear the diagnosis.

“My, my, that’s a big scar you’ve got there!” he commented, eyeing the palm of her hand with fascination.

Suddenly, I felt like I may need to borrow the bucket. I could hear Evie’s heartbeat increase at the inquiry, and I didn’t miss the way her eyes flicked to me in her peripheral.

“Yep,” she swallowed, feigning nonchalance. “Don’t put your hands through mirrors!” she laughed uneasily.

My stomach lurched, knowing that I had been the one to give her that injury as well. “I’m going to wait outside,” I muttered before I even registered that I had spoken.

The wall outside of the infirmary was cold against my thin shirt, but it was just what I needed to take my mind off of everything. I focused on the feeling to keep me anchored until I heard the door open once more.

“Thank you,” Evie thanked the nurse, who held the door open for her.

“No problem! Goodnight, ladies!” he replied with a friendly wave before closing the door once more.

We both waited there in the dark for a while before I spoke up. “So?”

“It’s a first-degree burn, just like I thought,” Evie answered stiffly.

“Did he heal you?” I inquired, eyeing her hands, which were still held outwards uncomfortably.

“No, he did a mild laser treatment to speed healing, though.”
I leapt to my feet, outraged by the information. “What? Are you telling me they don’t even use magic to heal their own students? You could be good as new already, but now you have to suffer for...?” I asked, prompting her to tell me when she was expected to be healed by.

“Three to twenty days,” she said to the floor.

“Three to twenty days! This is ridiculous!” I hissed. “How are you going to write? Take your exams? Hold a book? Sew?” the more things I listed the more my eyes burned with unshed tears. I had really done it this time. “I ruin everything!” I cried, tears finally falling down my cheeks. The cold wall collided with my back once more as I leaned against it, trying to breathe deeply and calm myself but failing. I half expected the nurse to come and shush us.

“Mal, hey,” Evie spoke softly, moving to take my face in her hands but stopping herself on account of the burns. “I’ve still got you. You don’t ruin everything Mal, okay? Quite the opposite,” she tried, but I knew if I asked her to give me examples she would come up empty.

I tore my eyes from the floor and looked up to meet her gaze. She looked more upset than when I had woken up earlier, as if her heart was breaking just hearing me speak like this. Her face approached mine, and her kiss was soft and warm on my forehead.

I leaned into the pressure automatically.

As soon as her lips left my skin, an overwhelming sense of calm washed over me. My eyelashes fluttered closed as the tears subsided and my lungs were capable of large breaths once more. Unfortunately, my limbs became heavy as well, and it took all of my strength not to simply lay down and sleep right here in the hallway. I slid down the wall as my legs fought to hold me up.

“Oh no you don’t! No sleeping until we get back to the dorms!” she ordered, snaking her arm through mine and pulling me further up the wall.

I couldn’t really recall the walk back. We managed to make it to Evie’s dorm, where Audrey opened the door with wide eyes and burning questions. She hadn’t expected Evie to bolt in the middle of the night and not come back for over an hour. When she was finished verbally reprimanding her roommate, she helped both of us into Evie’s bed, citing my fatigue and Uma’s wrath as good enough reasons for me to sleep over.

All I could do was nod feebly in consent. The night’s events had left me utterly exhausted, and I
wanted nothing more than to go back to sleep. The last thing I remembered was Evie’s arms wrapped around my body and a feather-light whisper of ‘goodnight’ into my ear. The best part of it all was that I didn’t dream at all.

Chapter End Notes

The second half of this chapter was going to go a completely different direction, but I think it's more fitting this way. Perhaps I'll write my previous idea in at a later time. If I don't, I may just write it as a little deleted scene from the story as a whole. The next chapter or two should be significantly happier, it is approaching Christmas and winter break, after all! What do you think the girls are going to get each other for the holidays? :D
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

So there comes a time when you just have to say FUCK THE OUTLINE. We've been waiting long enough, so I'm moving exciting things closer! I thought they would happen this chapter already, but you all have been waiting so patiently for so long that I'd rather just give you this now and a longer chapter next! I hope to have adequate time to work on the next chapters now that my semester is over, but I am hopefully starting a job soon, so we will see!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bzzt bzzt bzzt!

The blaring of an alarm had me shooting up into a sitting position out of a dead sleep. My eyes jumped around frantically, and my heartbeat increased as I took in a room that was not my own. Only when I caught sight of blue did it begin to slow down. Well, for a moment.

Evie’s eyes were wide, and her swollen, angry palms were up, weak red sparks falling from them. It didn’t take a genius to figure out that she had tried to cast a protection ward, just in case. From the looks of it, it had failed anyway.

My heart sank at the sight of the fear that had flashed in her eyes. Was this my punishment? Was I doomed to be a perpetual danger to the people I love?

“I’m sorry; I should have turned that off,” she apologized, reaching over and hitting a button on the alarm clock with her elbow. When she sat back down on Audrey’s bed, her hair draped over her face, effectively hiding her expression. “How are you feeling?” she inquired, finally looking up and into my eyes.

“Never mind me, how are you feeling?” I dismissed, glancing down at her hands.

“Mal, don’t do that,” she chastised with a sigh. She was clearly exhausted with my behavior.

“Do what?” I asked, more bite to my tone than she deserved. This time it was me who was avoiding her gaze.
“Deflect,” she clarified.

I could feel her eyes burning into my face. A sigh escaped my lips, and I concentrated on assessing how I felt. My body didn’t ache, and I was quite alert. I hadn’t felt this well rested in…maybe ever. “I feel…pretty good, actually. How long did I sleep?” I wondered, leaning out of the bed to look at the clock. It read six-thirty, and my eyebrows furrowed in confusion. There was no way I felt this rejuvenated after two hours of sleep, especially following last night’s events.

“It was the least I could do,” Evie muttered, gazing at me with too much sincerity for this hour of the morning.

My head cocked at the comment. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“I can manipulate time, Mal. Speed it up; slow it down. I just can’t stop it, or go back,” she confessed sadly. “I figured you could use some extra sleep.”

The way she always seemed to be immediately by my side; how she could balance homework, cheerleading, sewing, and being royal advisor; how she had managed to alter my shirt in just five minutes…it was all coming together. In fact, I felt rather stupid for not piecing it together earlier. “That…that actually makes a lot of sense,” I stated, running my hand through my sleep-tousled hair. “So,” I drawled. “Time manipulation, protection wards, unearthly beauty,” I listed, and her lips quirked at the last one despite herself. “Any other magic I should know about?”

The smile that had appeared swiftly went back into hiding. Evie opened and closed her mouth a few times before shaking her head and changing the subject. “Did you really have a nightmare about me?” she asked, a pained expression on her face.

My eyelashes fluttered, and my chest constricted painfully at the memories that threatened to come flooding back. In and out – I needed to breathe in and out. “No,” I decided on, lowering my head and examining the pattern on her blanket. “I had a nightmare about myself; you were just in it,” I whispered.

Her hands twitched, as if wanting to reach over and take mine. But with the state of her palms, Evie wouldn’t be touching anything with them any time soon.

My stomach lurched with guilt at the reminder.
“Mal,” she breathed, getting up from her place and moving to sit beside me on her bed. “Don’t beat yourself up,” she pleaded, bending over to see my face more clearly.

A mirthless laugh tumbled out. “Why not? It’s not like I don’t deserve it!” I growled. “Look at you! Look at your hands!” I directed, taking her wrists into my fingers and moving her palms up. “You use your hands for so much, Evie! What if you could never use them again? What if I’ve taken all of that happiness from you?” I asked, my voice breaking.

“Mal, they’re just first degree burns. That means only the first layer of skin is burned; it’s really not a big deal,” she assured me.

Honestly, she knew more than I did about most things, so maybe she was right. Maybe the burns weren’t a big deal. “Yeah? Well what about everything else? Huh? What about this?” I asked rhetorically, ghosting over the scar on her palm with my finger.

She flinched at the motion, still sensitive. It was unclear if the sensitivity was physical, emotional, or both.

“I was horrible to you, E. Horrible. Nothing you did deserved that kind of retaliation,” I urged quietly.

“What about it, Mal? It was a long time ago. You were just a kid, and evil knows your mother wasn’t a good influence. We all did things on The Isle that we’re not proud of. What matters is who you are now,” she insisted, eyes boring into mine.

How could she say that? How could she just brush off what I had done? I didn’t deserve that kind of forgiveness. “You say like I didn’t just hurt you last night,” I croaked, tears blurring my vision.

“It was an accident, Mal!” she insisted.

That didn’t mean it didn’t hurt. I shook my head as hot tears finally ran down my cheeks. ‘

“Listen to me,” Evie ordered, her voice becoming stronger and more authoritative. When I still couldn’t bring myself to look at her, she took my face in her hands, despite the obvious discomfort it caused her, and forced me to. “You are not a monster,” she said, taking the time to give each word emphasis. Nothing but overwhelming love and sincerity shone in her eyes. “And how badly you feel
about it is a testament to that,” she added softly, tenderly wiping the tears from my cheeks with the backs of her hands.

With the way my walls fell down and my heart softened every time I was around her, even I started to believe it.

* * *

Sixteen days. It took sixteen days for the swelling, redness, and pain in Evie’s hands to go away. During that time, Ben had appointed her a personal scribe to take notes and quizzes for her while she couldn’t hold a pen comfortably. He was a young whelp of a boy, all bright smiles, jingling laughter, and twinkling eyes. I hated him. I hated the way he sat and chatted amicably with Evie on the bleachers during gym class. I hated the way my obvious dislike for him prompted Audrey to start teasing me about it while we were partnered up in Evie’s absence. I hated the way he knew what he was doing in Life Skills Without Magic and how his sewn pillow didn’t have any loose seams. I just hated him.

To make matters worse, he was all too eager to open doors and pull out chairs for Evie. The first day on the job he had the audacity to offer to feed her even though she had a perfectly capable boyfriend and best friend to assist in that area. It made my blood boil. I couldn’t help my urge to beat him to the more chivalric gestures. When Evie mentioned it, I brushed it off as part of my penance for hurting her in the first place – my penance for being the one to complain about how cold the common room was and telling her to add more wood to the fire. The fire that subsequently burned her.

We didn’t tell anyone what had really happened. Neither of us wanted to get in trouble for using magic or taint the already precarious acceptance of villain kids in Auradon. Only Uma knew the truth, but I was confident she wasn’t about to tell anyone. As far as she was concerned, I had chosen Evie to replace her as my best friend, and she was giving me the cold shoulder ever since that night. So much for ‘you can have more than one best friend, Mal, and I choose you and Harry!’ . Between Uma, and Harry by association, ignoring me and the ever-present scribe preventing me from having any heart-to-hearts with Evie, I had never felt as alone in Auradon as I did during those two weeks.

Sure, I still had Jay and Carlos, but they either weren’t capable of heartfelt conversation or it made them so uncomfortable that they would rather avoid it altogether. I couldn’t blame them for that. I wasn’t close enough to Audrey, Jane, or Lonnie to be at ease about reaching out to them, and Doug was certainly out of the question given the topic. This left me with Ben. Even though he was incredibly busy ensuring the holiday season would go smoothly, I could always find a smile and an open seat next to him in the old library. It didn’t satisfy my need for conversation, but his calming presence was comforting enough to keep me from plunging into a dangerous downward spiral.

Long afternoons and late nights in the old library with Ben proved to be useful in more ways than
The lack of conversation and things to do led me to focus on my homework and pick up the slack that had accumulated all semester. By the time finals week began, I was actually feeling pretty confident in my ability to not only pass my exams but excel. Those three days were long and arduous. Most students spent all out-of-class time studying dutifully while shoving food into their mouths mechanically or sleeping off exhaustion. The entire campus seemed eerily quiet as students retreated into their headspaces – at least until Wednesday, when everyone was finally finished with exams.

I had barely made it into the main hall before a strong arm wrapped around me, and my feet left the ground unexpectedly. I immediately knew that it was Jay, but it still made my heart race every time. Although, this time it was much worse because, apparently, he had grabbed Evie as well. Our bodies were soon pressed flush together as he picked us both up simultaneously. Our noses were nearly touching, and I could feel my cheeks burning in response. All Evie had to offer was a grin full of amusement and glee. Her freshly healed hands gripped Jay’s shoulder to stay up despite the fact that he would never drop us. Not on purpose, at least.

“We did it! We’re free!” Jay yelled, causing more than a few pairs of eyes to be drawn to us. To make matters worse, Carlos decided he wanted in on the love and jumped on Jay’s back, causing all four of us to eventually end up in a heap of limbs on the floor. Being used to stuff like this by now, none of us made any move to get up. Now people were really staring.

“No shenanigans in the hallways!” came the stern voice of Fairy Godmother, who always seemed to be around just in time to catch at least one of us doing something questionable. Thankfully, she had only said it in passing, her short legs taking her through the hallways quickly.

“No shenanigans in the hallways,” Jay mocked in a squeaky voice from underneath me. Carlos’ rumbles of laughter reverberated through our bodies, the tingling sensation causing Evie and me to join in. Laying with them, laughing, in a pile on the floor made me feel so light and carefree. It was almost like we were children again.

“There may not be shenanigans in the hallways, but there will definitely be shenanigans at Chad’s tonight,” Carlos stated once his chuckles died down.

Evie’s joy turned sour at the mention of her ex-boyfriend.

“Aw, you know it!” Jay drawled, removing his arm from around Evie’s waist to awkwardly reach behind him in an attempt to fist-bump the other boy.

“What’s happening at Chad’s?” I wondered, lifting my head from Jay’s chest to better see my
“He always throws a big party before winter break,” Carlos explained, sitting up on his elbows.

“And it always gets crazy.” Jay supplied animatedly, practically vibrating underneath me in excitement. “It’s the last big shindig before everyone leaves.”

My eyebrows furrowed in confusion. “Leaves?”

“Yeah. Most of the students go back home for winter break, but some of us get to go on sweet school-sponsored trips!” Jay informed me.

“Like winter tourney camp!” Carlos hooted, pumping his fist in the air. I couldn’t see Jay’s face from the angle I was at, but I was sure his smile was splitting his face in two from excitement as well. I was glad they had somewhere to go over break, especially considering family was kind of a sore spot for most villain kids. At least they didn’t have to spend all of winter break in a mostly empty castle with nothing to do like I, no doubt, was going to end up resorting to. I could only hope someone I knew was hanging behind, or I would be forced to try to patch things up with Uma. It seemed too soon to attempt that with her.

“Anyways, everyone’s invited to Chad’s party. You should come,” Carlos prompted, addressing the statement to me with his gaze.

I couldn’t help but glance at Evie, who had remained silent this whole time. “Are you going to the party, E?” I asked, resting my chin on Jay’s chest. With the way we were snuggled up to him, our faces were fairly close together, and I could read her expression carefully.

“Everyone goes,” she answered, shrugging nonchalantly. Although I knew she was not a fan of the boy, the way she stared into my eyes rather than hiding from them made it seem like she actually wouldn’t mind going to his event.

Before I could respond, Ben sauntered through the halls, nearly tripping on Jay’s long, outstretched legs.

“What the?” he muttered, gazing down at us with furrowed eyebrows. Soon, a smile spread across his face. “I wasn’t aware we were having a holiday hallway sleepover today,” he teased, crossing his
“Ooo, Ben, King of Sass, has arrived!” Evie announced, poking her tongue through her teeth at him in amusement.

“So,” he drawled. “Why are you guys laying on the floor?” Ben inquired.

“The real question is why aren’t you laying on the floor with us?” Jay challenged. Evie quirked an eyebrow, and Carlos extended his hand into the air invitingly.

Ben chuckled and nodded. “Alright, alright. Fair enough,” he conceded, pulling up his pants a little and walking around our bodies to settle snugly between Evie and Carlos. Once on the ground, he clasped his hands on his stomach with a sigh. Carlos scooted forward and leaned back until he was laying on the ground like he had been before. We all remained there in contented silence for a few minutes as the activity in the hallways died down. Soon enough, it was just the five of us.

Ben’s soft voice was like the cozy blanket needed to complete the perfect picture, and my heart swelled with his words. “I’m going to miss you guys.”

* * *

Even though I couldn’t name a single person that was a huge fan of Chad Charming, they had to admit the guy knew how to throw a party. The event was held in his family’s castle, and not a single room was off-limits to guests. There was a seemingly endless supply of food and drinks at every turn, and the walls were practically vibrating with the bass from the music. Evil knew where his parents were for the night; I couldn’t imagine rational adults condoning this kind of partying. But I wasn’t complaining – quite the opposite, really. Parties on The Isle were definitely underfunded but also spontaneous and absolutely wild. Some of my best memories after I had befriended Uma and Harry were spent in an alcohol-induced haze of mischief and affection. I’d be lying if I denied that my fingers jumped just a little too quickly to grab the first cup offered to me, even if it was by a blushing boy I didn’t know. If anyone deserved a drink right now it was me. I had studied diligently for my finals and was now going to spend my entire winter break by myself or cooped up in a dorm room with my bitter roommate; I think that gave me more than enough permission to get thoroughly fucked up.

However, before the rim of the cup even touched my lips, the object was gently pulled from my grasp by slender, tan fingers tipped in blue.
A little whine of protest left my mouth at the motion.

“I’ll take it from here,” came the saccharine voice of Evie, who was giving the boy a smile that said she would probably poison him if he didn’t leave us alone. Not yet too intoxicated to miss the message, the boy’s head dropped, and he sulked away.

My hands lifted to grab the cup back, but Evie simply held it above my head and out of arm’s reach. Damn my short legs. “E, c’mon,” I pleaded, puffing out my lower lip in hopes she would melt.

She didn’t even falter. “You can’t just go around accepting mystery concoctions from random people, M!” she chastised aggressively.

“I can do whatever I want, E, give me the drink!” I snapped back, naturally reciprocating her negative tone.

“It’s not about autonomy, M, it’s about safety! You don’t know what he might have put in this! I don’t want you getting hurt!” she relayed sternly.

My shoulders slumped in a sigh, and my eyes studied the ornate rug beneath us in shame. “I’m sorry, E; I’m just really stressed, and I could use something to loosen up,” I apologized, feet fidgeting in place.

The cup appeared in my field of vision, and Evie sighed. “It’s okay. I just don’t know what I’d do if anything happened to you,” she muttered, barely audible with the music playing in the adjacent room. Then, strangely, she dipped one of her fingers into the beverage and swirled it around.

“Uhhh,” I uttered, taken off-guard. “I hope you washed your hands recently…they make special utensils for stirring drinks, you know. A few, actually. Straws, spoons…”

Evie’s lips pursed at the comment. “Of course I did! I’m wearing a special nail polish that Doug and I have been developing. It changes color when it comes into contact with common date rape drugs so you know before something bad happens,” she explained, extracting her finger and returning the cup to me.

I stood there, mouth agape, not exactly sure what to do with this information. “Wow, that’s…really, really cool,” I settled on, eyeing her nails with curiosity. I didn’t know how common that sort of
situation was in supposedly good places like Auradon, but on The Isle, the invention would have saved numerous people lifelong trauma. If I hadn’t had such protective friends, I likely would have fallen prey at least once. I had been extremely lucky. My heart suddenly swelled with pride at the realization that my best friend was creating something of such practical importance.

“It takes a couple minutes to do its thing, so,” Evie trailed off, avoiding my eyes and not sure how to continue.

“So,” I drawled awkwardly. “Are you planning on drinking?” I wondered after seeing such a strong reaction to it just moments ago.

Pretty red lips turned down into a scowl, and a scoff rushed out of them. “No. Alcohol has a therapeutic index of three-point-three,” she said harshly, as if that was all she needed to say to defend her decision.

“English, please,” I prompted, offering her nothing but a blank stare.

Red-brown eyes rolled, and her arms crossed. “It means that the difference between an effective dose and a dose that can kill you is very close,” she explained.

When I only appeared moderately less confused, she continued.

“It’s a safety measure. A drug is required to have a therapeutic index of, like, twenty to even be considered safe by the FDA, but here people are, risking their lives every weekend by drinking so haphazardly,” she spat, eyeing my cup with disdain. “It doesn’t help that popular drinking culture makes people think that vomiting, passing out, or falling asleep is a normal occurrence instead of a warning sign of danger that should be taken very seriously!” she ranted.

My feet staggered back as I took in her reaction. I had never seen her so worked up about anything; I could practically feel the passion heavily coming off of her in waves. “Hey,” I whispered, lightly resting my fingers on her bare arm. “I can just not-“

“No, Mal, it’s okay; I’m not going to ask you to abstain for my sake. Just please pace yourself and drink a lot of water so you don’t get too dehydrated, okay?” she pleaded, looking into my eyes intensely to convey the sincerity of her request. “Remember OOTAH: one or two an hour.”
“Sure, E,” I accepted. “OOTAH.” I was two seconds away from asking her to stay by my side throughout the night, just in case, when Doug’s meek frame appeared from behind Evie.

“Hey, guys!” he greeted cheerily. The flash of blue on his nails was unexpected as he waved. Apparently, he was sporting the special nail polish tonight as well. Good for him for being comfortable enough in his masculinity to do so, even if he wasn’t that masculine to begin with. “I got lost in the coat room; can you believe that? It was bigger than my dorm room!” he exclaimed in amazement.

I managed some semblance of a smile in return. I should have known Doug was going to be here; when Evie said everyone goes she really meant it.

“Is that alcohol?” he asked, peering into my cup.

“Yep,” I confirmed.

“Did you pour it yourself?” he questioned.

“No,” I answered.

His hand began to hover, and I pulled my drink closer to my body protectively. “Oh no, I’ve had enough of people shoving their fingers into my things today,” I joked.

Doug seemed to gather what I was getting at, looking down at Evie’s fingernails expectantly. It was a good thing he was looking there, because something predatory flashed in Evie’s eyes at my comment before they went slightly glossy, as if she had retreated into her private thoughts. “Well, it looks like you’re all clear then!” he chimed, noting that the pigment of her nail polish had not changed.

“Great!” I commented before taking a sizeable gulp, hoping it would kick in immediately so I didn’t have to feel so weird about the situation. I knew that wasn’t how it worked, but a girl could dream.

The action broke Evie out of her trance, and the worry was clear in her eyes as soon as the liquid coated my tongue.
But I would be fine. I always was.

Chapter End Notes

What do you guys think is going to happen at the party? What do you WANT to happen at the party? :D
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

To make up for the short chapter previous to this, here is a longer one! Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The contents of my drink remained a mystery, but it didn’t knock me completely on my ass. Always a lightweight, I had enough sense to forgo a second one just to be safe. The dance floor was much more inviting than listening to Doug and Evie animatedly discuss the material from their recent exams, so I grabbed Audrey, who was already drunk and happy to oblige, and dove into the crowd of people. As soon as I was fully surrounded by wiggling bodies and sufficiently buzzed, I let myself go. Most of the songs were not ones that I had come to know since arriving in Auradon, but I let the music guide me anyway. Every pulse of the bass seemed to synchronize with the beating of my heart, and the melodies ran through my veins and orchestrated my movements. I vaguely registered the familiar bodies around me as countless songs came and went. Jane and Lonnie were to my left, lost in one another and confirming my suspicions that there was definitely something going on between them. Audrey was off to my right, dancing with some boy I didn’t recognize.

It was alright, though. I didn’t feel alone; I had the music as my dance partner. That feeling remained until a provocative song from Homecoming night began to play, and the memories of the last time I had danced to this ran through my head. As effective as my sober mind was at repressing the memories – the feeling of Evie’s body pressed against mine and her lips against my skin – I couldn’t escape them now that my inhibitions were compromised. In fact, the harder I concentrated on them the more they felt almost real – like she might appear right behind me if I wanted it badly enough. I craved to experience her again, and soon my boots were taking me out of the crowd of moving bodies and into the hallway.

I didn’t know where she was. I had left her and Doug at a snack table a long time ago, but somehow my body intuitively drew me closer to her. Although I struggled with the complexities of the sliding glass door, I finally made it into the indoor pool area in one piece. My body was humming, and it only got worse as I locked my gaze with red-brown eyes. She was swimming near the edge of the pool, and I ambled over to her excitedly.

“Eeeee!” I exclaimed happily, amazed I had managed to find her.

Her arms shot into the air, trying to signal to me to stop approaching. In hindsight, it definitely wasn’t ideal for anyone that had been drinking to be so close to a pit of impending doom. “Mal! Where’s your buddy? You shouldn’t be out here alone!” she chided, looking around me to see if any of our
friends had been close behind. They weren’t, and they honestly probably had not even notice that I had left with how focused on dancing they had been.

“I’m not alone, I have you,” I countered, tapping my finger to my head to indicate my wit. My body lowered into a sit, and I went down a little too forcefully, likely bruising my hand when I tried to break my fall.

Evie rolled her eyes good-naturedly, my drunken state too cute for her to remain upset about.

“Come dance with meeex,” I begged, giving her my best pout, despite the fact that I couldn’t seem to keep my eyes open at the same time.

Wet hands encased mine as she pondered a response. “We can’t dance in the water, M,” she chuckled.

“I bet you can; you can do anything,” I insisted. Her thumb rubbed against mine, and I sighed at the feeling.

“What time is it?” she wondered aloud.

“Hot o’clock” I offered, my body still perspiring slightly from my time in the dancing mob. With the alcohol in my system, I felt impossibly warm, like I was a simmering volcano after an eruption. It was suddenly very important that I cool off. My fingers pulled away from their restraints and crawled down my legs before fumbling with the laces of my boots.

“What are you doing?” Evie asked me, confused by my sudden movement.

“Need to cool off,” I asserted, attempting to undress with more determination this time.

Refreshing water ran down my arms as Evie grabbed them abruptly, this time to stop my motions. “No, Mal; you can’t come in with me. I’m betting you didn’t bring a swimsuit, and you still don’t know how to swim. Besides, you could get hypothermia,” she argued.

“No, I won’t. You’ll save me. Just like last time,” I nodded, my eyes finally finding the strength to
Her lips were parted and there was a strange, sad look on her face as we looked at each other for what felt like an eternity. “I meant because you’ve been drinking. Just stay right here while I get out, okay, Mal? Don’t move! Be still like a statue!” she ordered, swimming over to the ladder swiftly.

“Like a statue,” I repeated dutifully, purple interrupting my vision as I nodded. I didn’t have any problem not moving, not after she began climbing up the ladder. With every rung ascended more of her body was exposed. Even if I was sober, I don’t think I could have snapped out of my trance as she stood before me, dripping with water, in a blue bikini that really didn’t leave much to the imagination. “A beautiful, beautiful statue,” I mumbled absentmindedly. My mouth was dry, and I felt like I may pass out and slip into the water. Perhaps it would be a peaceful death. In the time it took me to imagine such a scenario, Evie was already dry and slipping her dress back on overtop of her bikini.

“C’mon, M,” she encouraged, bending over to take my hand and pull me up to my feet. “I’m taking her inside!” she announced, much too loudly for her proximity to me. “We’re going to get something to eat!”

“I’ll be in soon,” Doug’s voice sounded from somewhere in the pool area.

I hadn’t even noticed him. I didn’t have time to dwell on it, though. Evie had pulled me out of the pool area and procured some bottled water. She instructed me to drink, so I did as I was told. The stools around the kitchen island were all taken, and so were all of the couches, so Evie settled into a comfy-looking loveseat and pulled me down into her lap.

“How much did you have to drink?” she asked, handing me a slice of pizza in exchange for the water bottle we were sharing.

“Just one,” I replied, unable to provide a less vague answer. The food nearly slipped out of my hand as I held up my finger to accompany my response.

“Hm, from the looks of it, it was about two cups of liquid, and you’ve been gone for about an hour and a half, so you should be coming down in a half hour or so,” she calculated. “Eat that; it will help.”

I wasn’t planning on refusing the pizza in the first place, but once she had ordered that I consume it,
it was as good as gone.

Doug stood behind the chair and made sure that we all had enough food and water, acting as our relay man between the kitchen and the living room so we wouldn’t lose our spot.

After I had devoured three slices, my stomach protested, and I let my head fall onto Evie’s shoulder as I gave it time to settle down. Her hair smelled like chlorine, and she was a little damp, but I didn’t really care. Even with Doug literally hovering over our shoulders, I felt comfortable and safe in her arms.

It was unclear how long we sat there, but it was long enough for me to start feeling increasingly coherent and suddenly guarded. My back straightened as I realized how Evie and I had been sitting. Something about the way her fingers ran along my skin soothingly as I was nuzzled into her neck was a little too intimate, and my heart raced in panic even though Doug seemed just as relaxed as we had been prior to my sober realization. There was barely a lull in their conversation as we repositioned into something more platonic.

Their discussion didn’t last much longer, however, as the host himself ran into the room, followed by a small pack of other students.

Evie’s body tensed beneath me, and my hand instinctively found her thigh and offered a comforting squeeze. She relaxed slightly with my touch and returned the sentiment by resting her hand atop mine.

“It’s truth or dare time!” Chad yelled, guiding the mob into the spacious living room where we happened to be sitting. “Anyone with enough balls to play come sit down in here, and the rest of you pussies need to beat it!” he announced. It didn’t take long for the living room to fill with people, only a few students choosing to sneak out and avoid the situation. Some stragglers gathered in the nearby kitchen, eager to witness the impending chaos but not wanting to be a part of it.

“Do you guys want to play?” Doug asked us, leaning down from the back of the chair to see us better.

Instinctively, I looked to Evie for an answer. I was up for anything, but I didn’t want Evie to be in a situation that may make her uncomfortable.

“Sure,” Evie consented with a small smile. After her confirmation, I nodded my head in agreement.
“I can’t stay for very long, though; you know how long it takes to get home,” Doug informed us.

It didn’t make much sense to me, but then again, he was addressing Evie in the first place.

“That’s okay. If I want to stay later, I’ll just go home with Mal,” Evie answered.

Little did she know, I had caught a ride here with Jay and Carlos, but I naturally assumed they were planning on taking me home.

Right on cue, the boys walked in to join the game and sat down next to our chair.

“Great!” Doug replied. He walked around the loveseat Evie and I were in and sat down on the floor slightly to the right of us, facing the inside of the circle that the students had made for the game.

Audrey also made an appearance, perching herself on the left armrest of our chair even though it was a little cramped for the three of us. Her fingers ran through Evie’s hair, trying to get the water-induced tangles out while she waited for the game to get going.

Lonnie and Jane came in and sat down next to Doug, but the rest of the students were only vaguely familiar to me from the hallways of school and the cheerleading squad. The clear absence of members of the fencing team caught my attention.

“Where’s the fencing team?” I wondered aloud, eyes scanning the group just in case I had missed anyone.

“Winter fencing camp is up in the mountains; the bus left right after finals,” Audrey explained, continuing to work at Evie’s hair as gently as possible. “Even though it runs through Christmas and New Years, most of the team opts to go. The lodge up there is really nice; I’ve been there loads of times with mommy and daddy,” she boasted.

I nodded as I took in the information, but I wasn’t sure as to why it was a big deal that it was during Christmas and New Years. I was sure they could celebrate trees and fire in the mountains. Before I could ask about it, Chad stood and explained the rules.
The concept was simple. We went counter-clockwise in our large circle, and players were given the choice of doing a dare or answering a truth. If they declined to complete their instruction, they had to chug a cup of alcohol before the end of some demeaning song about being a pussy. The alcohol was unceremoniously sitting in a bucket, and it consisted of an assortment of drinks they had simply poured together. Not only did it probably taste horrible, but who knows what the alcohol content of that shit was. Declining a truth or dare wouldn’t just be dangerous for your social status but likely to your health, as well.

To say the game got wild was an understatement. More often than not, Chad himself came up with the questions and the dares, and he was certainly succeeding in making the night memorable. Most of the dares were either dangerous, gross, or humiliating, but many students were too afraid of being labeled a loser to choose truth instead. Sadly, the questions asked for the people who thought they were smart enough to choose truth were nearly as awful as the dares – even if they were physically safer. It took over an hour for the wave to approach my friends, but, by the time it did, I will admit I was a little nervous for us.

Jay was the first of our group to have to go, and he, predictably, selected dare. Nearly immediately, as if he had been saving it just for Jay, Chad dared him to jump off of the balcony and into the indoor pool. Reckless as ever, Jay quickly accepted.

The huge crowd of participants excitedly migrated to the indoor pool area, stepping on toes and shoving one another, to watch the feat.

After climbing up to the second floor, Jay stripped down to just his boxers and perched precariously on the top of the fence that ran along on the balcony, toes curling over the edge for a better grip.

The pool was rather large, so I was not too worried about him missing it and having to scrape what was left of him off of the ground, but it was still terrifying. Heights I had always been fine with, but water? Water was unforgiving.

Thankfully, Jay had always been a strong swimmer. To the chanting of his name, he gracefully leapt off of the balcony fence and landed smoothly into the water, barely creating a splash due to his impeccable diving form. He resurfaced seconds later to be met with a chorus of cheers. By the splitting grin on his face, he was absolutely eating up all of the attention. He emerged from the pool and shook off the water like a dog, getting the first row of spectators wet, but none of them seemed to mind. In fact, many of them were thrilled to have such a novel experience with the tourney captain.

I shook my head in amused disbelief.
The crowd hurried back into the living room to continue the game, eager to see what shenanigans would occur next.

Evie returned to our loveseat and Audrey and I sat on the two arms of the chair.

Doug took up his seat on the floor in front of me.

It was Carlos’ turn next, and something about the way Chad was smiling at him made my stomach twist. When everyone had settled down, Chad finally spoke. “Truth or dare, De Vil?” he challenged, eyebrow quirking.

I wasn’t sure if a truth or a dare would be safer for him.

“Dare,” Carlos accepted, giving Chad a steely stare.

The prince paused for dramatic effect. “I dare you to play seven minutes in heaven with the player to your left,” he declared, eyes flicking to Jay, who happened to be the player he was roping into it.

All of the color drained from Carlos’ face as he registered the implications of the dare and the reaction of the crowd.

“What’s seven minutes in heaven?” I wondered, leaning over and whispering in Evie’s ear so I didn’t disturb the other students.

“You get locked in a closet with someone for seven minutes and you can do whatever you want with them. It’s generally assumed that the people will end up kissing at the very least, and at the most? Well, I’m sure you can guess,” she explained, furrowing her eyebrows in the boys’ direction, wondering how they would take it.

My heart sank. It was obvious Carlos wasn’t comfortable sharing his sexual orientation with the world yet, but here Chad was, basically outing him in front of a huge crowd in the context of a harmless game. My fingers curled into fists instinctively.
Before Carlos could chicken out and arouse even more suspicion for himself, Jay chimed in. “Pssh, that’s the best you can do? No problem, Prince Charming,” he brushed off, standing up and giving Carlos a soft, encouraging look that was hidden from most of the other people.

Carlos’ expression hardened, and he nodded in confirmation. “Dare accepted,” he announced, and he and Jay were escorted to the smallest closet in the castle.

A lookout was assigned to the outside of the door and was instructed not to let them out until the seven minutes were up. Other students were, thankfully, not permitted to stick around. Luckily, it all ended up being rather underwhelming.

Audrey’s dare was much less anxiety-inducing, and I was thankful for the break before it was Evie’s turn and I, undoubtedly, would be nauseous with worry once more. Audrey was commanded to give a lap dance to the player across from her, and she accepted without protest. The song they selected was sultry, and Audrey made a show of the whole thing, thinking it was hilarious.

Unfortunately for the quiet boy in the chair, the whole situation resulted in the lower half of his body having a mind of its own and embarrassing him in front of all of the students playing and watching. At the conclusion of the song, the boy promptly left the party with burning cheeks and a sweatshirt shielding his pants.

The throng of laughter died down once people realized who was next. Apparently, Evie and Chad’s history was well-known amongst students at Auradon University, and the memory of the drama that had ensued at the Homecoming dance was still fresh in their minds. The anticipation of what was to come was palpable in the suddenly heavy air.

“Princess Evie Grimhilde,” he started, then dramatically winced. “Oh, I’m sorry; I forgot! You’re only Homecoming royalty here,” he continued, earning a few chuckles and ‘Ooos’ from the crowd.

“Dare,” Evie boldly selected, not even giving the boy a chance to ask her.

For what it was worth, Chad’s eyebrows raised in surprise, and he laughed in stunned delight. “Okay, okay,” he nodded, sticking his tongue to his cheek as he thought over what he was going to ask her to do.

From what I gathered about Evie’s feelings regarding alcohol, it was almost a sure bet that she would rather do the dare than back down. My heartbeat increased as the silence lengthened.
Finally, Chad’s eyes flicked to Doug, and he smiled sweetly at Evie. He had decided on the dare. “Evie, I dare you to get the player to your right to make out with you,” he declared, leaning back to rest his arms behind his head.

I couldn’t even make out the sputters of protest on Doug’s part because my heartbeat was pounding too loudly in my ears. I was sure he meant the dwarf, considering he had looked right at him, and Doug was on the ground to Evie’s right. But there was no way I could ignore the fact that I, too, was sitting to Evie’s right, directly behind Doug. As I internally panicked, it appeared Evie and Doug had begun to argue. It took a few moments for my brain to calm down enough for me to catch what they were saying.

“Please Doug, just this once? I’ll-“ Evie was pleading quietly, much too hushed for most of the students in the crowd to hear.

“No! Evie, you know how I feel about touch!” he argued back, visibly worked up by the situation and refusing to meet her eyes.

“Do you really want me to have to drink that shit? Who knows what’s in it!” she countered, motioning to the ominous bucket in the middle of the floor.

“It’s not like that, and you know it; I can’t just-“ Doug started, but Chad interrupted him.

“What’s wrong, Doug? Evie’s a very beautiful girl-“ the prince interjected, only to be cut off by a very angry Doug.

“Shut up!” the boy yelled, the sudden loud noise causing a few people to jump. His face was turning red, and his fingers were tightly balled into fists by now.

I couldn’t even imagine that the usually docile boy could get this upset; even my heart was racing at the sight.

“I’m sure plenty of people here would gladly take your place,” Chad continued casually, reveling in how emotional Doug was becoming.
“Shut up! Shut! Up!” Doug shouted, jumping to his feet in anger. His body was trembling, and his breathing was rapid. He pivoted towards Evie and me. “I’m leaving,” he announced before storming out of the room hastily.

Evie called his name a few times but made no motion to leave the loveseat.

“I’ll go talk to him,” Audrey whispered, getting up and heading down the hall after the boy.

“Looks like you need to drink up, princess,” Chad chuckled, sliding the bucket towards her with his foot.

The green liquid sloshed around, and, with my inner dragon, I could hear Evie’s heart skip a beat at the sight. Her eyes raced around the room as she devised a plan. “The dare was that I get the person on my right to make out with me,” she stated matter-of-factly, but her voice wavered slightly. “Mal will kiss me; won’t you, Mal?” she asked rhetorically, looking up at me with wide, pleading eyes.

This is what I was afraid of. My throat constricted, and my breathing faltered. There was no way I could kiss her now. Not here, in front of all of these people. Not now, after how upset Doug had been. None of it felt right, and, as much as I know she didn't want to drink, I couldn’t bring myself to go along with it. “E….” I whispered, my eyes apologetic.

The first thing that flickered in her eyes was hurt, then came a hint of fear. Her gaze flicked to the next person to our right. “Lonnie?” she asked, but the girl simply side-glanced in Jane’s direction and offered a feeble apology. Red-brown eyes flicked across the crowd of people in desperation.

“Will anyone kiss the princess and save the day?” Chad fished, standing up and outstretching his arms.

“Not unless they want to get herpes,” someone dared to mumble from across the crowd. It caused a string of chuckles, and Evie’s expression became more and more wrecked as the seconds passed.

“I tell you what; I’ll spare you the punishment…if you kiss me,” Chad offered, sauntering over to her and grinning wickedly.

Evie’s eyes began to burn crimson, causing a chorus of gasps and cries from the students surrounding us. She was on her feet instantly, nose-to-nose with the boy. “Go to hell,” she spat.
All it did was widen the prince’s smile. That was, until Evie bent over, picked up the heavy bucket of alcohol, and heaved it. Not only did it wash away Chad’s smirk, but it covered him in a thin coat of sticky green. The boy stood stock-still, in utter shock of her actions, while the crowd was eerily silent in their surprise.

Evie pushed her way out of the crowd, not even bothering to take in the satisfying sight of Chad beginning to shriek.

Knowing she didn’t have a ride home, I promptly left the scene as well. Thankfully, she wasn’t running, and I was able to find her as she walked along the driveway leaving the Charming Castle. The cold, December air bit at my skin, and I called upon my inner dragon to keep me comfortable. “E!” I called, but she didn’t slow. “Evie, wait!” Not receiving an answer, I began to jog to catch up with her. When I was finally by her side, I was slightly out of breath.

Her eyes were glued to the pavement, and she was walking hastily, not bothering to slow down for me. Her arms were wrapped around her stomach, and her skin was covered in goosebumps.

“E, you didn’t go get your coat?” I inquired, rubbing her arm to create friction.

She pulled away from the contact. “He can keep it,” she growled.

“You’re gonna freeze,” I pointed out, but she evaded all of my attempts to touch her. A sigh of frustration left my lips at her stubbornness. “Where are you even going? You can’t walk all the way back to school!”

“I don’t know, Mal, a hotel? I’ll be fine; leave me alone,” she insisted, increasing her pace.

“At least let me walk with you to make sure you get there okay,” I asserted, speeding up to match her strides.

“Fine,” she agreed.

We walked quickly, with purpose. When the beds of her nails turned purple, Evie finally let me embrace her and warm her up. She made it perfectly clear that it was only for survival, not even
bothering thank me. Thankfully, it took us less than an hour to find a hotel on foot. Apparently, having a position in the royal court included getting hotel rooms in Auradon for free. Evie was all too annoyed to hear that there was only one room left due to the holiday season; she had been fully prepared to get me my own. I was thankful for our luck, however; she didn’t really seem like she should be left alone after what had happened and how she was behaving.

Upon entering our hotel room, Evie made a beeline for the bathroom. She claimed she needed to take a bath to wash off the chlorine from the pool before going to bed, and it seemed like a good enough reason, so I didn’t protest. The couch was as good of a place as any for me to settle into. I turned on the television, hoping it would keep me awake until she was done and ready to sleep.

* * *

The sounds of the television faded from my consciousness the longer the bathroom door remained closed. Taking a bath to get clean was one thing, but I was pretty sure Evie would be full of wrinkles at this point – and she hated wrinkles. With a click of the remote, the room fell silent. My bare feet barely made any noise against the wood floor as I padded over to the source of my concern. With a soft knock, I called out to her. “E?”

It took her a few moments to respond, but eventually a weak ‘yeah’ answered me. At least I knew she wasn’t dead. “Are you okay?” I inquired, resting my head against the door. It remained there until I was sure a small dent had formed in my skin, and I tentatively reached for the doorknob after receiving no further acknowledgement. The click of the handle turning without resistance was much too loud, and the echo, in turn, increased my heart rate. Slowly but surely, the bathtub was revealed to me, and there was Evie – still as a statue save a trembling lip – lying in the tub. A quick once-over of her body under the water did not disclose any immediate danger, much to my relief. Her hair was messy and dry, but her face was wet. The blue mascara trails made it evident that the moisture was not caused by the bath water. Her arms were hanging off the sides of the tub, and the glint of metallic caught my eye.

My body trembled as I took in a shuddering breath. A flask was limply clutched in one of her hands, and a pressure was released from my chest as I realized this could have been much worse. “Where did you get that?” I asked, walking further into the room.

“Someone left it here, I guess,” she muttered after a few seconds.

“I thought that stuff had a therapy ratio of like three, Evie; how much did you drink?” I began, hoping to get answers but treading lightly.
A mirthless laugh escaped from Evie’s swollen lips and the ripples in the water fled from her body, sensing a disturbance. “Not enough,” she mumbled, eyes still glazed over. “And it’s therapeutic index,” she corrected. “It was the only depressant I could find here; I don’t suppose you packed any sedative-hypnotics?” she scoffed.

The technical jargon escaped me, but I raked my mind for any possible interpretations. “Why would you want to be depressed?” I wondered out loud.

Tangled blue locks shook in response. “No, it’s not like that. A depressant reduces, or depresses, bodily functions and nervous activity,” Evie explained.

My past experiences with alcohol flashed through my mind, and I pondered how I could feel so warm and giddy when my body function was being depressed. “That sounds dangerous,” I commented, my mouth going dry. Perhaps the situation was as ominous as I first felt.

“It can be,” she said, facial expression not providing me with any clues.

“Why would you drink it then?” I whispered.

At last, her zombie-like trance faltered, and her gaze fell to the water in front of her. After what seemed like an eternity, she finally spoke. “Don’t you see, Mal? I don’t want to be here! I don’t want to feel; I don’t want to think!” she said increasingly loudly, voice cracking and crimson eyes boring into mine.

The more she admitted, the harder my heart pounded in my ears. “E,” I started, but she seemed to be regaining her energy.

“I don’t want to even be conscious!” she exclaimed, newfound tears springing up and interrupting her pleading gaze.

“Evie, don’t say that,” I breathed, reaching out my hand to take hers. It was ice cold. A wave of panic washed over me, and I thrust my hand into the bath water. “Evie! The water’s freezing! You need to get out!” I yelled, not worrying about the effect the volume of my voice might have while she was still so fragile. I scrambled to my feet and grabbed some towels. “Get up!” I exclaimed, grabbing her arms and using my upper body strength to pull her to her feet. Water splashed everywhere, and the flask clattered to the ground noisily. The sounds only spurred my instincts to help her.
Evie’s movements were lethargic and robotic; clearly her muscles were already cramping from the cold.

I wrapped the towels around her as she clung painfully to my neck and shoulders, trying to stay upright. After a few unsuccessful attempts at walking, I made up my mind. “Fuck it,” I murmured, bending down to securely grasp her legs. The bedroom was not far from the bathroom, so I carried her to the bed, gently laying her down on it and gathering as many blankets as I could to throw on top of her. Evie whined softly at my absence, and it tugged at my chest painfully. Recalling the very night that changed everything, I swiftly began removing my clothes. They landed haphazardly throughout the room, but the only thing I was worried about was Evie. Once undressed, I climbed under the mass of blankets and wrapped my body around hers as best as I could. Her body was icy and still somewhat slick with what water the towels didn’t absorb, but I knew this was the best I could do for her.

Her fingers clung desperately to my arms as I held onto her. A sob finally escaped, and it was like a dam had broken. Her body convulsed as every cry clawed its way out.

My heart ached, and my stomach churned. “It’s okay,” I whispered, only to be met with a yell.

“No it’s not, Mal! It’s not okay!” she got out before her sobbing prevented more communication. “Why am I here? Nobody wants me! Nobody’s ever wanted me!”

“What are you talking about, Evie? Everybody loves you!” I assured, nuzzling her gently with my nose.

A loud scoff cut through the room. “All those boys I dated? They didn’t want me; they only wanted my body. They just wanted to use me,” she cried.

A stabbing pain made my breath falter, and I instinctively held her closer. I couldn’t imagine the innocent and naïve Evie I knew from The Isle being taken advantage of in Auradon, of all places. My inner dragon simmered deep within, imagining exacting revenge on all of the boys that may have hurt her.

“And my mother!” she yelled viciously between sobs. “She’s the reason why it happened! My whole life she told me I was only a pretty face, that I was an object to keep a prince happy! How could I have been so stupid?” she asked rhetorically. “She didn’t want me, either! She sent me away at the first opportunity, finally happy to be rid of the burden she never wanted to begin with!”
By now, my vision was distorted with tears. Most of the kids on The Isle could relate to feeling unwanted and unloved by their parent, but to be exploited by their own flesh and blood was another thing entirely, especially for such a pure spirit like Evie was. My dragon heat was burning deeply, and I could feel Evie’s body slowly creeping up to a normal temperature.

The sobs were dissipating, but it was clear that her emotions were still heightened.

“What about Doug?” I asked carefully.

Evie laughed bitterly. “Doug? He’s just the safest choice so I don’t need to be alone forever. It’s all a lie, Mal. Auradon isn’t a fairy tale place filled with heroes and happily ever afters. Everything is just as bleak as back on The Isle,” she informed me before taking a deep breath to calm herself. “Doug values my intellect and companionship, but he won’t even hold my hand. Am I really that repulsive?” she replied, voice growing increasingly quiet.

“Of course not, E; you’re the most beautiful girl I’ve ever seen! Inside and out,” I attempted to assure her. I was hit with more than just the pain of her shoving me away when she answered.

“Oh, shut the fuck up, Mal!” she shouted, and her unexpected reaction was like a punch to the gut. “You never wanted me, either! Not back then, when you went from my best friend to my bully, forcing me to stay in my house with my mother, of all people! Not after, when you never bothered to send me letters or try to reconnect when I had to leave The Isle! Not today, when I needed your help and you wouldn’t even show me an ounce of affection!” she rambled, eyes glowing brightly in the dark. “You are the single most important person in my life, Mal. You always have been.”

Each word stole the breath from my lungs until there was nothing left, and I was speechless.

“And to think that I was stupid enough to fall for you again, thinking things would be different. I’m such a fucking idiot,” she finished, her voice eerily quiet. Her distaste was punctuated by her abruptly turning away from me.

My pillow was soaked from more than just the extra bath water. My eyes and throat burned hotter than my inner dragon, and I had never experienced pain quite like this. In this moment, I knew that I had fucked up. Evie had always been it for me; her smile had made my heart flutter from day one, and nothing made me as light and carefree as being with her. What was the point of denying that anymore? It was clear that no one was happy in the current situation. A deep breath helped to steel myself so my voice wouldn’t falter.
“Do you know why my mother banished you?” I asked, not expecting a reply. I didn’t get one. “Because I was a complete wreck when I didn’t get that invitation. You were my everything, Evie, and I was so excited to spend your birthday together. I had planned to steal this beautiful little crown to give to you; it was something I had been eyeing for weeks. When I finally tried to take it, I was caught, and the store owner whipped me so badly I’m surprised I was able to make it home. And then, not wanting to disappoint you, I made you a little crown out of cardboard instead. Because you were my princess,” I continued, pausing to take another calming breath.

The bed dipped as Evie turned around to face me once again.

“I waited for days for that invitation, hoping that it just got lost in the mail or that you would come and invite me in person. But it never came, and neither did you,” I cried, not able to keep my voice steady. “I was inconsolable. My mother kept telling me that I was weak, and I that needed to channel my inner dragon instead. So I did. I turned my sadness into anger, and I bullied you. I bullied you, and it was wrong, and I feel horrible about it,” I confessed, closing my eyes to squeeze the tears out. A soft hand wiped them from my cheeks, and I cried even harder at the tenderness of the act. Warm lips gently pressed to my fingers as I tried to calm my uneven breathing. After a while, I had enough strength to say what I needed to. “I do want you, Evie,” I confessed, finally looking up to meet red-brown eyes. “I think I always have.”

I had never seen so much vulnerability and love in a gaze as right then and there. And even with her hair a tangled mess, her eyes and lips puffy from crying, and mascara streaking her face, she looked so beautiful. With a teary smile, she leaned into my space again and rested her forehead against mine. Slowly, she moved so that her lips were just a breath away. She hovered there, silently asking for permission.

I had never wanted something so badly in my life, but I couldn’t help the guilt from clawing at my chest like it always managed to do. “What about Doug?” I found myself saying for the second time that night.

Something flashed in Evie’s eyes, but it was gone before I could identify it. “We have an agreement; he won’t mind,” the words trailed against my lips.

That was all the encouragement I needed.
We've finally arrived at the turning point of the story! I'm sorry it took so long to get here, but thank you to everyone who has been very patient along the way! Things will start looking up for Mal and Evie for the next few chapters, so get ready for less tears and more smiles! You all deserve it! XD
This kiss was nothing like the ones we had shared in the past. It was not messy and urgent, like the kisses Evie had placed along my skin at the Homecoming dance. It was not fleeting and tentative, like the many times we had stolen chaste kisses as children. No, this kiss was something entirely different. It was firm, and our movements were sure. Neither of us left any room for misunderstanding; this was what we wanted. And with every second that our lips moved together, I was more and more certain that hers had been sculpted to fit perfectly with mine.

Even though the nature of the affection felt new, there was something all too familiar about finally kissing Evie again. Her lips and her fingertips were soft, warm, and gentle, like they had always been – like Evie had always been with me. There were no fireworks, no sparks of magic igniting with the contact like you read in the fairy tales, but it was somehow...better. Because the feeling of calm and safety that accompanied our exchange felt like coming home after all those years.

Our foreheads rested against one another once more as we separated to catch our breath. When my eyes opened a crack, all I could see was the little pleased smile on Evie’s face as she savored the moment. The sight prompted my mouth to mirror the action. Soon we were both beaming.

Her eyelashes finally fluttered open, and her gaze was intense yet vulnerable and full of adoration. Pearly teeth bit into a puffy lower lip in a bashful smile when I returned her look with equal fervor. “Gods,” she sighed. “I’ve been wanting to do that for...forever,” she admitted.

A light chuckle escaped my lips. “You say that like it’s our first kiss,” I said, brushing my nose against her cheek.

Her red-brown eyes flicked up to mine. “Doesn’t it feel like it?” she asked, blue locks suddenly veiling her face as her head shook side to side.

Instinctively, my fingers reached out to tuck the stray hair behind her ear, and they slid to cup her jaw once that was done. The pressure against my hand increased as she leaned into the touch. “Yeah,” I agreed. “It really does.”
For a while, our gazes remained locked, and the magnitude of our feelings for each other was palpable. However, it didn’t take long for Evie’s mind to begin to wander. “Thank you for saving my life,” she whispered with sincerity.

My hand dropped from her face into the space between us, and she took hold of it with hers. “I guess that means we’re even now, right?” I joked. It didn’t lighten the mood.

“Listen,” she started, glancing down at nothing in particular. “I’m sorry about how I treated you earlier and what I said,” she apologized. “I would have never told you those things under normal circumstances,” she commented. “That’s what I get for restoring to alcohol. There was enough for inhibition, but not enough for escaping my problems,” she muttered with a mirthless laugh. Her eyebrows drew together in what I could easily guess was self-deprecating thought.

I shook my head in reply. “E, it’s okay. Everything you said was justified, and if that’s how you really felt than I needed to hear it. You know you don’t have to hide things from me. People with pasts like ours? They don’t get over it quickly. Hell, some don’t get over it at all. But you and me? We’re strong. We’re fighters, and, Evie, we can do anything as long as we have each other. You taught me that,” I declared, taking her chin in my free hand and resting my thumb in the dimple there.

Her head bounced as she nodded, an involuntary frown pulling at the corners of her lips as a few fresh tears slipped out.

My thumb was quick to jump up and catch them.

A watery laugh cut through the room, and her eyes gazed up at mine in a mix of relief and awe.

“Now let’s take care of you, yeah?” My lips left a sweet kiss on her forehead before I carefully pulled back the blankets and got out of bed. When I returned a few minutes later, arms full of supplies, I was met with glowing crimson eyes and a fixed stare. “You okay, E?” I asked tentatively, setting down the complimentary water bottles I had gathered on the side table.

“Yeah, I’m fine; it’s just-I forgot you were naked,” she admitted, surely blushing under the soft red glow.

I couldn’t help the surprised chuckle from erupting, and she answered it with an embarrassed, but not ashamed, smirk. My head shook in amusement as I crawled back into bed, gesturing for Evie to sit
She did as instructed with a raised eyebrow and fading eyes. The confusion was replaced with unexpected gratitude as I took a warm washcloth and gently removed the smudged makeup from her face.

Once it was clean, I simply sat there holding her face for a few moments before leaning in to press a short kiss to her lips.

Her blush returned.

I leaned back to grab a water bottle and handed it to her. “Here, for the alcohol,” I explained.

“You know, drinking water doesn’t actually help your body metabolize alcohol faster, it just keeps you from being dehydrated,” she claimed, unscrewing the cap and taking a big swig anyway.

“Okay, smartass, what does help you metabolize alcohol faster?” I inquired, raising an eyebrow.

Her sly smirk remained in place even after she was done drinking. “Nothing, really; it’s a pretty fixed rate regardless of your sex, age, and size, but food kind of helps.”

“Is that so?” I wondered. “Well, I don’t think we can order room service like this…” I decided, gesturing to our lack of appropriate attire.

“Why not? We probably won’t even have to tip,” she chuckled, tilting her head to the side and not bothering to conceal her blatant appreciation for my body.

I laughed along with her and tried to remember all of the businesses that we passed on our way to the hotel. “I think there was a twenty-four hour diner just down the road if you want to go get a midnight snack?” I proposed.

The way she bit her lip at the suggestion made it seem as though she had a different meal in mind, and I could feel my face heating up under her gaze. “There really wasn’t that much in the flask, M; I’ll probably be okay to just eat in the morning,” she assured me. “Besides, I don’t really want to get
dressed and go anywhere,” she added, leaning into my space until she was just millimeters from my lips. “Do you?”

My breath stuttered in response, and all I could look at was how inviting her mouth was. “Wouldn’t dream of it,” I breathed, leaning in to close the distance.

* * *

I was never one to rise with the sun, but there was something about the way the first light touched Evie that I didn’t want to miss. The golden streams of sunlight shone down on her tanned skin, illuminating it in a warm glow. The way it caressed every curve of her body had me itching to do the same, and for once, I did so without the accompanying states of fear or guilt. In this moment, Evie was mine once more, and I was going to hold on to that feeling for as long as I could.

As soon as I gave in to the urge to trace my fingers along her skin, she began to stir. It wasn’t much, just the slight twitch of her lips and the subtle way her eyebrows drew closer together, but it was enough to tip me off that she wasn’t completely unconscious anymore. The longer my ministrations continued, the more they coaxed the sleep from her body. Before long, small, contented sighs were slithering through the otherwise silent air. Her face buried deeper into my chest for a moment before she began to sleepily press kisses along my skin. They started on my chest, moved to my collarbones, traveled up my neck, and ended along my jaw. By now, my own fingers had forgotten their original intent and were holding her closer to my body instead.

In one swift movement, she had untangled our legs, threw one of hers over my hip, and straddled me. During the transition, the blanket that had been covering our lower halves fell away, pooled up and forgotten on the mattress. When her hand migrated from my waist to gently grip my jaw, my heart skipped a beat. It was just assertive enough to force me to face her, and I swear my body turned to putty when her eyes finally locked with mine. Her gaze wasn’t soft and sweet, like it had been all night when we kissed until we couldn’t keep our eyes open. No, she had awoken with renewed energy, and she was looking at me like I was the hotel’s complimentary breakfast and she was starving.

“Good morning, Sleeping Beauty,” I breathed as her thumb traced along my bottom lip.

“A good morning indeed,” she purred, finally closing the distance between us and replacing her thumb with her lips. It was a more eager kiss than last night, and it was punctuated with a nip to my lower lip.

The unexpected action prompted a whimper from me, despite my best efforts to remain calm and
collected. “So,” I diverted, sitting up and clearing my throat. “How do you feel this morning?” I asked, snaking my arms around her waist and attempting to keep my eyes from glancing down to appreciate more than just her face.

“Never better,” she claimed, resting her arms on my shoulders. The shine in her eyes and the smile on her lips told me that her answer was genuine.

Not able to contain my delight, I hid my face-splitting smile in her neck and pulled her closer.

She began to giggle at the action. “Are you the daughter of Maleficent or Bashful?” she jested, tightening her embrace in turn.

My chest tightened at the mention of the dwarf, and I reluctantly revealed my face. “Evie, maybe you should give Doug a call – just so he knows you’re okay,” I suggested.

Her shoulders sunk in a sigh as the lighthearted mood slipped away. “You’re right,” she agreed. My arms tickled as her fingers ran along them, stretching out our time together. Another sigh sounded before she placed a kiss on my lips and removed herself from my lap.

The second she left, goosebumps crawled along my skin, and I immediately pulled the blankets back up to cover my body. As much as I missed the contact, I certainly couldn’t complain about the new view as she sauntered over to the hotel room phone. The phone barely had time to ring before someone answered. Oddly enough, I couldn’t make out what was being said on the other end of the line, despite my dragon hearing.

“Hey, Doug! Yes, it’s me. I’m sorry about not calling you when I got home last night, something came up…” she said, leaning against the table that housed the phone. “No, no, everything’s fine. We left early, so we actually got a hotel,” she explained. “Mal and me,” she added before taking a steadying breath. “Doug, Mal and I are together now; is that okay?” she asked tentatively, and my heart began to pound in the time it took him to answer. All at once, the tension in Evie’s shoulders faded away, and I knew everything was alright. “Yeah, of course, I just wanted to let you know,” she answered, peeking at me with a growing smile on her face.

Now that I could breathe again, I decided it was as good of a time as ever to get dressed. Evie continued her conversation with Doug, apologizing for last night, making sure he got to his uncles’ house okay and asking about how his family was doing. I couldn’t be bothered to eavesdrop anymore; I was having a hard time finding all of the articles of clothing I had haphazardly thrown about the bedroom last night. Specifically, the pair of panties I had removed in a panic were nowhere to be found.
“Looking for something?” Evie’s voice rasped behind me, and I couldn’t help but jump at the unexpected noise. When had she finished talking on the phone?

“Yeah, I can’t f-” I started, but my thought died as Evie stood there holding up my panties with one finger and a smug grin. “Thanks,” I said, reaching for the item.

Of course, Evie simply raised her arm so I couldn’t grasp them without jumping. She thought she was so funny. “You know, you could just go without them,” she purred, daring me to accept her challenge with her eyes.

“Or,” I said, closing the short distance between us until our bodies were nearly touching. “You could just give them back.”

“You’re no fun, Mal,” she teased, not moving a muscle apart from the quirk of her lips.

“I think you’ll find that I can be tons of fun,” I whispered, resting my fingers lightly on her hips and ghosting my lips against hers.

Her resolve was slipping; I could hear it in the way her breath hitched at the contact. “Yeah?” she asked, eyes locked on my mouth. “Prove it.”

As if I needed more incentive than that. In a second, my lips were on hers, and she returned the kiss with equal fervor. She traded the panties for my hips, digging her fingers into them so that I began to move backwards to alleviate some of the discomfort. It didn’t take long for the backs of my knees to hit the edge of the bed, and I fell backwards, taking Evie down with me. If I thought her lips were eager, I definitely underestimated her hands. Even though we were officially a thing now, Evie was careful to avoid any areas that she had not already touched at some point in her life. I wasn’t completely sure if I loved the sentiment or if I wanted her to just destroy me already. After a few moments of consideration, my hand swiftly guided hers to my breast, and she eagerly kneaded it as soon as she made contact. She swallowed my moan with a wicked grin.

Two knocks on the door had my heart desperately trying to escape from my ribcage.

“Housekeeping!” came a voice from the hallway.
“No, thank you!” I yelled, cringing at how stupid that must have sounded.

Evie’s answering chuckle only confirmed my fear.

I shoved her shoulder playfully to chide her.

“We should have put the ‘Do not disturb’ sign up,” she whispered before nipping my earlobe.

“Aren’t they, like, not supposed to do that in the morning?” I huffed, more annoyed with the housekeeper – and how embarrassed I felt – than entranced by my best friend for the time being.

She seemed to sense it and rested her head on her hand. “M, it’s almost eleven,” she informed me, glancing at the clock on the bedside table.

“What?” I shouted, twisting my body to confirm the claim. Sure enough, ten fifty-eight stared back at me in bright, green lights. My lower lip jutted out at the sight. “I guess I’m not taking you out to breakfast then,” I mumbled.

Evie’s gaze softened. “You were going to take me out to breakfast?” she asked, tilting her head in adoration.

“Yeah, of course,” I admitted. “Considering you turned down my offer for a midnight snack run.”

“Can you blame a girl for wanting an excuse to lay naked in bed with you for the rest of the night?” she teased, reaching out her hand to trace patterns on my collarbones.

This time it was my turn for a smug grin. “No,” I replied, earning a poke to my side. “Alright, we better get up and get dressed so we can go eat, then,” I sighed, placing my hands on Evie’s arms.

“Sure,” she agreed, not motioning to get up any time soon.

“Evie,” I said, giving her a pointed look. “You have to get off first.”
“Oh, I do? Then I guess you’d better get started,” she declared with faux innocence, taking my hand and sliding it down her body in a much less wholesome manner.

“E!” I gasped, pulling my hand free like it had been electrocuted.

A sultry little giggle bounced through the room. “I thought you said you were fun, M,” she whined, pushing up from the bed and outstretching her hand for me to take. She helped me to my feet and even retrieved my panties for me, which had been dropped on the floor once again on our way to the bed.

“Thanks” I said, albeit a bit sarcastically.

“No problem. I’ll get dressed, and see you in a bit,” she commented, kissing my cheek and heading to the bathroom, where she had piled up all of her clothing before her bath last night. I wasn’t going to lie – seeing her go back into that room, where the floor was still damp with last night’s scare, caused a pang of fear in my chest. But the way that she was smiling just a few seconds ago bought me some comfort; I was fairly confident that she was genuinely feeling better. I just hoped it would last.

* * *

The walk to the diner wasn’t long, but it was cold. It was nearing the end of the year, and the brisk air was anything but refreshing. It was somewhat tolerable when we walked to the hotel last night, but today there was a nasty breeze. Days like this made me thankful that I was part dragon. Evie and I hadn’t even stepped three feet outside of the hotel before she was wrapping her arms around herself. Like any decent person, I automatically stripped off my favorite leather jacket and held it out for her to put on.

“No, Mal, I can’t ju-” she weakly protested, but I didn’t let her finish.

“E, are you kidding me? I’m a dragon. I’ll be fine. You, on the other hand…” I trailed off, giving her a stern look.

Evie seemed to realize how ridiculous her objection was and stepped into the open jacket, pulling it around herself as best she could because the zipper had been broken for a while now.
“Thank you,” she said softly as we continued on our walk.

“Of course,” I replied, and my ears turned red from more than the cold when she smiled down at me.

We were silent for a while before Evie spoke up. “You know Mal, this jacket has seen better days…” she noted, examining the places that the cold air had slipped in through various holes.

Some of the gaps had been from simple wear-and-tear. I had gotten the jacket shortly after I befriended Uma and Harry, and it was a rare occasion to see me without it after that. I had tried to patch it a few times, but it certainly didn’t look pretty. Additionally, there were small holes littering the leather from cigarette burns and close calls during knife and sword fights back on The Isle. On top of that, the unforgiving sun had shone down on it for so many years that it was hard to tell that it was once purple. Even though it was fairly beat up, I couldn’t help but look fondly at it; it was like my second skin. It had been through so much with me, and it definitely showed.

“Yeah, it has,” I agreed easily, moving my attention from the jacket to my best friend. Seeing it on Evie was an odd sight. The dull, tattered garment on such a bright, polished individual felt...wrong. It made me think about how much more she would have went through if she would have stayed on The Isle – how much different she would be today because of it. She had gotten a fresh start here in Auradon, and, although it certainly wasn’t perfect from what I had heard, I felt the urge to do the same myself. When I finally looked back up at her, Evie was watching me closely with a curious look in her eye, and I couldn’t help but wonder what was running through her mind.

The rest of the trip was fairly uneventful and mainly consisted of Evie and me trying to remember where exactly the diner had been located. Thankfully, their big, neon sign was hard to miss. Our entrance into the diner was signaled with a pleasant-sounding bell, and all eyes were on us as soon as we stepped through the door. Despite being residents of Auradon now, our sense of style easily identified us as villain kids to anyone who saw us. Even the people that did recognize Evie as part of the royal court clearly couldn’t wrap their heads around why she was hanging out with me, the daughter of the Mistress of All Evil – let alone wearing my jacket. I didn’t miss the way some parents scooted their children closer to them as Evie and I made our way to the corner booth, as far away from everyone else as we could get. Thankfully, Evie didn’t seem to mind, her wide smile giving away how pleased she was to finally be on a date, of sorts, with me.

Our waiter showed up just moments after we seated ourselves and slapped some menus down on our table, effectively snapping me out of my trance of appreciating Evie.

“Hi. I’m Bradley. I’m your server today. Can I get you a drink?” he said mechanically, not even bothering to glance down at us.
My nose crinkled at his standoffish behavior. I expected that kind of attitude on The Isle, but in Auradon? Usually people weren’t so obviously rude in public, especially at work.

“Just water for now, thank you,” Evie replied, moving her gaze from me to the menu.

I nodded in agreement, and the boy left. “Wow, what was his problem?” I pondered aloud, watching him walk back to the kitchen with too-stiff movements and a clenched jaw.

“Bradley? Oh, we dated for a while,” she mentioned offhandedly, still browsing the menu before her.

Of course they did. “That end badly, too?” I wondered, not being able to shake how upset he had seemed.

“Yeah…” she drawled before perking up. “Ooo! Looks like we can have breakfast after all!” she exclaimed, sliding her menu over to me and pointing at the ‘Breakfast served all day!’ headline.

“Great!” I said, finally opening my menu and browsing the breakfast options. As soon as I saw the image of a stack of pancakes absolutely smothered in strawberries, I knew what I wanted to order.

* * *

“Okay, but waffles have pockets to hold the toppings! The toppings on pancakes are messy and make the pancake soggy! No one wants to eat soggy food!” Evie argued, waving her last bite of apple cinnamon waffle into the air with her fork animatedly.

“Yeah, well, you’ve got powdered sugar on your face, so,” I feebly countered, stabbing a few stray strawberries on my plate.

“That’s a total cop-out, M!” she laughed, leaning back into her chair. “Just admit it; waffles are better than pancakes,” she goaded, the waffle finally disappearing behind ruby lips.
Before I could refuse to admit defeat, Bradley was suddenly looming over our table. I could practically hear the annoyed sigh desperately trying to escape his body.

“I hope everything was satisfactory. Would you like to try some of our snowballs? They’re only available for the holiday season,” he recited monotonously, as if he was required to do so but couldn’t care less about our actual response.

“Your wh-”

“Sure! We’ll take two, please,” Evie responded, cutting me off with a small smile.

“Thanks,” Bradley said, gathering our empty plates and returning to the kitchen.

Once he was out of earshot, I had to ask. “Okay, what the hell did you just order?” Since coming to Auradon I had been introduced to a plethora of new foods, but this was one I was not yet familiar with.

Evie simply laughed at my concern. “Dessert, M. They’re little chocolate cakes with cream filling that are surrounded by marshmallow and coconut. You’ll love them; I promise,” she assured me, placing her elbows on the table and resting her head in her hands.

My eyebrows furrowed together. “But...where’s the snow?” I asked.

Her expression grew even more amused. “What?” she laughed.

“Well, I’ve had meatballs, which are balls of meat, and mac and cheese balls, which are balls of mac and cheese...I just expected these to be balls made of snow. You know, snowballs,” I explained. It all made perfect sense to me.

Red-brown eyes flicked between mine for a few moments. “Mal, do you-do you not know what snow is?” she asked incredulously.

“Food, I assume?” I responded, suddenly feeling stupid and avoiding her gaze.
Her mouth dropped, and she immediately called out for Bradley, who had been washing a booth near ours.

“Yes?” he asked boredly.

“Hi, can we get a strawberry snow cone as well?” she asked, biting her lip in hopes she wasn’t being too much of a pest from the looks of it.

Bradley sighed and threw his towel over his shoulder. “Coming right up…” he muttered, going back into the kitchen to retrieve the treat.

As soon as he was out of sight, Evie began to speak animatedly. “So, you have water, and when it freezes it turns into ice, right?” she started, pointing to my glass of water, which was mostly full of ice cubes at this point.

I nodded in understanding.

“Well, in some places that get precipitation – rain – when it’s below thirty-two degrees, the rain freezes and turns into snow. It’s kind of like ice, but it’s white and light and fluffy,” she explained.

“White and fluffy, eh? Is that what that huge Christmas tree in the middle of main hall is covered in?” I pondered. I had always thought it was strange looking. Ben had informed me that they haul one in every year for the holidays to get all of the students in the mood, whatever that meant.

“It’s fake, but yes, that’s what it’s supposed to look like,” she answered with a good-natured eye-roll.

Apparently, the desserts don’t take long to make, because Bradley was already back with a plate and a cup in hand.

It was easy to tell which desserts were which based on the vague description I had been given moments ago. My hand reached out for the snow cone, and I took the spoon and scooped some of the contents out to examine it. “And it just...falls from the sky?” I inquired, trying to imagine such a thing.
“Yes! And if you get enough of it, it stays on the ground, and you can do all sorts of fun stuff in it!” she enthused, smiling widely and staring off into space. “You can go sledding, ice skating, make snow angels and snowmen, have snowball fights,” she listed.

My eyes lit up at the last activity. “Snowball fights, eh? Sounds right up my alley!” I chuckled.

“Oh, Mal! We have to go somewhere with snow together someday!” she pleaded, taking my hand in hers and locking eyes with me. “Everything turns white, and it’s beautiful, Mal, absolutely beautiful!”

“Sure, E; of course we can,” I agreed, rubbing her hand with my thumb as she swooned.

“Each little snowflake is beautiful on its own, too! We looked at pictures of them under the microscope in class one day, and they were just incredible, M! They’re so tiny, but every snowflake is like a work of art! They’re intricate and symmetrical, and not one snowflake looks the same as another; they’re all unique!” she continued, and I found myself getting lost in how lovely wonder looked on her.

“Yeah?” I prompted, trying to get her to keep talking about it.

“Yes, it’s amazing! But it’s also kind of sad. It’s so beautiful, and it’s so fun, but it doesn’t last, you know? It can’t last,” added softly, her mood sobering quickly.

“Well then,” I said, lifting our joined hands up to my lips and pressing a kiss to her knuckles. “We’re just going to have to make the most of it while we’re there.”
Chapter 14

Evie and I were not about to try to walk back to Auradon Prep in the freezing December weather, so Evie pulled some strings and hooked us up with a ride. As if there weren’t enough eyes on Evie and me at the diner when we were eating, I could immediately hear the excited whispers in the air when a limo from the royal court itself pulled into the small, shoddy driveway. Evie bounced on her feet in anticipation and didn’t even wait for the driver to come out and open the door for her once the vehicle had stopped. I awkwardly clambered in behind her. The last time I had been in one of these I had come straight off of the boat from The Isle, but the uneasy feeling that settled in my stomach as soon as I got in quickly faded when I noticed that the driver was not dressed in the usual royal help uniform but rather something quite casual.

“Roger! Thank you so much for coming and picking us up on such short-notice – and on a holiday as well!” Evie cooed, grasping the windowsill of the limo between the front and the back seating areas to get a better look at the other occupant.

“Think nothing of it, Lady Evie; you are practically family! Besides, ol’ St. Nick does not come until tonight anyway!” the man answered back with a wave of his hand.

My head unconsciously tilted at the mention of the saint. No one had told me there was a special guest coming tonight. I briefly wondered where he was going to be, considering most students and staff had left for the holidays. Perhaps he was exclusively a royal guest.

The driver’s voice interrupted my thoughts. “I assume you are heading back to campus?”

"Yes, please,” Evie requested with a beaming smile.

“Partition up?” he added next, and Evie’s smile morphed into something more sly.
“You know me so well.”

The next thing I knew, there was a tinted window separating the driver from Evie and me and a hand on my thigh. Even though I was wearing jeans, I could feel how cold it was through the material. Before I even thought about it, my hand covered hers, and my dragon heat began to travel through my body and to our intertwined fingers. She scooted closer to me until the sides of our bodies were in full contact with one another, and she hummed as her body absorbed my warmth.

“So,” Evie drawled, giving me a look I couldn’t quite decipher.

“So,” I parroted back blankly.

“The ride to campus is going to take a while…” she casually supplied, letting her head fall against the back of her seat gently.

“Okay?” I answered, raising an eyebrow at her in suspicion. This time, I didn’t miss the way her eyes flicked down to gaze at my lips. Now I could see what she was doing.

“What ever are we going to do to entertain ourselves?” Evie sighed dramatically, eyes sparkling with mischief.

I had to hold back a chuckle. “Hm,” I mumbled in faux contemplation. “We could…play a game,” I suggested.

“A game?” she echoed, her body tensing up in interest. “What kind of game?”

“Oh, I don’t know…” I started, exhaling and looking out of the window dramatically. “We could count roadkill, play ‘I Spy’…see how long it takes for me to kiss all that lipstick off of your fa-“

Predictably, Evie had grabbed my jaw and pulled me in for a kiss before I could even complete my proposal. My lips tightened as I smiled into the kiss, and she nipped at them in frustration.
“Stop smiling; it makes it hard to kiss you!” Evie chastised playfully, which only made it worse. Her hands loosened their grip on my jaw until she was holding me gently instead, brushing her thumbs into the dimples of my cheeks. “Gods, you’re cute,” she said with a hint of annoyance.

“Cute? Really? That’s the adjective you’re going to use to describe me? I don’t think so,“ I protested, leaning away from her to pout. It was all just for show, of course.

“Ooo ‘adjective’! Did you learn about those in your Grammar class?” she teased, leaning back in to kiss me.

I avoided her lips just to keep up the facade, so she moved them to my neck instead. “I am not cute. I am a dragon. I am-“ I started, but she stopped her light kisses and interrupted me instead.

“Tiny, and you have the cutest dimples, and your eyes are so big, and your lips are so pouty!” she swooned, fixing me with a big, amused smile.

I began to correct her. “Fierce and terrifying an-“

“Fierce, huh? Hm, I don’t see it,” she prodded, trying to get a rise out of me. “You’re just going to have to prove it,” she challenged.

She asked for it. In the blink of an eye, I reached over, grabbed her by the backs of her thighs, and pulled her roughly into my lap. The gasp that escaped her lips was swallowed by mine as I kissed her.

She returned the gesture with just as much passion, and before long, we were in a heated make-out session. It was only a few minutes before Evie had shed my leather jacket and thrown it carelessly onto the floor, never breaking our kiss to do it. She wasn’t being shy about touching me this time, either, knowing I had given her permission to do so earlier. Her hands were still a little cold under my shirt and against my skin, but it felt incredible, especially with how hot it had suddenly gotten in here.

I had to admit, the thought that there was only a wall of glass separating us from being caught was kind of thrilling.

Evie didn’t seem to be worried about the prospect at all, not bothering to try to be quiet. The soft
moans she was emitting here and there as our tongues slid together was making my heart pound and my head hazy.

Suddenly, a motion had my thoughts misdirected. At first, because my eyes were closed, I figured Evie may be just repositioning herself. It wasn’t exactly cramped in the back of the limo, but I had kind of forced her into my lap without giving her time to get more comfortable. But when the movement didn’t end after a few seconds, I opened my eyes to assess what was going on. One glance and it was clear that Evie was grinding down into my lap. The realization made my eyes begin to glow green, and I slipped out a “Fuck!” between kisses.

The exclamation had Evie breaking the kiss to stare at me, teeth biting into her own bottom lip. She had absolutely no shame. “Is this okay?” she asked, eyes only conveying a hint of worry behind a soft, red glow.

My brain short-circuited, and I could only sputter out a reply. “Is thi-um, yeah! It’s-fuck! Yeah, yeah; it’s fine!”. As badly as I wanted to keep kissing her – her lips, her neck, anywhere – I couldn’t help but sit back and watch her as she moved instead. I placed my hands on her hips to guide her onto one of my thighs instead, thinking it would be more comfortable for her. Apparently it was, because the moan she let out upon the contact was absolutely filthy. Immediately, my leg became impossibly hot, and, as she moved, I could clearly feel a wet spot gathering on my jeans. “A-are you?” I said, trying to ask if she was wearing any underwear but basically incapable of speech. So, to answer my own question, my hands dipped under her dress and ran along the sides of her thighs. All I felt was smooth skin, and my heart skipped a beat.

Between soft whines, Evie replied. “My s-swimsuit – hmm – was still a little damp from the pool; I wasn’t about to put it back on. Besides, – fuck – I didn’t bring any extra clothes; I was a-anticipating going back to school after the party.”

Fair enough. Not that I particularly cared about her reasoning; it was just a pleasant surprise, is all. Now that she mentioned it, I could see the hint of her nipples straining against the material of her dress. “Can I touch your-“ I started, but before I could finish, my hands had been pulled from her thighs and guided to her breasts. They were nearly perfectly fitted to my hands, and I kneaded them instinctively, earning a moan of appreciation from her.

Her mouth was slightly parted, her eyebrows were furrowed, and her eyes were tightly closed; she was captivating.

The hard grip of her hands on my shoulders reminded me that this was all indeed real. I was so caught up in the moment that it took me a while to register the distinct sound of knuckles rapping on the partition window.
Evie either didn’t hear it or didn’t care, her hips increasing speed and quiet gasps cutting through the suddenly heavy air.

“Shit! Evie, the driver is knocking; w-what do I do?” I whispered, fearing that any minute the window would lower again.

“J-just gimme a sec,” she breathed, biting into her lip so hard that I feared she would draw blood.

“Lady Evie? Lady Mal?” the driver’s voice cracked, and my stomach jumped into my throat.

Instinctively, I shoved Evie off of my lap and to my right.

“Mal!” she growled, falling into her seat unceremoniously. “What did you do that for?” she huffed, brushing her now-messy hair out of her face with her hands.

“We will be arriving at Auradon Prep in approximately five minutes!” the chipper voice of the driver appeared again.

This time, I realized that it was coming from a small speaker near the window. “I-I thought that-” I stuttered, gesturing to the window and the speaker.

“Mal, Roger would *never* lower the partition without my permission. It’s there for a reason,” she explained with a slightly amused smirk.

An embarrassed blush creeped across my face. “I’m sorry, E; I just panicked.”

She giggled and retrieved my leather jacket from the floor. “Yeah, I can see that; you’re red as a ruby!” she teased.

I’m sure I only blushed harder at that.
“It’s okay, M. You’ll just have to make it up to me some other time,” she purred, leaning back in to capture one last kiss.

It left me a little breathless, but I managed to compose myself by the time we pulled up to the girl’s dormitory side entrance of the castle.

When the limo came to a stop, Evie pressed a small, round button next to the speaker by the window. “Thank you so much, Roger! Merry Christmas! Say hello to Kathy and Christine for me!” Evie spoke into the device before removing her finger.

“No problem at all, Lady Evie! You and Lady Mal have a happy holiday as well!” his voice came from the speaker.

Hand in hand, Evie and I exited the limo and made our way to the dorms. As soon as we went through the front door, I gravitated towards the elevator out of habit. A light tug on my arm pulled my body away from it and closer to the stairs. When I looked over at my companion to pout, all she provided me with was a stern look.

“Put the pout away. How are you going to keep up your stamina if you’re always taking the elevator?” she asked rhetorically, making her way up the steps and pulling me along with her.

“Pssh, I have stamina,” I insisted. But by the time we had made it to the top floor, my legs were burning, and I was struggling to breathe normally enough to not give myself away. If Evie had noticed, she spared my feelings and didn’t say anything about it. I was suddenly thankful that my room was adjacent to the stairwell. My feet automatically took me to my door, but Evie planted her feet and refused to come any closer to it. “What? What’s wrong?” I wondered, stroking the back of her hand with my thumb comfortingly.

Her eyes flicked between my own and the door nervously. “It’s just…I don’t want to bother Uma,” she admitted.

“Mm,” I hummed, understanding where she was coming from. I still had yet to patch my relationship with my roommate, and honestly, I didn’t want to bother her, either. Barging into our room unexpectedly with Evie in hand would be the last thing Uma would want to deal with. “Alright, uh, I’ll just see you later?”

“Of course, M,” Evie smiled, squeezing my hand before taking hers back. She was about to turn
around when I hastily lifted myself onto my tiptoes to plant a kiss on the corner of her mouth. Her lips curled upwards at the action, and she leaned into my space to gently cup my face and give me a real kiss.

It was gentle and sweet and left me feeling calm and serene even as I turned to my room and towards a potential conflict. As soon as I walked through the doorway, however, it became apparent that I was the only one there. Uma’s side of the room was suspiciously cleanly, so I sauntered over to it to investigate. On her neatly-made bed was a handwritten note. ‘Went to fencing camp with Harry for break. Staying with teammates. Happy holidays!’ was all it said. Well, that was one issue I could put off until later. My mattress dipped with the weight of my body, and I sighed, not quite sure what to do. The sight of some of my clothing laying on the ground reminded me that I really ought to change my clothes. On second thought, a shower was an even better idea...

A half hour later, I was nearing the end of my shower in the girls’ dormitory bathroom. The telltale sound of the door opening made my eyebrows furrow in confusion. As far as I knew, all of the Auradon kids went home to their families for the holidays or to camp. “Evie?” I called, and the sound echoed through the large, empty room.

“M?” a familiar voice answered. The sound of heeled shoes approaching tipped me off that she was just outside my shower stall. “Taking a shower, huh? You know, I would have joined you if you just asked,” she revealed, voice lower than before.

I let out a nervous chuckle and began to wash the conditioner out of my hair. “I think I’m good!”

“Oh, I’m sure you’re more than competent,” she purred, nearly too quiet for me to hear.

My hands unconsciously moved more quickly. While I was finishing up, I could hear the clicking of the bathroom stall door as Evie opened and closed it. By the time I had emerged from my shower stall wrapped in a towel, Evie was perched casually on the counter by the sinks. It appeared as though she had changed into something more comfortable for our afternoon together. An oversized, yellow Fighting Knights sweatshirt hung down past her butt, and the edges of a pair of black athletic shorts peeked out from underneath it. That’s where the casual wear ended, however, as her feet were still donning a pair of dark blue, strappy heels.

“Did you wait up just for me?” I asked, walking until I was standing in front of her.

“Well, what else was I supposed to do?” she wondered, curling a finger into my towel – between my breasts – and pulling me in between her legs.
Dazed, I stumbled forward and rested one of my hands on her thigh.

She hummed at the contact and leaned down, gazing at me intensely. Her hand clutched my jaw firmly, and my breath hitched as her thumb brushed across my lower lip appreciatively. Just when I thought she was going to close the distance and kiss me, she spoke. “Do you want to make ornaments?” she asked, lips nearly touching mine.

“What?” I breathed, not sure I heard her correctly and unable to look anywhere but at her mouth.

“Do you want to make ornaments for Christmas, like we used to back on The Isle? We can hang them on the tree in the Great Hall,” she proposed, brushing her lips against mine but not quite adding enough pressure to make it a real kiss.

“Sure,” I answered, and I felt her smile against my lips before she finally closed the distance.

The kiss was enthusiastic but sweet, and when we finally pulled apart she was beaming. Her fingers moved down from my face to intertwine with my own digits. With an excited hop, she was back on the ground and hastily tugging me out of the bathroom.

At this rate, she was going to give me whiplash.

“Okay, so, the help probably already took out the garbage yesterday, but they only pick up the recycling half of the time, so we can probably find something cool to-” she ranted happily, pulling me along the hallway.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa! E, can I, like, get dressed and put away my soap first?” I laughed, holding up my bag of bathroom products for effect.

“Right,” she said with a blush.

“How about,” I started, pulling my hand from hers. “I go do that and you get a head start on looking for materials?” I proposed.
“Okay!” she agreed with a smile, already looking down the hallway for recycling bins.

It didn’t take me long to go up to my room and get dressed. After all, we were basically the only people in the castle, so I had no one to impress…or intimidate. When I came back down the elevator, I was fresh-faced and donning my white Fighting Knights tank top and grey shorts that I frequently used as pyjamas. I didn’t need to use my dragon hearing to pick up on the rattling and clanking of various objects coming from the west wing. After padding down it, I came across Evie kneeling on the ground and going through the recycling bin of my art classroom. Next to her, on the floor, was a small pile of random bits and pieces of things we could use for our crafting.

“Wow, looks like the art room was a jackpot,” I commented, eyeing the materials and trying to imagine them as something new.

“What?” Evie asked, momentarily shaken out of her zone. “Oh, we found those in all of the other rooms,” she answered, continuing to dig through the bin.

“We? All of the other rooms?” I wondered aloud, peeking my head back out into the hallway to see that, indeed, all of the other rooms’ doors were wide open. More clattering could be heard in the distance.

“Oh, that’s cool!” came Jay’s voice, much to my surprise. I thought the boys were going to tourney camp for break.

“Hey, give it back!” Carlos yelled back.

“No! It’s the coolest thing we’ve found, and I’m the coolest person in the group, so I should have it!” Jay reasoned smoothly.

“You mean the coolest thing I’ve found!” Carlos argued.

“If you want it so bad, you’re just going to have to come and get it,” Jay teased.

I fully expected the conversation to be followed up by the usual shuffling, grunts, and groans that accompanied the boys’ short-lived scuffles. When they were unusually quiet, my eyebrow quirked, and I moved to go check on them.
“Mm, I wouldn’t do that if I were you,” Evie warned. “Unless you want mental images you can never be rid of.”

It took a few seconds for my brain to process the insinuation. Although my heart quickened with excitement about the boys finally getting together, I decided it was best if I remain here with Evie. I shook the mental image I was already getting out of my head. “Even with help, there’s no way you three got all this looked through in that time. How’d you do it?” I wondered with a quirked eyebrow.

“Time manipulation, remember?” she reminded me with a wink. A spiky, metallic object joined the pile on the floor.

“Huh, right. Gods, that’s useful,” I mused. While I could do without the relatively uncontrollable bursts of flames from time to time, I was thankful for my dragon hearing at the very least. In a way, I felt we kind of deserved an edge in Auradon after growing up on The Isle.

“Alright,” Evie spoke up, brushing her hands together. “I think we’ve got enough embellishments to make our ornaments!” she smiled, gathering as many of the pieces into her large sweatshirt pocket as she could before gesturing for me to take the rest. “Boys! We’re going up to my dorm!” she shouted. A muffled acknowledgement answered her, and she shook her head in amusement. Once we had a sure enough hold on the materials, we made our way back to the girls’ dormitory. For once, Evie allowed the use of the elevator, citing that it would be best to keep our items safe.

I wasn’t about to argue with that.

Evie’s dorm room was clean and tidy, as usual. She made a beeline for her sewing table upon entering it, emptying her pocket onto it unceremoniously before moving her sewing machine, much more carefully, to the floor. I placed the objects I was carrying onto the table as well, and Evie retrieved another chair for me in the meantime.

By the time we had that settled, the boys entered the room, looking slightly more disheveled than usual.

I couldn’t help the teasing smirk that crepted across my face.

“H-“ I started, prepared to make a snarky comment.
“Stuff it, lizard breath,” Jay interrupted, pointing at me in warning.

I was so surprised, I couldn’t even think of anything to say.

“Jay! Be nice! Both of you, bring your treasures over here,” Evie commanded.

They did as they were told, and soon enough, there was more recyclables than wood tabletop visible.

“Alright,” she drawled, taking a seat at the table and spreading out the treasures. “How do you want to divide them up?” she asked, looking at me expectantly.

My teeth bit into my lip as I pondered what would be most fair. After all, they were the ones who had done all of the digging. “I’m not picky; you guys can pick all of the ones you want, and I will take whatever is left,” I suggested.

“Sounds g-” Jay started.

Evie protested instead. “M! That’s no fair!”

My eyes rolled; she was the one who asked me.

“How about…we each take turns picking every other item, but I get to go first because I suggested the idea?” she proposed.

I nodded, not bothering to fight it, and the boys agreed that it was a good plan.

The items ended up being divided rather predictably. Evie’s side was full of things that were glitzy, eye-catching, and various shades of blue and red. My side contained purples, pinks, and greens intermixed with monochromatic, shiny, and sharp objects. The boys looked like they had selected weapons instead of decorations. After we had chosen our materials, we worked side-by-side in contented silence, save for the occasional requests for the glue gun and questions about what should go where. By the time all four of us were happy with our creations, the sun was nearing the horizon.
“I think these might be our best yet!” Evie exclaimed, gazing at our work appreciatively.

I didn’t doubt that; the last time we had made ornaments together seemed like eons ago. At the very least, we had more coordination to assemble them with. Even after Evie, Jay, and Carlos had left for Auradon, I had dutifully carried on our annual Christmas tradition of making an ornament and hanging it on Evie’s coat rack in our old, secret hang-out space. Over the years, it became predominantly purple and out of place.

Evie held her ornament up to the overhead light and watched it reflect stars all across her room. I couldn’t tell which was brighter, her heart-shaped block of sparkles or her smile. “Let’s go hang them up!” she squealed, taking my hand in hers before I could even formulate a response. The boys seemed nearly as excited as Evie, and we all scrambled out of the dorm room. Sadly, this time Evie had decided the stairs were our only option, and I could barely keep from falling as she sped down them – in heels no less – and jogged to the Great Hall.

I would be lying if I said I wasn’t out of breath by the time we were all standing in front of the absolutely massive tree they had set up for the holidays. It went all the way to the ceiling of the third floor, for evil’s sake. If I felt short in normal, everyday life, then this tree definitely made me reconsider the definition of the word. The branches of the tree were already adorned with various generic-looking ornaments, much like the students that normally flooded the halls of the castle. The addition of our four unique pieces completed the picture – we belonged there, too.

As we all stood there with dopey smiles and fluttering hearts I suddenly had an idea.

“Hey, guys; do you want to get a Christmas tree for your dorm?” I asked. Christmas on The Isle was all about being thankful for what little nature could grow there. There were only a few trees on the entirety of the island, and no one would even think about cutting them down for the sake of a single holiday. Even villains recognized the sanctity of their presence and respected their strength and beauty. But here in Auradon there were trees aplenty, and now that we had the chance to actually have a Christmas tree, I kind of wanted to do it.

“Fuck yeah!” Jay exclaimed.

“Totally!” Carlos agreed.

Evie’s features scrunched up. “You boys can get a tree for your dorm. I am not cleaning up all of those pine needles when this is all over, no matter how nice it smells,” she decided on.
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

Woo! Glad to have a new chapter up for you fairly quickly! I hope you enjoy the Christmas fluff even though it's probably sweltering where you all are! XD

JUST A PSA that I will be editing some of the details of this story to make the characters a little older. I'm not quite sure how I'm going to go about it yet, but it will be happening eventually. It won't be affecting the story itself a great deal; it will just make certain things more believable. Thank you!

As soon as the words ‘Christmas tree’ left my mouth, Jay and Carlos had made it all the way down the hall and to the main entrance before Evie reminded them that it’s December and they should really get their coats first. As soon as everyone was ‘snug as a bug in a rug’, to quote Evie, we headed out to the parking lot and to Carlos’ car. He wasn’t sure where the destination was, so Evie sat up front with him and helped him navigate. On the way, Jay explained how there are people who grow trees specifically for the holiday season and sell them in lots throughout December. However, it turns out that there aren’t people selling Christmas trees at nine at night on Christmas Eve. Who would have thought?

“So, tell me again how this isn’t wrong?” Evie sighed, her breath forming a cloud of smoke in the air. Her arms were wrapped around her midsection either in protest or because of the cold; it wasn’t entirely clear.

“It’s Christmas Eve, and they’re closed, so no one is going to need these trees tonight or any day after that,” Jay reasoned, bending down and cupping his hands for me to step into.

“Except for us?” Evie countered with a raised eyebrow.

Jay pointedly ignored her in favor of lifting me up and over the fence separating us from our future tree.

“Look, these trees are all precut. They’re going to die off now, so we should at least take one home and give it a good rest of its life,” Carlos supplied, walking up to Jay and placing his foot in the other boy’s hand.

“Yeah, E; let’s give it a loving home,” I added, pouting at her through the chain link fence.
“Well, when you put it that way…” she mumbled, avoiding my gaze. “But I’m staying out here. If I climb over that fence the whole world will see my ass.”

“It’s your fault for wearing such short shorts,” Jay laughed.

“That’s okay, E; we need a lookout anyway,” I assured her, although I, for one, wouldn’t mind being flashed.

With a loud stomp, Jay landed on the inside of the fence after scaling it like it was nothing. “Alright, who’s going to pick out the tree?” he wondered.

“I vote that Mal, as our unofficial leader with a keen eye for detail, picks out the tree,” Evie suggested, giving me a smile that made my heart swell with pride.

Jay looked as though he was going to contest ‘unofficial leader’ until Carlos said “Can’t argue with that!”

I took my sweet time examining every single tree down to the individual needle to find one suitable for my friends. Evie even slowed time to allow me to really get into it. If the dramatic sighs and feet shuffling were any indication, the boys wished that they could speed time up so they wouldn’t have to wait so long. But this was an important decision, and it was not one to be rushed. Finally, it hit me. There it was – a big, beautiful pine tree. It wasn’t as massive as the one in the Great Hall, but it was definitely impressive.

“This. This is it. This is our tree,” I stated, brushing my hands across the needles fondly.

“Nice!” Jay agreed.

“Damn!” Carlos exclaimed, staring up at it with his hands on his hips.

“It’s perfect!” Evie chipped in from behind the fence.
“Of course it is,” I agreed, pushing through the branches to get to the trunk. Once I was in far enough I felt like the tree had eaten me; all I could see was green. My knees bent and I lifted, but the tree barely budged.

“Whoa! Here, let us he-“ Carlos called, reaching his hands into the tree.

“No! I’ve got it!” I insisted, not wanting to seem weak. I just needed to get a better grip; that’s all.

“She’s got it!” Evie said encouragingly.

“But she’s so tiny,” Jay muttered, probably just to Evie, but with my dragon hearing, it didn’t go unnoticed.

“I’m a dragon!” I reminded them, maneuvering around the tree to find a better place to grab it. After a few minutes of struggling and managing to get the tree a total of two feet from its starting position, I huffed out an aggravated sigh. As I stood there, taking a little break to breathe, I saw another pristine tree. It was just as nice as this one but small enough for me to carry with my enhanced strength. “You know what?” I said, walking over to it. “This one is even better! This is the perfect tree!” I insisted, easily grabbing this one by the trunk and dragging it over to the fence. I did my best to ignore my companions’ obvious attempts to stifle their giggles and threw it over the barrier with a little help from my inner dragon.

“You’re right, Mal,” Evie assured me.

“Yeah, the other one would have been a hassle to get into the dorm,” Carlos added with a wave of his hand.

Jay started to say something with a wide smirk, but an elbow to the ribs shut him up fast.

“Now we’ve just gotta get this thing home,” I noted.

Three faces suddenly became much less amused.

* * *
“You were right, Evie. Mal picked out the best tree,” Carlos said softly from the other side of the bed. He and Jay had pushed their beds together to accommodate the four of us, and we were all laying in them and admiring Carlos’ work in decorating our Christmas tree with fairy lights that we may or may not have borrowed from Jane and Lonnie’s room. It’s not like they would miss them while they were gone anyway.

“Thank you; I pride myself on always being right,” Evie teased.

The answering nudge to her shoulder from Jay made my head slide off Evie’s shoulder and onto her chest, but I just snuggled further into it rather than complaining.

After a few moments of contented silence, Evie spoke up. “Don’t fall asleep, Mal; you’ll miss Santa.”

“Santa?” I muttered, eyes already closed in serenity.

“San-“ Jay started, but something stopped him from finishing his sentence.


“Oh, the guy the driver mentioned,” I recalled, opening my eyes in curiosity.

“That’s the one! He’s a big, jolly fellow with white hair and a huge beard that wears a red suit and brings gifts to all of the good girls and boys on Christmas,” Evie explained.

My eyebrows furrowed, trying to imagine such a thing. “How could someone possibly-“ I started.

“Time manipulation, just like me,” she interrupted.

“Okay. Well, even if he could, why haven’t we heard of him on The Isle?” I asked, suddenly a little upset that the guy seemed to have forgotten about an entire group of children.
“Because he uses magic, he can’t cross the barrier,” Carlos blurted.

I hummed. It all made sense. “But why would he bring us gifts? We’re the children of villains,” I grumbled, already resigned to not getting anything. Auradonians had a knack for judging a book by its cover, and I certainly didn’t fit the mold of a ‘good little girl’.

“It’s not about where you come from; it’s who you are. The three of us have gotten presents every year here in Auradon; haven’t we, boys?” Evie said, hugging me a little more tightly.

“Yes!”

“Every year!”

My lips pressed together in thought. “So when does this guy come, and how to we get the gifts?” I inquired, sitting up and turning to look at them now that the situation was more than hypothetical. Free stuff was a hell of a lot more exciting than celebrating trees.

“Oh, he only comes when you’re asleep,” Carlos answered.

“Then I’ll just prete-“

“Nope! He sees you when you’re sleeping; he knows when you’re awake!” Carlos suddenly broke out into song.

“And he’s way too fast; you’ll never see him,” Jay said right after, which sounded like a challenge if I’ve ever heard one.

“I bet I cou-“

“And you should leave out cookies for him, because it’s hard work bringing presents to all of those kids,” Evie added, looking at me with a serious expression.

“Okay, well, I can probably just poof u-“
“Oh, no, Mal. They have to be homemade. He knows the difference; magic has a weird aftertaste,” Jay informed me.

“Ugh,” I groaned, falling backwards onto the mattress with a bounce. This was becoming a lot of work. But the idea of a free present was very tempting, especially considering I had been robbed of them for my entire childhood. My three best friends waited in silent anticipation for my response. “Do any of you know how to get into the kitchen?” I sighed.

That was all it took for them to sit up and start getting out bed.

“I know where the kitchen is,” Jay offered.

“And I’m sure you can just *alohamora* that shit if it’s locked,” Carlos added.

“What?” I wondered, closing my eyes in frustration. It was much too late for big words.

“Magic, M. He means use your magic,” Evie explained with a soft smile, taking my hand and gently pulling me to my feet. The boys had already made it into the hallway by the time Évie and I had gotten out the door.

“Oh, yeah; I could definitely try,” I answered as we padded along the cold halls in our bare feet.

“And if your magic fails then I’ll just have to get out the big guns,” Jay grinned, flexing his arms dramatically – as if he could actually muscle the door open.

Evie and I rolled our eyes at him, but Carlos chuckled at the show.

Trying to earn back some cool points, Jay casually slid down the arm rail of the stairs in one swift movement.

I will admit, it was pretty damn slick. But I’m sure it wasn’t *that* hard to do. Wanting to try out my theory, I pulled on Évie’s hand, trying to get her to release it so I could get up onto the railing.
“Oh, no you don’t!” she chastised, increasing the strength of her grip.

I whined in protest.

“I don’t care if you’re part dragon; you’re small, and if you fall down the stairs you will get seriously hurt. So, until you learn to fly, let’s keep our feet on the ground, hm?” she reasoned.

My ears perked up at that. Flying did sound convenient. Perhaps it was about time I talked to Fairy Godmother about my abilities. Well, as soon as break was over. I had zoned out for a while thinking about flying. Before I knew it, we were standing in front of the double doors to the kitchen.

“Alright, Mal. Do your thing!” Carlos encouraged with a smile.

I exhaled and shook out my arms, trying to wrack my brain for a rhyme that would work.

“Hello, we need admission for four; so help us out and unlock the door!” I chanted, hoping it would do the trick.

Much to everyone’s delight, the door emitted a soft, green glow. Evie did a series of proud little claps, and Jay and Carlos offered me high-fives to congratulate my success. When Carlos reached over me to grab the door handle, it opened without a problem.

The lights in the room immediately flicked on, making my heart skip a beat. Thankfully, they seemed to just be motion-sensor lights rather than someone in the kitchen catching us red-handed.

“Alright! Mal, I need a large bowl, a whisk, and an electric mixer! Carlos, I need a cookie sheet, a spatula, cooling racks, and a spoon! Jay, I need flour, salt, sugar, and vanilla. I’ll get the baking powder, butter, eggs, and sprinkles! Break!” Evie directed. She was the one who had the most baking experience, so we all willingly submitted to her commands.

Sure, I had made cookies with her in Life Skills Without Magic, but was I paying a lot of attention? Not really. Could you blame me, though? Evie was my lab partner, after all.
The four of us went off in separate directions in search of our assigned materials. Even though there was a lot of banging and clanking happening, we all seemed to find our materials in a rather short period of time. It was getting late, and, although this was exciting, it was obvious by the bags under our eyes that we all wanted to make quick work of it, which meant no food fights. This time.

It turns out, making cookies isn’t really that difficult. It’s just following directions and mixing ingredients using a certain technique. Things seemed to be going smoothly, and it didn’t even take us long to clean up our mess once the cookies were in the oven. To keep us from falling asleep in the ten minutes we had left to wait for the cookies, Evie got out some confectioner’s sugar and milk and had us take turns slowly whisking them together until we had enough frosting to put on our batch of cookies. While the boys and I did that, Evie got to work on the dishes.

By the time the cookies were cool enough to be frosted, Carlos and I were too tired to do a decent job of it. But from what he had told me, it was the fact that we had made the cookies by hand that mattered, not how pretty they looked. I hoped it was true and that this Santa dude would be happy with them. Evie finished putting away the ingredients and utensils we used then moved over to Jay.

He had proven to be useless a couple minutes ago by falling asleep standing and leaning up against the counter. I mean, who does that? As soon as her fingers brushed his bare arm, he jolted awake. “I wasn’t asleep!” he asserted, voice gruff from not using it.

“Of course not,” Evie giggled, patting him on the cheek affectionately. “Alright, guys. I think it’s time we go to bed,” she proposed.

“I second that motion,” Carlos agreed, picking up the plates of cookies and stacking them in his hand.

“Wait-what? I thought we were staying up to catch Santa?” I questioned, lip jutting out against my will.

My three friends exchanged looks I was unable to decipher.

“I told you, he only comes when you’re asleep,” Carlos urged.

“And I told you that he’s too fast, and you wouldn’t be able to see him even if you did stay up. Trust me; I’ve tried it,” Jay reminded me, already sleepily shuffling towards the doors.
“It’s just how it works, Mal. You can see him at the mall next year, though. He always stops by so he can meet kids and ask what they want for Christmas,” Evie tried, taking my hand and leaning down to rest her head atop mine as we walked.

I processed her words as we left the room. “Wait, he asks kids? How does he know what to get me if he hasn’t asked me what I want?” I wondered, stopping at the foot of the staircase leading to the boys’ dormitories.

Jay groaned and rested his head on the railing.

Carlos rubbed his shoulder sympathetically with his free hand.

“It’s getting late, M; let’s just set out his cookies, and we can talk more tomorrow,” Evie suggested softly, rubbing my hand with her thumb.

After a few beats I agreed, but only because I was so tired. “Alright.”

Once we got into Jay and Carlos’ dorm and set the cookies on their desk, Jay motioned to grab one of the treats.

Evie slapped his hand before he could get to it. “No, those are for Santa!” she chided.

“Santa doesn’t need, like, thirty cookies!” he whined sleepily.


“Exactly!”

“Either way, you shouldn’t be eating sweets before bed. If there are any left, you can have them in the morning,” Evie decided on.

I didn’t see how sweets for breakfast was any better, but I wasn’t about to bring it up.
“Fine,” Jay grumbled before suddenly pulling all three of us into a big, tight hug. “It’s really nice to all be together during the holidays again. Merry Christmas, guys. Goodnight, and sweet dreams,” he said sweetly, giving each of us a kiss on our heads through our hair. My heart swelled with the sentiment – he always got this way when he was overtired.

We all returned his wishes and climbed into the combined beds – Evie and me on the left and Carlos and Jay on the right. As everyone was falling asleep, I couldn’t help but feel nostalgic. It was just like old times, when we used to all sleep on a shabby, queen-sized mattress on the floor in our secret hideout when we had particularly hard days with our parents and just wanted to be with each other. I knew I could always find comfort and security with these three human beings, and even tonight, I wouldn’t have had it any other way.

Although I was admittedly the one who usually cuddled up to Evie, she soon realized that I was fully intent on staying up to catch this Santa guy in the act, so she snuggled up to me and got comfortable, pressing a silent kiss to my neck. I don’t care if he did this every year; I wasn’t going to let some stranger creep into our room while we slept, even if he was bringing presents. At least, that was the plan. It didn’t take long for three hearts to slow. Then four. I stayed up until my eyes burned, and my thoughts swirled into incomprehensible flashes of image and sound. Then I, too, gave in to sleep.

* * *

The next morning, I awoke with a start to Jay whooping excitedly and Carlos groaning in defeat. I opened my eyes just in time to see Evie, who was acting as my pillow, fixing them with a disappointed glare.

“Guys! I told you to play quietly,” she urged, beginning to soothingly run her fingers through my hair.

A quick glance at the clock on the side table informed me that I had slept in pretty late, so I couldn’t even be mad about it. And Evie’s motions were certainly a nice way to wake up on top of it.

“Sorry,” Carlos apologized, looking genuinely regretful.

“Sorry, I can’t contain my excitement over beating his ass!” Jay laughed, playfully shoving Carlos’ shoulder with his hand, which still held the remote to their video game.
“It’s okay. It’s pretty late anyway,” I reasoned, yawning despite myself. That’s when I noticed them. There were boxes wrapped in beautiful, shimmering paper and decorated with colored ribbons underneath our Christmas tree. My feet kicked the blankets off of my body, and I scrambled to get out of bed. I could hear Evie chuckling behind me as I neared the tree.

“Looks like she found the presents,” Jay laughed, and he and Carlos shut down their game and put their remotes away. By the time they had gotten over to me, I had organized the presents into piles based on the color of the ribbons. We received two boxes each.

“Open the big ones last!” Evie called, walking over to sit across from me.

Once we were all seated with our respective boxes in front of us, Carlos smiled widely. “Go!” he yelled, and everyone began to unwrap their gifts. Jay ripped apart the wrapping paper carelessly and began shaking the boxes close to his head while squinting. Carlos and Evie were carefully unwrapping their presents so they ripped the paper as little as possible. I was a mix between the two; not being overly careful or completely destroying it.

“It’s clothes,” Jay decided, setting down the big box and exchanging it for a long, skinny one. “Annnnd this one is a tourney stick,” he guessed. Once he had his estimates voiced, he finally opened the packages.

“Every year!” Evie whined, pouting at the boy. “Did he get yours right, too?” she asked Carlos, who nodded in amusement. “Why is he so good at this?” she wondered with a jealous frown.

Carlos just shook his head and chuckled.

Glancing down at Evie’s lap, she had a slip of paper and a blue, square device that resembled a watch.

“So the tourney stick can calculate how fast and hard your swing is, and I took the liberty of decorating it for you,” Carlos said, gesturing to a hand-painted snake wrapped around the length of it and a small screen embedded in the stick’s handle. “It’s pretty shock-resistant, but don’t get it wet,” he told Jay.

“Aw, sweet!” Jay exclaimed, appreciating the details.
Next, Carlos turned to me and gestured to a small bronze dragon made to wrap around a finger, much like a ring. “I had that enchanted to provide the user with relatively complete fire resistance. I know that it can be hard getting magic under control, especially when you’re first learning, and I wanted to make sure you didn’t hurt yourself or incinerate your clothing on accident,” he laughed.

“That would be a real shame,” Evie purred sarcastically, eyes flashing red for a split second.

I was still in shock and unable to properly respond to either comments.

“And for you,” Carlos started, turning to Evie.

“You stole my watch and then gave it back to me? How sweet,” she teased. “I would have expected that from Jay, but you?”

“Hey!” Jay exclaimed, only slightly offended by the comment.

“Okay, yes, but I upgraded it to include a chemistry app I made myself. Now you have the whole periodic table at your fingertips, a dictionary of chemistry terms, and a calculator so you don’t need to calculate amus by hand anymore,” Carlos said, earning a gasp and a shove from Evie.

“It was one time!” she defended, cheeks blushing. “And I haven’t said it since!”

“Alright, alright!” Jay said, settling the two others down. “I made you all slave-for-a-day coupons. They’re good for twenty-four hours, and I will do anything you want me to in that time,” Jay declared, wiggling his eyebrows at Carlos suggestively.

Evie missed the gesture, too busy smiling down at the poorly drawn gift. “Aw, that’s so sweet, Jay! I’m going to make you carry me everywhere,” she decided, sticking out the tip of her tongue through her teeth in amusement. “Okay, open mine now!” she encouraged, hand tapping the large boxes left unopened.

I took that moment to open my largest box, as directed. When I did, my signature symbol was staring back at me. When the four of us were little we came up with symbols to represent ourselves and our lineage – mine was two dragons in the form of a heart. My head snapped up, and I looked around to see Jay and Carlos holding up bright, new leather jackets with their symbols on the backs as well. Their smiles were huge, and Evie was soon enveloped in a bone-crushing hug between them. My fingers traced over the intricately made patterns on my new jacket. It was very similar to my old,
worn out jacket but even better. It was obvious from their reaction and her beaming smile that Evie had made them all and likely spent a lot of time on them.

I wouldn’t readily admit it to anyone, but my eyes were tearing up. My best friends had put a lot of thought and time into coming up with personalized gifts for me, and here I was with nothing to give them in return. Not wanting to dwell on my negative emotions, I promised myself that I would make it up to them by giving them their gifts late. Always a hardass, I steeled my expression and subtly dried my eyes while they were still distracted. One glance over to the desk confirmed that the cookies we had made last night all remained. Well, one had a bite out of it, but otherwise they looked untouched.

“What? Don’t you like it?” Evie asked me with a worried expression, bringing my attention back to my friends. They were all still huddled together in a friendly embrace.

“Santa isn’t real, is he?” I deadpanned.

As soon as the words left my mouth, they all burst out laughing. Jay even looked like he might cry.

“You assholes!” I shouted, launching myself over our presents to tackle the three of them. We all fell onto the floor in a heap of chuckles. “I stayed up, like, all night for nothing!” I growled good-naturedly, punching Jay in the shoulder for good measure.

“Ah! It was Evie’s idea!” Carlos yelled, avoiding my attempts to punch him as well.

I gasped loudly, turning my attention to Evie instead. “Traitor!”

“It was too good of an opportunity to pass up!” Evie said between giggles. She shrieked as I tried to climb over to her, intent on getting my revenge. “No, no, no!”

“Quick! Save the princess!” Jay yelled, and he and Carlos draped their bodies over her protectively.

Because of my small stature, I was able to snake my arms in-between the gaps of the boys’ bodies to tickle her, and she began squealing with laughter as it took a toll on her. “Okay, okay! I yield!” she yelled, and I slowed down my fingers. The four of us collapsed into a pile and caught our breath for a moment as the excitement died down.
After a few minutes, I spoke. “I’m honestly surprised you guys didn’t eat all of the cookies.”

“That’s because they tasted like sh-“ Jay started, but an elbow to the gut made him groan. “What is with all the elbowing lately?”

“Someone here mixed up the salt and sugar, so they were a little, uh,” Evie drawled, trying to find a polite way to say it.

“Let’s just say they make better crackers than cookies,” Carlos decided.

“It’s not my fault they look the same, and no one put a label on the containers!” Jay tried to justify.

All I could do was laugh. We really were disasters. Then, I suddenly remembered something. “Wait,” I said, drawing the attention of my friends. “So was the stuff about snow all bullshit, too?” I wondered, looking between them.

“No, M. Snow is real,” Evie assured me from underneath the boys.

“It just never happens in Auradon because of the climate. You have to go up into the mountains if you want to see it,” Carlos explained regretfully.

“Hmm,” I hummed, trying to recall Evie’s explanation of what snow was and how it worked. Once I was sure I had it, I knew exactly what I was going to give them for the holidays. “Are you sure? Because I distinctly remember hearing that it was going to snow today,” I claimed, a hint of a smirk playing at my lips as I said an incantation in my head and hoping it was enough.

My three friends looked between themselves with doubtful expressions for a few moments, perhaps thinking that I had finally lost my mind. But one by one, I could see their expressions change as they noticed little flurries of white fall past the windows.

“No fucking way!” Jay exclaimed, scrambling to get up before turning back around to help Carlos up as an afterthought. They quickly made their way out of the dorm and into the hallway, clearly on a mission to get up close and personal with the snow.
“I-it can’t be!” Evie gasped, collecting herself and walking to the window as if in a trance.

I slowly approached her still form and wrapped my arms around her waist, resting my chin on her shoulder. “Happy holidays, Evie.”
I just realized that the last time I updated was almost two months ago! Completely unacceptable! I will try to do updates more frequently for you all! Believe me, I love the story just as much as you do! Thank you all for being so patient and sticking with me even when the hiatus periods are annoyingly long! I hope you enjoy the chapter!

The sight of Jay and Carlos running around and doing kicks and flips outside in excitement had Evie breaking out of her daze. In an instant, she had spun around and enveloped me in a tight hug. As I returned her affection, the sudden trembling of her body startled me.

“Whoa, hey, E; are you okay?” I wondered, pulling back to examine her.

Small teardrops were sliding down her cheeks, but her smile was sweet. She nodded instead of responding, drying her face with her sweatshirt sleeve while she collected herself. “This is – you’re – just-“ she stuttered, shaking her head and trying to find her words. “Thank you,” she decided on, sniffing and leaning in to press a lingering kiss onto my forehead.

My hands found hers and squeezed gently. “Anything for you,” I answered without even thinking about it.

Her gaze weighed heavily on me in the moment as she took in the force of what I said.

As soon as her expression changed, I considered my words as well. Although they were loaded, I couldn’t find anything dishonest about them. Yes, I was ride-or-die for all of the people that had proved to make a difference in my life. But Evie? She had always been something more – something special. From the moment she saved my life, a connection had been created – one that couldn’t be earned through years of loyalty and mutual trust. And because of this unique bond that tied us together, I was certain that I would do anything if the request came from her lips.

The booming of footsteps quickly approaching made my heartbeat increase in alarm, but Evie remained calmly transfixed on me. The interruption was soon revealed to be Jay with Carlos soon behind him. My lungs expelled in relief.
“Hey!” Jay greeted in the doorframe, slightly out of breath. “Do you think you could make it snow harder?” he requested, clearly eager to start some real winter fun.

A grin crept across my face. “I’ll see what I can do.”

* * *

As it turns out, getting it to snow harder wasn’t that difficult to accomplish. Another quick incantation increased the snowfall, and before long, there was a thin layer of powder on the ground. Always the responsible one in our group, Evie hastily requested four complete outfits of snow clothing from the royal family, claiming that we’d all be too sick to enjoy the rest of our vacation if we didn’t wear the proper attire. By the time my friends and I had properly eaten lunch and received the snow clothing Evie had sent for, there was an entire foot of snow covering the campus grounds.

As eager as we were to begin some sort of snow-induced shenanigans, Evie made sure we were all ‘bundled up’ before we went out. Snow looked harmless enough, and as more and more layers went onto my body, I wondered why we needed to be so careful. Once Evie was done dressing me, I wasn’t sure if I’d be able to feel anything besides suffocating heat. At least everyone else looked just as ridiculous as I did. There was a moment before we ran through the doorway where the four of us stood there and giggled in amusement and barely-contained anticipation. On Evie’s signal, we all scrambled through the doors, pushing and shoving until we were finally free. The boys made it out first and ran as fast as their snow outfits allowed in the deep snow.

I barely had time to register the frigid air stinging my cheeks and the bright lights shining in my eyes before I got up close and personal with my creation. It took me a half a second to learn that snow… was not always pleasant. The entire left side of my face felt like thousands of needles were stabbing it, and the cold seemed to worsen it rather than numb it, like one would assume using intuition. Little pieces of the substance fell into my gaping mouth and quickly melted into water, which I now had a newfound appreciation for.

“SNOWBALL FIGHT!” Jay yelled so loudly I’m sure he interrupted the royal family’s Christmas gathering.

“Perfect shot!” Carlos hooted at the same time, slapping Jay’s shoulder in enthusiastic comradery. Their celebration seemed to get increasingly quiet, and I could only guess that they had ran off somewhere together.

“And that, Mal, daughter of Maleficent,” Evie’s voice rang out. “Is a real snowball!”
An annoyed sigh cut through my lips, and I slowly wiped off the remaining snow with my gloved hand. “I think I prefer the dessert,” I muttered.

Her giggle was loud and clear, signaling her proximity. Once my eyes felt decent enough to open, I could see that she was crouched protectively in front of me, snowball in hand.

“You alright?” she asked, but the twinkle of her eyes informed me that she was more amused than concerned.

I scoffed instead of giving her a real response. “Cowards already ran off, huh?” I observed, seeing nothing but blinding white in the distance.

“Don’t let your guard down, M. They started this fight and chose their side. They’ll be back, but we’ll be ready,” she informed me, never taking her gaze from the horizon.

From safely behind her, I bit my lip to try to contain my answering smile. She was so serious; I couldn’t help but be entertained. “What do you suggest we do?” I asked in as grave of a tone as I could muster in the moment.

“Retaliate.”

* * *

As confident as Evie and I were that we made a great team, our retaliation efforts on the boys went poorly to say the least. I wasn’t sure how long we had been fighting a losing battle, but, eventually, my face was numb from headshots and my regular outfit was soaked through even under my snow clothes. What else could go wrong?

“Mother-fucking damnit!” I growled, eyes catching sight of green flames licking at my gloves. All I had done was try to warm my near-numb hands up, but apparently, one shouldn’t call upon their dragon heat when inexperienced and distracted.

“Should have worn the ring I gave you!” Carlos yelled from behind his tourney shield, which he had retrieved at some point when they were still in hiding.
“M! The snowbank!” Evie directed, and I heeded her advice by shoving my hands into the snowdrift that had begun to form along the castle walls.

The fire was extinguished before it could damage any more of my snow clothes, but my problems didn’t end there. Another well-aimed snowball slugged me right in the back of the head. My dragon heat encouraged it to melt quickly, and ice-cold water was soon dripping down my neck. “What the fuck, Jay? Could we not throw headshots during an emergency?” I roared out, becoming increasingly aggravated with how poorly Evie and I were doing.

“Nope! Unless you surrender, we’re never going to stop!” he asserted with a cocky grin.

“I’d never surrender to you, pretty boy!” I called as I retreated behind a wall of snow Evie had crafted as a makeshift fort. Once behind the buffer, I noticed that my teammate already had a small pile of snowballs made and ready to fire. However, when I picked one up with my now-bare hand, it simply melted upon contact. “Damnit!” I exclaimed, trying another one but achieving the same result.

“Maybe he has a point,” Evie whispered dejectedly.

My body stilled, and I looked at her in disbelief. “What? No! Evie, we’re winning this!” I declared.

“M, you’re literally steaming,” she commented, waving her hand so the mist that had formed around me dissipated a little. “You can’t touch the snow because you just melt it. We can’t compete with Jay’s aim. It’s okay. We can surrender; I had a lot of fun, and that’s all that matters, right?” she assured me.

My lip jut out involuntarily; I couldn’t imagine letting Evie down, even if it was in something as silly as a snowball fight. Then, my eyebrows shot up, and my smile grew wide.

Evie’s answering expression was one of concern.

“Jay!” I shouted, running out from behind the safety of our wall of snow.

“Coming to finally surrender?” he inquired slyly, tossing a snowball into the air casually as I approached.
“Coming to recruit you, actually,” I returned.

“Pssh, yeah, like I would actually joi-“

“I call upon my slave-for-a-day coupon,” I announced loudly enough for Evie to hear as well.

Her head popped up from behind the snow wall to reveal a face-splitting smile. She scrambled to gather an armful of snowballs before running over to meet me.

Carlos’ face quickly became the color of his hair. “What? You-you can’t do that!” he shrieked, unconsciously holding his tourney shield a little closer.

“I’m afraid they can, buddy-ol-pal,” Jay purred, packing together a huge snowball with a wolfish grin.

“Wait-Jay! Can’t we talk about this? Can you just-ah!” Carlos yelled, suddenly being pelted with snowballs from both Jay and Evie.

Calmed down enough to take on a regular body temperature, I soon joined in on the ambush. The fight didn’t last long after that.

* * *

Upon crossing the doorway back into the castle, I was overcome with a gods-awful feeling. Every part of my body that had previously been numb was now regaining feeling, and I suddenly wished I was back outside. On top of that, my surroundings seemed to take on a strange, green appearance. I tried to blink it away, figuring it was some trace of my magic, but it didn’t dissipate.

“IT’S TOO HOT,” Jay yelled, immediately beginning to take off his snow clothes as we made our way through the entrance.

“I don’t know if I’m hot or cold, but it hurts,” Carlos said, voicing the exact sensation I was feeling.
“Is anyone else seeing things in green?” I wondered, shaking my head and blinking hard.

“Oh, that’s just mild photokeratitis,” Evie declared, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. “Snow-blindness,” she clarified. After the three of us didn’t look any closer to understanding, she explained it as “Sunburn of your corneas.”

“Hardcore,” I said, earning a laugh from Jay.

“No, M; it’s serious! Your eyes are so lightly pigmented that you’re particularly susceptible! I should have thought to make you wear sunglasses! I’m so sorry!” she apologized, taking my hand with hers. The skin-to-skin contact was scalding, but I didn’t have the heart to tell her that it was uncomfortable.

“It’s okay, E. I’ll definitely wear eye protection next time, but only because someone thought I had two targets painted on them,” I emphasized, staring directly at Jay, who was now down to the outfit he had on when he woke up this morning.

“Hey, it’s not my fault you’re so small that when I hit you with a snowball it takes up your whole face,” Jay quipped, subtly climbing the steps a little faster as soon as he finished his sentence, knowing I was going to try to sock him for it.

I would have, too, if it weren’t for Evie’s hand in mine.

“I still think that whole snowball fight finale wasn’t fair. Three-to-one? I didn’t even have a chance,” Carlos complained, stripping out of his drenched snow clothes now that we had arrived in the boys’ common room.

My hand felt instantly cooler as Evie dropped it, both of us intent on getting out of our wet outfits as fast as possible.

“Oh please, if it would have been the three of you against me I still would have won. It’s not about the numbers; it’s about the skill. Today was just not your day, my friend,” Jay jested, taking the clothes that Carlos shed and adding them to the pile of his own by his feet.

“Jay!” Evie exclaimed. “You can’t just put wet clothes on the wood floor; it’ll ruin it!” she scolded.
Her own jacket, snow pants, and sweatshirt were draped carefully on her arm.

It was all piled just high enough where I couldn’t see her nearly-bare chest. That was probably for the best, though.

“Like the royal family doesn’t have enough money to fit it,” Jay coughed carelessly, crossing his arms.

“Yeah, well, the royal budget shouldn’t have to cover that expense just because you’re lazy,” she huffed, hurriedly grabbing armfuls of jackets, mittens, and snow pants and looking for a place to hang them up to dry near the fireplace. “If everyone in Auradon acted like that, they wouldn’t be able to afford to feed you out of the kindness of their hearts!” It had been her idea for the royal family to pay for meals and housing for the villain kids until they all got steady jobs, and she’d be damned if Jay was going to disrespect the family after all they had done for them growing up.

“Whatever, miss royal advisor,” Jay grumbled, and Evie shot him a glare that told him to stuff it or prepare for the fight to escalate. He backed off, and she went back to moving clothes racks in front of the fireplace.

“Ehhh, my clothes are wet,” Carlos whined, successfully diverting our attention from the conflict. He took the material of his shirt in between his fingers and tried to pull it away from his skin. “…and cold.”

“Yeah, mine are, too,” I chimed in, nose wrinkling at the feeling of my own clothes tightly clinging to my body.

Evie turned to look us over as she finished hanging up all of the clothes. She was barely wearing anything, so it was understandable for her not to realize how uncomfortable the rest of us were.

And now with the sight of her skin-tight shorts and blue, lacy bra on full display, I was becoming increasingly bothered for a completely different reason. My feet shuffled in an attempt to get more comfortable. I realized too late that my lip was becoming sore from unconsciously biting it, but I couldn’t bring myself to stop. Not when she was standing there looking like that.

There was a dangerous flash in her eyes when she finally caught sight of me, but it was gone in an instant and replaced with what appeared to be sympathy instead. “Oh my goodness, guys; I’m so sorry! You all must be freezing!” she said much too dramatically, running up to us and feeling our
Rosy cheeks with her hands. “Let’s all go take showers and warm up,” she suggested in a way that emphasized every word.

My eyebrows furrowed automatically. “I’m a dragon, I can ju-”

“But don’t you want to get clean, too?” Evie interrupted, eyes flicking between me and Jay.

“Yeah, I gu-” I started, but he cut me off.

“Great idea, Evie! We’ll meet back here in an hour!”

“An hour? Don’t you think that’s a little exc-” Carlos wondered, but, once again, Evie was too quick to answer.

“Sounds perfect! See you boys later!” she said, fingers wiggling in the air to wave them off.

Before I even had a chance to contemplate why my friends were acting so weird, my wrist was caught in a cold grip, and I was being tugged down the stairwell and over to the girls’ common room bathrooms. If the sound of scuffling in the distance was any indication, the boys had also briskly made their way to their own bathrooms.

“Whoa, whoa, Evie; shouldn’t we go get clothes to change into first?” I wondered, nearly running into her as she spun around to open the bathroom door with her butt.

“Who said anything about getting dressed?” she asked with a wicked grin, pulling me through the doorway just to push me against the door once it was closed.

Now my heart was pounding from more than just the hasty trip over here. Her breath was hot against my still-frigid skin, and goosebumps quickly spread across my body at the feeling.

“I saw the way you were looking at me, M; I figured ‘why not heat things up?’” she said softly, and I could feel her smile as she began to press kisses into my neck.
My breath hitched, and my head rolled to the side to give her better access “Heat is definitely welcome at this point,” I sighed, taking her hands in mine and guiding them to the hem of my shirt.

Ever the smart one in the group, she caught on quickly and helped me peel off my wet shirt, throwing it in the general direction of the countertops. It landed on its destination with a loud slap. With that motion, her bra strap slid down her arm, but rather than adjusting it back into position, she simply reached behind her and unhooked it completely. A flick of her wrist was all it took for her bra to join my shirt on the countertop. In an instant, her body was flush against mine, and my dragon heat kicked in to start warming us up. Not that I could think about how cold my body was now that her lips were finally on mine, and I was sufficiently distracted. Her kisses were firm, but not aggressive, and her hands appreciatively explored my body, moving from my neck to my shoulders and down to my hips. The longer her lips moved against mine and the lower her hands progressed, the hazier my thoughts became. When her fingers brushed along the skin just below the waistband of my shorts and her tongue brushed across my lower lip teasingly, I was a complete gonner.

“How about we take that shower now?” Evie suggested, lips hovering just out of reach from mine.

A groan sounded before I could stop it. Out of all the things we could be doing right now, stopping was not at the top of my list. I don’t even think it was on my list at all. “But aren’t we nice and warm right here?” I bargained, letting my fingers trace up and down her bare back to make it even more tempting.

“Yes, but we still need to get clean, don’t we?” Evie argued, leaning down to nuzzle my jaw with her nose.

“I think I like us better dirty,” I commented, getting on my tiptoes to nip at her ear playfully.

The gesture earned me husky little laugh from those lips I adored. “Hmm, can’t argue with you there,” she agreed, pulling on my waistband and walking backwards, towards the shower stalls.

Obviously, I had no choice but to follow her. But realistically, I would follow her to the end of the world and back if she asked.

Once we got to the shower stall, she released her hold on my shorts and hooked her thumbs into the waistband of her own shorts instead, taking them and whatever had been underneath – if anything – off in one swift motion. Knowing I was staring, she walked a little to slowly, with a little too much swing in her hips, to add the clothing to the growing pile on the counter.
I shimmied out of my shorts and panties as fast as I could, nearly running to set them down with the rest of the articles. With my dragon hearing, I picked up on Evie stifling a giggle as she walked back to the shower and turned on the water. Well aware of how eager I had looked, I didn’t bother calling her out for it. If anyone was going to make me act like a fool and get away with it, it was Evie. When I made it back to the shower stall, fully undressed, Evie had already gotten under the water and was making sure to get her thick hair completely soaked. I stood just outside of the water’s reach, curtain closed behind me. As I waited for an invitation, I traced the curves of her body with my gaze much less politely.

“Come on in, Mal; I won’t bite unless you ask,” she encouraged, throwing me a subtle wink and raking her fingers through her hair.

“Are you sure?” I inquired, not wanting to overstep any boundaries even though they had always seemed to be a bit blurry for the two of us.

This time, she rolled her eyes. A wet hand reached out and grabbed my arm, yanking me into the shower stall and pulling me right into her embrace. Although it was clear her intent was to kiss me, my mouth fell open in a shriek as soon as the water touched my skin.

“Evie! It’s freezing!” I yelled, squirming in her arms to shield myself from the liquid.

“Then you’ll just have to keep me warm,” she reasoned, hugging me closer and placing smile-infused kisses along my skin.

So I did my best to call upon my inner dragon. After using my magic so much since my arrival in Auradon, my body seemed to be growing accustomed to the powers I made frequent use of. This meant that in a few seconds, rather than a few minutes, Evie and I were perfectly toasty even while the school’s water took its sweet time heating up. Just as it had done outside, the cold water hitting my warm body quickly produced a constant cloud of steam. We stayed like that, just holding each other while the water flowed down our skin, until I no longer needed my dragon heat to stay warm.

“So,” Evie finally sighed.

My head lifted from her chest, and I looked at her, worried about the tone of her voice.

“I forgot the soap. And shampoo. And conditioner. And towels,” she admitted, looking more and more sheepish with every addition to the list.
“And clothes,” I reminded her, at which we both laughed. “It’s okay; you were distracted.”

“I prefer to think of it as focused,” she hummed.

“Oh, do you?” I chuckled, watching her cheeks darken. “And what? You were thinking I could just poof it all in here so we wouldn’t have to leave the bathroom?” I asked, already saying an incantation in my head shortly after. Because it had worked with the snow earlier, I wasn’t surprised when the loud clattering of objects hitting the floor outside the shower stall could be heard.

Evie just about jumped three feet out of her skin at the noise, fearing we had been interrupted. When her shampoo bottle came rolling in under the curtain, however, her fear morphed into impressed shock. “Wow, Mal; look at you! You’re really killing the magic game,” she beamed, squeezing my hips in excitement.

Although the gesture was innocent enough in the context of her comment, my body suddenly remembered that I was naked in a shower with Evie and decided to respond accordingly. My mouth fell open and my hips knocked into hers. I had to clear my throat before responding. “You’re pretty magical yourself.”

All casual conversation was suddenly dropped as Evie realized what she had done. A crimson glow slowly lit up the shower stall, Evie’s eyes giving away the secrets her body was keeping. It only took a few seconds for her to decide that our time would be better spent kissing.

The back of my neck was firmly in her grip, but it didn’t feel too controlling. In fact, she let me guide our kisses. I was thankful for this, and decided to keep them passionate but sweet so she understood how much the moment meant to me. Yeah, we had literally ran in here with one thing in mind, but that didn’t mean it wasn’t special. Evie was special. What we had was special, and I wanted her to feel that in the way that I touched and kissed her.

So I touched and kissed her softly. Appreciatively. Like she was something precious and rare and extraordinary. Because she was. I touched and kissed her head, the one often filled with creativity and benevolence but also troubled by bouts of self-loathing. I touched and kissed her lips, the ones that spoke up for what they believed in and were generous enough to share the thoughts of the head. I touched and kissed her neck, the one that she claimed had a double chin she had to get fixed someday. I touched and kissed her shoulders, which held the weight of all of the responsibility and expectations of a future queen. I touched and kissed her breasts, the ones that many boys before me had seen only as objects for their own pleasure. I touched and kissed her stomach, the one that she constantly monitored to make sure it stayed lithe, a habit formed out of years of her mother doing it for her. And when she asked me to touch her intimately, I felt as though I had been given permission
to do something absolutely sacred...and I wasn’t sure if I deserved it. It wasn’t as though Evie didn’t deserve it; hell, if anyone I had ever known deserved to be loved, it was her. But coming from me? Someone who had made her life absolute misery for years?

“Are you sure?” I inquired, looking up at her from where I knelt on the slippery tiles with wide, green eyes.

A gentle smile and a hand was offered, but instead of taking it, I pressed my lips to the crescent scar that I had created so long ago – the one that seemed even brighter now that I had managed to burn it as well. She carried around a visual reminder of how I had mistreated her. I didn’t have to; my conscience would never met me forget. My eyes squeezed shut, trying to keep tears from welling up. I wanted to be angry at them for daring to interfere with such an important moment, but I couldn’t bring myself to feel anything but undeserving.

“Mal,” Evie whispered, taking my hands in her own pulling me up to my feet, and into her arms. She held me close as I couldn’t stop the tears from spilling out, but they were well hidden with the water already streaming down my cheeks. At least, I thought so until her hands travelled up to cup my face, thumbs wiping away the evidence of my uncertainty. “You’re the only person in the entire world that has ever completely seen me for me, and you still accept me regardless,” she said, shaking her head in near-disbelief. “I’ve never been more sure of anything,” she assured me, gazing deeply into my eyes with a look of pure, unbridled adoration. Even though I was a mess, with my snow-matted hair, red eyes, and broken soul, she looked at me like I was her whole world.

And that look was all it took for me to believe it. Studying her with her hair so dark it was almost black, with water droplets cascading down the panes of her face, and with eyes soft and smile sweet, I had never had to say four words so badly in my life. But I couldn’t, so I said this instead. “You’re my everything, Evie.”

Her eyes became even brighter, her smile impossibly happier. “You’re mine.”
WARNING for SMUT (finally)

I know it's been ridiculously long since I posted last, but life has been very very busy. As promised, I would never dream of abandoning this story. It is the creation I am most proud of, and I fully intend on finishing it, no matter how long it takes.

That being said, during the hiatus I finally got the chance to go through and make the changes I wanted to do earlier. The ages of the characters have changed and the timeline is slightly different. A new character has been introduced, and a few hundred words have been added to every chapter! I HIGHLY RECOMMEND REREADING THE STORY DUE TO THE CHANGES, but it is not completely necessary. I really hope that you all stick around to see the completion of the story. Your comments, thoughts, and theories really make all the hard work worth it!

My heart fluttered at her words, and I didn’t waste any time leaning in to show her exactly how she made me feel. Our lips moved together slowly and sweetly – a testament to the overwhelming sense of adoration that was palpable in the air. Before long, soft fingers took my hand and guided it along the panes of her stomach, down to where she wanted me before. I was trembling; I couldn’t help it. Spur-of-the-moment sex was one thing, but this was entirely different. The intimacy of the situation felt heavy on my shoulders, and I wanted desperately to not disappoint her.

But then her nose nuzzled me, and she gave me an encouraging little smile. Her hold on my hand was firm – reassuring. And when I looked into her eyes, it was clear that I was safe here. All Evie wanted was me. My racing heart slowed, and my inhibitions faded away.

Once she was sure I wouldn’t break down again, her hands moved to cup my face. Her kisses were slow and loving, only the hitch of her breath interrupting them as my fingers slid along her center. She was wet, likely from our teasing earlier. The more my fingers explored the new territory, the more labored her breathing became as she tried to continue kissing me.

It didn’t take long to map her out, little whines informing me where she liked being touched the most. By the movement of her hips, I could tell she wanted me inside, but I kept my fingers just out of reach. I didn’t have the heart to tell her I wasn’t ready for that, not during our first time; there was just too much potential for me to mess it up. So, instead, I focused on her clit. My finger circled it slowly, using her wetness to keep my movements fluid and the pressure feather-light. At first, she seemed confused and a little impatient, but soon enough, she began to relax.

“What are you doing?” she moaned, and I awkwardly began to pull away in embarrassment. “No! No, keep going,” she encouraged, firmly moving my hand back to where it was. Once I resumed my motions, they began causing her to lose her concentration, and she finally couldn’t kiss back well enough to feel that it was worth it. Her forehead rested against mine, and her hands moved from my face to wrap around my neck, holding me close as well as steadying herself.
Even though it was taking longer than I would have preferred, for my pride’s sake, it was nice to feel so close to her regardless. Every now and then, she would whisper words of encouragement and place a kiss on my skin, calming my nerves and letting me know I was doing just fine. When she finally came, both of our bodies shook with the force due to our proximity; it was as if we had shared the moment. Tan hands took my face once more and placed a big, tender kiss onto my lips. My eyes opened, only to be met with shining red-brown. At first, my heart skipped a beat, thinking I upset her, but her big, genuine smile informed me that she was just really happy. That look alone was enough to bring a bashful grin to my face as well.

“Fuck, M,” she groaned. “I don’t know what you were doing, but it was really really nice,” she smiled.

“Oh yeah?” I asked, biting my lip so I didn’t smile too wide.

“Mhmm,” she nodded, pausing for a while before continuing. “My legs are all tingly now; do you mind if I rest a little?” she inquired, tilting her head.

Something about the glint in her eye told me there was more to her words, but I nodded anyway. “Yeah, of course.”

“Thanks,” she said, making a show of kissing down my body as she lowered herself into a kneel. Just when I thought that was it, she traced her fingers along my thighs and looked up at me with her teeth sunk into her lip.

Oh. Now that I saw the previous look in context, it was easy to figure out what was on her mind. Not needing her to verbalize the question, I nodded in consent. Her hand reached up to take mine, intertwining our fingers together. Soft lips pressed into the insides of my thighs as I opened them, making room for her. I should have felt exposed and vulnerable as she took in the sight before her, but, for some reason, my heartbeat was even. My hand squeezed hers in an attempt to convey my comfort, and she offered me a gentle smile in return before finally leaning in to press a small kiss to my clit. Goosebumps crawled along my skin as her breath ghosted against me, the pause feeling like an eternity.

Then her tongue dragged along my folds, and my body shivered at the feeling. It was slow but not tentative. Her movements were practiced and sure as she switched between gently flicking my clit and teasingly dipping into my center. As I’m sure she gathered from my soft vocalizations, both sensations felt absolutely incredible. For a while, I thought she was just going to keep teasing me like that forever, but eventually, she decided to mirror my decision from earlier. Or, at least, that’s what I gathered.
Using the tip of her tongue, she ever-so-gently circled my clit, peering up at me through long eyelashes to gauge my reaction. The image was almost too much, and I let my head fall back and my eyes close. This allowed me to better focus on the feeling, and it wasn’t long before I knew I was close. Suddenly, my train of thought was interrupted by the distinct feeling of her fingertips at my entrance. My eyes opened and I looked down into her pleading eyes. For the first time since we entered the bathroom, her confident exterior was clouded with apprehension. But this time I wasn’t scared; I trusted her with all of me. I pulled our joined hands up to my lips and placed a kiss on her knuckles, brushing my thumb against it afterwards.

She correctly took the gesture as my consent and very carefully entered me with a single finger. With how wet I had become, it slid in without issue. When she added another digit, it was much easier to feel her, and I ground down onto her hand and moaned quietly at the feeling. I could feel her smile against my thighs as she began to pump in and out slowly, as if I might break. Even though the pace was slow, her fingers were long and her reach deep – much further than what I could do myself. My shallow gasps informed her as to when she was curling into just the right spot, and my mind grew hazy after that. I would have been embarrassed as to how quickly it worked me up if I didn’t recognize how damn talented she was. When I was nearing my climax, she suddenly brought her tongue back into the game, flicking my clit relentlessly while continuing to thrust into me. That was all I needed to tumble over the edge, my knuckles turning white from clutching her hand so tightly.

While I was catching my breath and regaining the ability of coherent thought, she busied herself lapping up the leftover liquid from my now-sensitive center and kissing along my wobbly thighs. “Do you want anything else?” she wondered aloud, and my head shook in reply. “Are you sure?” she asked, running her thumb along my hip bone. Green met red-brown, and I couldn’t stop the smile that formed at the sight. My head shook again, scattering droplets of water along the tile walls. Confident I was sure in my answer, Evie climbed back up my body, leaving small kisses in her wake. The last destination was my lips, and the kiss was slow and loving, punctuated by her nose nuzzling mine.

In the silence, the overwhelming need to say those three words clawed at me once more, but I just couldn’t do it – I didn’t want to ruin the moment. After a beat, I noticed the forgotten shower products scattered along the tile floor, and I sighed. “We should probably get to our actual shower,” I reminded her, reluctantly backing out of her embrace to pick up the bottle of her shampoo.

A faint blush crept across her cheeks, and she smiled at the ground. “Mm, perhaps,” she hummed in agreement, turning around when she noticed that I had a sizable glob of the product in my palm, waiting for permission to massage it into her hair.

The rest of our shower was spent in near-silence as we took the time to help each other get sufficiently clean. Although it was quiet, it wasn’t awkward. Our knowing gazes, sweet smiles, and lingering touches only further solidified the fact that our relationship had not been negatively affected by the addition of physical intimacy. We felt as we always had together: right.
Once we were actually concentrating on properly showering, it didn’t take us long to complete our task. Although we had not brought clean clothing to change into once we were dry, Evie pointed out that there was no one in the castle but us on the girl’s dormitory side anyway. The odds were in our favor that we could make it back to our dorms without being caught – and we did.

Although it was rather cold, and my heart felt like it may beat out of my chest, soon enough, we were safe and sound in our respective dorm rooms. It didn’t take me long to find something comfortable to wear; the royal family made sure I arrived in Auradon with enough Auradon University swag to last a lifetime. When I returned to the hallway, I found Evie already waiting for me, leaning against the wall with a smirk.

My head tilted in silent question, wondering what was on her mind, but she didn’t make any motions to enlighten me. So, simply because I couldn’t resist, I took the two steps needed to cross the hall and gave her a kiss.

Her smirk morphed into a soft smile instead, and her eyes looked between mine with a lively sparkle. “So, it looks like we exceeded the hour time limit,” she finally revealed.

It took me a second to recall what she was talking about, but then I remembered what Jay had said before our showers. “Oops,” I said, not at all regretting how we had spent the time instead.

“I’m sure the boys are just worried sick by now,” she said against my lips.

“A tragedy,” I said lowly, taking her lower lip between my teeth gently.

A delicious sigh escaped her right before she took me by the back of the neck and deepened the kiss.

I let her keep the kiss going for a few seconds before pulling away slightly. “What about those poor, worried boys?” I asked, quirking an eyebrow.

Those lips pulled into a frown. Then they sighed. “Yeah, okay; I’m sorry. I just…got distracted,” she apologized, still gazing intensely at my mouth.

I couldn’t help but chuckle, prompting her to playfully shove me away. Despite her faux annoyance, she took my hand and led me down the hall and to the staircase. We weren’t even
halfway down it when we noticed the boys in question across the Main Hall. They were certainly busy but not looking for us.

“Oh wow,” Evie commented, consciously walking a little heavier to try to tip them off that they weren’t alone. The distinct sound of heels on hardwood echoed through the vast, open space, but Jay and Carlos probably couldn’t hear with all the sloppy kissing noises they were producing.

“Looks like you weren’t the only one who got distracted,” I laughed, clearing my throat theatrically as we crossed the Main Hall.

Carlos jumped out of the older boy’s grasp, clearly taken off-guard by our presence. “Shit,” he cursed, running his hand through his hair in panic.

Jay seemed confused for a second before realizing Carlos had only pushed him away due to our arrival. By the look on his face, it wasn’t a good enough reason to stop.

“Hey, nice of you to join us,” Evie teased, tilting her head at him.

He scoffed loudly. “Says you, Miss Can-Manipulate-Time-But-Is-Still-An-Hour-Late.”

Evie didn’t bother giving him a verbal reply and cleared her throat dismissively. “Thanks for the concern. We could have been kidnapped or something, and you know the first forty-eight hours are crucial to th-”

“Blah blah blah! You’re fine, aren’t you?” Jay interrupted, waving his hand dismissively.

“We did come looking for you,” Carlos assured us, the blush in his cheeks finally fading.

“Yeah, I can see that was real productive,” I commented, smirking at him knowingly.

“Well, you know, we have to respect Auradon traditions and all; it’s very important to our integration,” Jay said with a sly smile, pointing up to the archway he had Carlos pushed up against. Hanging down from it was a bundle of green leaves and red berries.
What an odd place for a decorative plant.

“That’s not even mistletoe, that’s holly,” Evie informed him, rolling her eyes in annoyance.

“I don’t care what it is as long as it gives me permission to play tonsil hockey in public,” Jay admitted, flicking his tongue at her sexually.

I was officially lost at this point.

“Jay!” Carlos scolded, face heating up again.

“What?” Jay asked, holding out his arms. “At least I’m being honest. Unlike Evie, who was probably late because she had her tongue in Mal’s-“

My eyebrows shot up in shock; were Evie and I really that obvious? Before I could even pretend to deny that we were involved, Carlos interrupted Jay.

“ANYWAY, I’m glad we found you and that you’re safe; would you like to watch a Christmas movie in our dorm?” he interjected. “G-rated,” he added, sending Jay a pointed glare.

“Love to,” Evie accepted, matching Carlos’ expression.

Now that we had decided on a task, the four of us made our way up the staircase to the boys’ dormitories. Before long, Jay and Evie were continuing their banter. Clearly not wanting to get involved, Carlos lagged behind them and thread his arm through mine, effectively escorting me down the hallway.

“I’m not so sure a movie is a good idea, Carlos. I don’t think Evie here can keep her hands to herself for two whole hours,” Jay jested loudly. Even though he addressed Carlos, it was obvious he was speaking just for Evie’s ears.

“Well, you’re right about one thing,” Evie replied, balling her slender fingers into fists and chasing the boy, punching him lightly whenever she caught up.
Jay’s laughter echoed through the castle walls as the two continued their little skirmish, darting down the hallway and closer to Jay and Carlos’ dorm room.

“So,” I drawled, looking up to an amused, freckled face. “What was so special about that plant?” I wondered.

Dark eyebrows furrowed momentarily before relaxing in understanding. “Oh, the mistletoe?” Carlos asked, suddenly blushing. “It’s just a silly Auradon holiday tradition. If you’re under the mistletoe with someone, you’re supposed to kiss them.”

“I wonder why they would hang that sort of thing up around in a school. ‘That’s stupid.’”

Carlos just laughed at my reaction. “Yeah, I thought so, too. But, you know, it’s kind of grown on me,” he confessed, gazing down the hall at the other boy.

If it had been Jay that said those words, I would have teased him for a week about it. But the soft, happy expression on Carlos’ face was too sweet to ruin.

Once the four of us were safely behind the closed door of Jay and Carlos’ dorm room, Carlos unhooked his arm from mine and went to the entertainment center to retrieve a movie for us to watch.

Jay busied himself with propping up pillows for us to lean against on the beds, which were still pushed together from last night.

Evie made herself comfortable on the bed we had claimed as our own and patted the space next to her invitingly.

Wasting no time, I hopped up onto the bed and assumed my spot beside her, taking her hand in mine.

“*The Grinch*?” Evie asked the boys, who nodded their heads in turn.
“Of course,” Jay confirmed, leaping into bed next to Evie and quickly getting under the covers.

“It’s tradition,” Carlos added, coming to join Jay now that he was done putting the movie in the DVD player.

“You guys watch the same movie every year? That’s kind of lame,” I teased. “I mean, don’t get me wrong. I love honoring personal traditions, too, but variety is the spice of life, right?” I added, using my best Professor Merryweather impression for the second half of the sentence.

“Oh my evil, Mal, please. Please don’t ever say that again,” Evie groaned, letting her head fall back against the headboard dramatically. By winter break, everyone in our Lifeskills Without Magic class was getting sick of the catchphrase.

“The Grinch is the best Christmas movie ever! The rest of them are all too sappy,” Jay complained as Carlos busied himself skipping the previews so we could start the movie.

Evie’s head shot up in dismay. “Are not!” she argued, smacking the boy lightly on the chest with her free hand.

“To be fair, The Grinch is kind of sappy…” Carlos interjected, but no one seemed to hear him.

“Yeah they are; they’re just poorly disguised, trashy romance movies!” Jay claimed.

“Well you’d know all about trash, wouldn’t you?” Evie shot back angrily.

“OKAY GUYS; THE MOVIE’S STARTING,” Carlos announced loudly, turning up the volume in hopes to drown out the bickering friends. It seemed to work, and only unintelligible murmurs could be heard after that. At least, until Jay spoke up again.

“Keep your hands above the covers, Evie,” Jay goaded, clearly just to piss the girl off.

“Oh, I’ll keep them where you can see them, alright!” Evie growled, leaning over to begin
punching the boy again.

It was strange seeing Evie so violent, even if it was all in good fun. But, then again, it was kind of nice reminder that we all lived on The Isle together for a while. I didn’t even think to separate them until Jay started defending himself, even if it was gentle in comparison to what he was capable of.

“Okay, that’s it!” Carlos asserted, grabbing Jay by the biceps to get him to stop. “We’re switching places!”

“What?” Jay whined, not quite fully understanding why moving was required.

“You, too! Mal, switch places with Evie,” he ordered, standing up on the bed and squishing himself between the two dumbstruck friends.

“Yes, sir,” I smirked, proud to see Carlos taking action for once. Once we were all settled into our new places, Evie grumbled.

“That was completely unnecessary.”

Carlos promptly hushed her, finally directing everyone’s attention to the movie.

I will admit, once I began watching the movie, I found it to be very entertaining as well as thought-provoking. It was surprisingly easy to identify with many of the themes. I recognized the absolute fear in the whos’ faces at the mere mention of the Grinch – it was the same terror that my mother’s name evoked. The whos themselves were just as dull-minded and unshakably cheery as most of the long-time residents of Auradon. And, apparently, just as ignorant as to how ostracizing individuals and using their home as a collective dumpster can negatively affect their attitudes and world views. But the Grinch did what everyone on The Isle learned to do – make the most of what he had. And plot.

And speaking of plotting, Jay and Evie’s squabble earlier had gotten me thinking. He hadn’t teased me about keeping my hands in plain sight, so I slid them beneath the covers under the guise of being cold. Which, as a dragon, wasn’t a very good plan, but my three companions seemed engrossed enough in the movie to not give it a second thought. As soon as my hand brushed over bare, tan skin, however, Evie’s attention was clearly elsewhere. Her body tensed as I lightly traced the outside of her thigh, but her eyes remained fixed forward. The closer I got to the inside of her
thigh, the more her eyebrows furrowed. When I was just about to my final destination, she snapped.

“Do you two have some sort of bet or something?!” she huffed, looking between myself and Jay with eyes narrowed in suspicion. When her little outburst was met with two very confused faces and one surprised, if not slightly embarrassed, one, her cheeks grew pink. It was immediately clear that the boys had absolutely no idea what she was talking about. “N-never mind,” she stuttered, leaning back into her pillow sheepishly. My hand slid back up her thigh, and she promptly shoved it off, reaching over to pinch my leg. I stifled a laugh, and she just shot me a look that said she’d get me back later for it. I knew she didn’t take it to heart, though, because not five minutes later her hand was in mine and her head on my shoulder.

Now that my attention was back on the film, it was just as enjoyable as before. I smirked at the Grinch’s childish pranks and even got a little – but just a little – teary about his impromptu ornament, so much like the ones my friends and I crafted year after year. Yes, the longer I watched the movie the more I realized why the three people surrounding me made a tradition out of viewing it. And the ending message was clear – no matter what your background is, love can transform you. But, after meeting friends like mine, I kind of knew that already. I always cherished the time I had alone with them on The Isle, the little moments where we could all finally let our guards down and just be kids. But in Auradon it was almost always like that – like letting out a breath you’ve been holding for what feels like an eternity. By the time the end credits were rolling, I felt as though my own heart had grown three sizes. And looking over at Jay, with his arm holding Carlos snugly against his chest, and feeling Evie’s hand keeping mine warm even though they were resting atop the blanket, I knew that this was what choosing good was all about.

* * *

We had exactly one week before classes started back up again, so, naturally, Evie decided we were going to cram every single winter activity involving snow into those seven days. It was just the two of us, though, as Carlos and Jay went off to winter tourney camp the day after Christmas. Not that I minded. Most winter activities are perfectly suited for just two participants: making snow angels, building snowdragons, going sledding and skiing, ice-skating, snowshoeing, fucking on every possible surface while we had the castle to ourselves.

“You know,” Evie sighed, lifting her head from the crook of my neck, which had become thoroughly littered with hickeys over the past couple days. “You don’t have to make me come under every single mistletoe in this castle. That’s not their original intention, you know,” she said, quirking an eyebrow.

“But we only have one left,” I joked, earning a chuckle and a light slap to my chest. “And for the record, my intention is always to just kiss. I do believe you are the one who can’t keep her hands to herself,” I pointed out, sliding my finger down her sweat-sheened chest.
She bit her lip, looking everything but innocent. “I think that if you’re the one initiating it every time then it’s definitely you that has the problem,” she rationed, reaching up to play with the hairs at the back of my neck.

I sighed contently at the feeling. “Hey, I’m just following Auradon tradition,” I replied, figuring Jay’s excuse was as good as any.

“Well if you like Auradonian kissing traditions so much, then you’ll love New Year’s,” she said, tracing my lower lip with her thumb.

“Is that right?” I muttered against her finger.

Blue hair bounced as she nodded. “Turns out there’s a lot more going on over here on the Night Of Fire than just fireworks.”

Now that caught my attention. Back on The Isle, we ushered in the next year by watching colorful balls of fire dance over the kingdom of Auradon. Never receiving a formal explanation for the tradition, the villains decided to interpret the celebration as the Night of Fire. It made sense to us, seeing fire as both a force of destruction and rebirth – perfectly symbolizing the end of one year and the beginning of the next. For more reasons than one, it was my favorite holiday. Every year since I became friends with Uma and Harry, they would take me all the way up to the top of Uma’a ship. We would stargaze and share our favorite stories from the year until Auradon shot off their beautiful fire displays. I was certainly no stranger to fire, as it was the element of my ancestors. But I had never seen fire quite like Auradon’s. I longed to create something so beautiful and captivating myself, but I simply settled for admiring it for the time being. The news that there was more to my favorite holiday gave me goosebumps, and I momentarily forgot all about Evie’s soft fingers. “More? Like what?” I asked a bit too eagerly.

A little, amused smile answered me. “Well, honestly, a lot of people just use it as an excuse to get completely trashed. But, otherwise, the royal family has this huge, shimmering sphere on a spike that lowers as the year ends. The kingdom is invited to come and watch it in person, but it can get pretty crowded, so a lot of people just throw their own parties and watch it on TV,” she explained.

Well that didn’t sound interesting at all. “So...a bunch of people...travel to the royal castle...to watch a ball drop? “ I repeated, wondering if I really heard it right.

“Mal!” Evie chastised, picking up on the childishly immature wording. “It’s more fun than
that, I swear!” Giggles shook my body, and Evie huffed, taking her arms back and untangling our legs. “You didn’t even let me get to the good part,” she mumbled.

“Oh, okay; I’m sorry. Continue,” I encouraged, taking her hand in mine.

She paused for a moment, making sure she really had my attention. “Okay, so when there’s ten seconds until the new year, everyone counts down out loud. Then, at midnight, you’re supposed to kiss who is next to you, and there’s a fireworks show!” she exclaimed, smiling widely at the thought.

“Now that definitely sounds like more fun,” I agreed, leaning in to brush my nose against hers.

She nuzzled back happily.

“So when do we have to be up there tomorrow?” I inquired.

“What?” she said, leaning back.

“You said it gets crowded. What time should we get there so we get a good spot?” I clarified.

“Oh, uh, I didn’t think you’d actually want to go,” she confessed, tucking a stray blue lock behind her ear.

“Well, fireworks and kissing you are, like, two of my favorite things in the whole world,” I started, prompting a small smile from her lips. “And you seemed so excited, and I love seeing you excited. So of course I wanna go.”

Red-brown eyes practically twinkled back at me, and Evie’s smile grew wide once more. Soon, she couldn’t contain herself, and her arms snaked back around my shoulders. She leaned down to kiss me, her smile making it kind of tight-lipped but all the more adorable. After just a few kisses, she managed to relax enough for our kisses to deepen. Then, as usual, she made her move to escalate the exchange. This time around it was tightening her grip on my hair and biting my lower lip.
I hissed at the sensations. “What do you say we hit up that last mistletoe?” I suggested, wanting to take this somewhere more comfortable.

“Lead the way,” she husked, regretfully separating herself from me.

It took us longer than usual to get up to my dorm. It seemed as though we couldn’t go more than ten feet without having to stop for another kissing break – not that either of us minded. Eventually, we made it. My hands noisily fumbled with the doorknob as she kissed me, holding my face even as we clambered through the door. A quick glance forwards revealed that I had hung a bundle of mistletoe above my four-poster, and she chuckled a little at the sight. The backs of my knees collided with the edge of my bed, and Evie easily pushed me down onto it. Her legs had just straddled my own when the telltale sound of someone clearing their throat had Evie jumping up as though she had been electrocuted.

I’d know that voice anywhere.

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter is already halfway done and my hours at work just got switched, so I hope to have it done for you soon! Thank you for sticking around! <3
“Uma!” Evie exclaimed, swiftly yet gracefully removing herself from me and standing next to the bed. “I’m sorry; I didn’t expect to see you there!” she apologized politely, quite different from the girl who was just two seconds from ripping my clothes off.

“I live here?” Uma replied, making it sound more like a question than a statement.

“You’re back early,” I noted, sitting up and turning to face my roommate to better gauge her body language. I figured that there would be yelling by now. Evie must have, too, because I felt the comforting pressure of her hand on my lower back. But Uma looked calm sitting on the edge of her bed with one boot unlaced – maybe even a little timid.

“Yeah, it’s just that, uh, Christmas felt...wrong without you,” she admitted, her eyebrows knitting together and her gaze on her hands as she unlaced her other boot. “And I know Night of Fire is your favorite holiday, so I decided to come back so we could...spend it together,” she sighed, clearly upset that things wouldn’t go as planned. She must have also assumed Evie would be spending winter break with Doug.

“Oh,” I responded, too surprised to come up with more.

“That’s really sweet of you, Uma,” Evie pitched in, sounding genuinely pleased with the other girl’s sincerity.

It seemed as though none of us knew what to say after that, and the room quickly became tense.

“I’m going to go get dinner ready and let you two catch up,” Evie decided. “Uma, you’re not a vegetarian now, are you?” she asked.

“Uh, no,” Uma replied, looking equally shocked that Evie would make her dinner and at the concept of being a vegetarian.
“Great! Then I expect to see both of you in the girls’ common room in about two hours! And don’t be late; empanadas are best hot!” she said with a smile, taking her leave from my room.

With just the two of us left, it wasn’t as painfully awkward anymore, but it was still tense. We hadn’t spoken in weeks, and Uma could hold a grudge for an eternity. I knew we were best friends, but I still didn’t expect her to be the first to try to make up.

“So,” she drawled, casually throwing her boots by the door. “How long has that been going on?” she asked, nodding her head at me.

My eyebrows drew closer in confusion, but when I realized she was staring at my neck, and the hickeys Evie had left along it, I put two and two together. “Beginning of break,” I answered carefully, still not sure how she would react to the news.

“You look like a gecko,” she commented, leaning back to rest against her headboard, her hands behind her head.

“What?” I asked, taken completely off guard.

“You know, like a leopard gecko. Because you’re covered in spots,” she explained as if it was obvious.

I just sat there, mouth agape for a few seconds before responding. “Out of all the spotted animals on this earth, you went with gecko?”

“Well you’re too tiny to be a giraffe or a cheetah, that’s for damn sure,” she reasoned.

“You’re so stupid,” I responded, finally earning an amused smirk. We would be okay.

“Yeah, well, at least I’m prettier than you, bug eyes,” she countered.

The pillow nearest to me went flying in her direction, hitting its target with a boof. “You love my
"bug eyes," I stated, recalling the many times she lovingly compared them to the sea when we were back on The Isle.

"Yeah, and you love my sass," she rebutted, repositioning so the pillow was behind her head.

I couldn’t argue with that. "I missed you," I whispered.

"I know," she said casually, but I knew she understood what I meant.

Now that we were back on friendly banter terms, I slid off of my bed and crawled onto hers, sitting cross-legged by her feet. "Whatcha doin’ over here? We actually gonna ‘catch up’?" she wondered aloud.

"Uh, yeah. I want to know all about what happened while you were pointedly avoiding me," I encouraged.

Brown eyes rolled, but a small smile formed regardless. "It really wasn’t that exciting," she claimed, taking the time to tell me about all of the things she and Harry did instead of studying before finals. Apparently, she had passed her courses with flying colors despite her poor decision-making. Harry hadn’t been as lucky, but at least he didn’t need to retake any classes.

As I was told at Chad’s party, the fencing team left to go to winter fencing camp pretty much immediately after the last scheduled final. The bus drive up to the mountains was long but entertaining, Uma’s teammates taking the time to teach traditional camp songs to their newest team members. Then Uma moved on to talk about winter tourney camp itself. She’d only been there for eight days, but by the stories she shared, it seemed more like a constant party than a school-sponsored camp to improve athletic performance. She learned about snow and how to ski, her teammates taking her out on the mountain after fencing activities for the day were over. And, I swear, she talked about the hot tub itself for ten minutes straight.

I was glad she seemed to be having fun in Auradon. Pirates were known to love adventure, but due to the confines of The Isle, Uma and Harry hadn’t been able to travel all that much in their short time on earth. And both of them weren’t the greatest at making new friends. Thankfully, most of the fencing team was rough-and-tumble and appeared to genuinely enjoy their company.

"Don’t get me wrong, I love the boys, but gods, it’s such a sausage fest. I could have spat when the coach suggested I bunk with the other fencing girls, but after three days of constantly catching Harry
balls-deep in both teammates and rivals, I was practically begging to be moved,” she groaned dramatically, squeezing her eyes closed.

I barked out a laugh at that, knowing the feeling all too well. “Yeah,” I drawled. “So the girls are better?” I figured, leaning forward to rest my chin on one of her bent knees.

“Well, a lot of them are gay, too, but at least they have the decency of fucking discreetly,” she explained. “Can finally get my beauty sleep.”

“Fucking discreetly, huh? Like in the alley outside Gaston and Gaston’s house?” I teased, recalling one of our more public trysts back on The Isle when we had tried dating like normal teenagers.

“Yes!” she insisted, and I laughed in reply. “We took it outside! We could have fucked in a bedroom or the bathroom or the dance floor, for evils sake! I was trying to be discrete, and we would have been if you weren’t so damn loud!” she reasoned, perfectly serious about her side of the argument.

“What, was I supposed to just whisper when you kept asking ‘what’s my name?’” I defended. “Pretty sure you told me to ‘say it loud!’” The next thing I knew I was on the floor. She had shoved me off of the bed, gently at least, but I kind of deserved it.

“It was discrete. I was trying to be classy,” she grumbled.

“Oh yeah, dark, moldy alleyways are super classy,” I jested, unable to stop myself. The same pillow I had thrown at her earlier landed on my face, and I placed it behind my head, content to remain laying on the floor.

“Well, it’s not like I had a nice, cozy dorm room and four-poster to bring you back to,” she replied monotonously.

A pang of guilt hit me right in the chest, and my amusement quickly died. I wasn’t sure what to say after that, so I didn’t say anything at all.

Before long, the sound of blankets shuffling caught my attention, and Uma repositioned herself. She was now laying on her stomach, head peeking over the side of the mattress to watch me. “So,” she started. “What all happened with you?” she asked, her expression guarded.
So I told her about how hard I studied and how proud I was to pass my exams. I told her about Chad’s ridiculous party. I told her about making ornaments and cookies and staying up to catch a man who doesn’t exist. I told her about how I managed to make it snow without saying a spell out loud and all of the fun activities that I got to do in it. But with every story told, I purposefully excluded or minimized Evie’s involvement. It didn’t go unnoticed.

Dark eyes bore into mine knowingly, daring me to speak up without being encouraged to. When I remained silent, a pointed ‘Mal’ was sent my way. I chewed on my lower lip, thinking about how to word what I was going to say.

“I just...don’t want to...” I trailed off, not wanting to offend her. It was awkward talking about how much fun I was having with Evie right after Uma and I made up. The reason Uma was so mad at me to begin with was because she felt like Evie had replaced her as my best friend. And since that argument happened, it honestly seemed to be true. But now that Uma was ready to make amends, I wasn’t about to jeopardize what little progress we made.

“Don’t want to what? Talk about it? You’re practically vibrating holding it in,” she commented, grabbing my shaking hands to still them.

I looked down at our hands and shook my head. “No, I do – you’re my best friend; of course I want to talk to you about it.” I hesitated again.

“Then what is it?” she prompted, squeezing my hands a little tighter. But Uma knew me better than anyone, and it wasn’t long before realization, and something else I couldn’t decipher, hit her. “Oh, I get it. Auradon’s already made you soft, hasn’t it? You’re worried about my feelings,” she guessed.

Considering our last big fight was due to her feelings, I’d say my hesitation was warranted. “Well, yeah, ” I confirmed.

“Well don’t. Harry already whooped my ass when I finally told him what our fight was about. He reminded me of something a short and angry eleven-year-old once said about having more than one best friend,” she revealed casually.

I laugh erupted out of me, and I rolled my eyes good-naturedly, knowing full well the person she was talking about was herself. “Yeah, I heard that kid grew up to be a dumbass,” I teased, embracing the annoyed shove I received in reply.
“Wow, here I am, tryna be a good friend n’ shit, and you’re ruining it,” she said, more amused than actually upset.

Our laughter filled the room for a while, and my apprehension dwindled. After taking a deep breath, I began speaking, excitedly filling in all the Evie-shaped blanks from my earlier storytelling.

While there was some amusement here and there, Uma’s face, for the most part, was pensive. When I was finally done speaking, she remained silent for what felt like forever, looking at me so intensely that the urge to turn in on myself was almost overwhelming. As if she could sense my walls building back up, Uma finally spoke. “So, this thing with Evie...it’s...serious?” she inquired, holding my gaze firmly.

It didn’t take long for my brain to come up with the answer. “Yeah,” I breathed.

“Would you say that you’re in love with her?” she asked, cutting right to it.

Blood rushed to my cheeks, and I wiped my sweaty palms on my shorts. I could deny it all I wanted, but I knew Uma would see right through me if I tried. “I couldn’t tell her, but I’ve thought about those words a lot lately, yeah,” I said honestly, sitting stock-still as I waited for her reaction.

“Well, how does she make you feel?” Uma prompted, leaning forwards, as if to get a better look at me.

A rush of air escaped my lips as I thought about all of the things Evie made me feel. A smile pulled at my lips despite myself. “She makes me feel like I’ve never felt before. Everything is just so...much? If that makes sense?” I sighed again, trying to better collect my thoughts. “When I saw her again for the first time, I couldn’t move; I could barely speak. And you know me; I don’t freeze up. But she was so beautiful. Like, obviously I thought she was beautiful when we were little, too, but now she’s a woman, you know? God, I was so scared that she still hated me. She should have still hated me. I would still hate me,” I admitted. Purple flashed across my vision as I shook my head. “But she didn’t hate me. She was so nice, and she just kept saying all these things that brought me right back to The Isle – but to the times when it was just me and her. When we’re alone, that’s what I feel like. Hell, sometimes, even if we’re in a room full of people, she looks at me a certain way, and it’s like it’s just us. And if I’m freaking out or getting worked up, she can calm me down, just like that,” I said, snapping my fingers. “But at the same time, sometimes I get earwigs in my stomach when she looks at me, too. But it’s not bad, I guess, just different. Did you know Auradonians call it ‘butterflies in the stomach’? That’s so funny to me. It definitely sounds better than earwigs,” I laughed, getting off track. “Anyway, now that we’re together it’s just...amazing. It’s like we’ve finally let down those little walls, and I just feel so...alive. When we were little, she used to say you
feel a spark, like electricity, when you’re with someone you love. I told her that was all just fairy tale stuff, but I don’t know, Uma. Sometimes, I swear—I swear to evil, I feel it.” I laughed incredulously. “So, yeah. Do I love her? I wouldn’t say I’m an expert on the subject or anything, but gods, it feels like it,” I confessed, smiling stupidly after finally saying it all out loud.

But the giddy feeling was short lived, as two soft lips covered mine. A completely different swell of emotions overtook me, and my vision blurred with unshed tears.

When she pulled away, dark brown eyes looked deeply into mine. “And how do you feel now?” Uma asked.

“Uh,” I started, unsure how to even begin to voice the chaos I embodied. “Surprised, confused, hurt—Uma, why the fuck would you do that when I just told you that I’m in love with Evie?” I cried, shaking my head as if I would get rid of all of the thoughts and feelings that I was experiencing. My feet took me around the room, pacing to try to calm myself.

To her credit, Uma looked just as surprised, confused, and hurt as me. The only thing missing in her expression was regret. “I—I just thought it might change things,” she said, so quietly it was almost to herself. With the distant look on her face, she might as well have been.

“Like what? Like-like fucking up the last couple hours of progress we just made? What the fuck did you think was going to happen, Uma? Fuck!” I exclaimed, stopping and facing her.

She finally seemed to fully register the reality of the situation and was quick to apologize. “Look, Mal; I’m sorry it upset you. That wasn’t what I expected to happen. You know I don’t apologize, so you know I mean it when I say it.”

The room went black as I rubbed my hands over my face and through my hair. I could tell she was being honest about not intentionally hurting me, but the mystery of her motive for doing such a thing in the first place was still fucking with my head.

To make matters worse, two distinct knocks sounded before our dorm room door opened. “Okay, I’m glad you two are catching up, but that’s no excuse to stand me up for dinner,” Evie said half-jokingly while entering the room. As soon as she saw the state I was in, she was by my side in two long strides. “You okay, M?” she inquired, cupping my cheek and instantly making me feel calmer.

I nodded. “Yeah, I just got up too fast and got a little dizzy,” I lied, taking her hand in mine for
comfort as soon as she dropped it from my face.

“Oh, well you know what will help with that? Dinner! Now c’mon; I gave you two a half hour grace period, but your empanadas won’t be hot for much longer!” she said, tugging on my hand enthusiastically.

Uma’s eyes widened in panic, realizing how awkward a meal between the three of us may be. “I can just go grab dinner down the road,” she offered, getting up to retrieve her boots.

“Nonsense, Uma! I made enough empanadas for everyone, so you must join us! I insist!” Evie urged pleasantly. “If Mal tried to scare you off by saying my cooking is bad, she’s lying. I’m top of the class in Lifeskills Without Magic. She likes to pretend she can eat as much as the boys, but she don’t have the physical capacity to eat both of your servings on her own,” she teased, giving me a knowing look.

Uma managed an authentic chuckle at that. “Yeah, she used to do that at Fish and Chips, too, but I know she was feeding the squid the extra food.”

They both shared a laugh, and my stomach twisted. “Okay, ha-ha. Now that you’re done bonding over embarrassing me, can we go eat? I’m starving,” I lied, eager to get this dinner over with.

Evie rolled her eyes with an amused smile. “So impatient.”

Not wanting to offend Evie’s hospitality and draw attention to the sudden strain in our friendship, Uma decided to join us for dinner. The girls’ common room coffee table was fixed with candles and placemats from the dining hall, and the fireplace was nice and warm by the time we arrived. Evie and I had made a habit out of hanging out here since the boys left. The space almost felt like a studio apartment when no one else was around, and it was a lot more homely than the dorms. The three of us sat on the ground around the coffee table to eat. Well, Uma and I sat on the ground while Evie sat on a pillow, which I had already teased her about on the days prior. Today, I said nothing about it.

The empanadas were already plated, each of us getting two. I eagerly dug into mine, hoping a full mouth would excuse me from needing to contribute to the conversation. It seemed to work. Soon, Uma and Evie were chatting away as if I wasn’t even there.

Evie started out by asking Uma how her exams went. After marvelling at how easily school came to the pirate, she moved on to inquiring about winter fencing camp. By the shake of Evie’s head, she
wasn’t too surprised to hear that it was wild. Apparently, because fencing was a student-run activity, the ‘camp’ was basically a cover for a month-long party. Winter tourney camp, led by the stern but encouraging Coach Jenkins, was the complete opposite. From the sound of it, Jay and Carlos were probably being worked to the bone but loving every minute of it.

Just when the conversation seemed nice and light, Uma had to open her mouth again. “So, why are you here?” she asked Evie.

“Uma,” I warned, giving her a glare that let her know the topic was sensitive.

“What? I just meant because the royal family basically, like, adopted her; didn’t they?” Uma clarified.

“Uma, just drop it,” I spat.

“No, M; it’s okay,” Evie assured, touching her hand to mine briefly before wiping her mouth on her napkin. “To answer your inquiry, the royal family always offers me a place in the castle over breaks. I used to live there when I was little; my inclination for politics was apparent shortly after arriving in Auradon. But life in the royal family was quite extraordinary, and I wanted to experience different narratives, so I spent my school breaks with different students to see what it was like to live in Auradon for them. Not only was it fascinating, but it helped me to suggest ways to better policies to the King. I was appointed a royal advisor on my twelfth birthday,” Evie shared casually, taking another bite of her empanada.

“Damn,” Uma muttered, eyebrows raising. “So why aren’t you off...taking field notes then?”

“No, M; it’s okay,” Evie assured, touching her hand to mine briefly before wiping her mouth on her napkin. “To answer your inquiry, the royal family always offers me a place in the castle over breaks. I used to live there when I was little; my inclination for politics was apparent shortly after arriving in Auradon. But life in the royal family was quite extraordinary, and I wanted to experience different narratives, so I spent my school breaks with different students to see what it was like to live in Auradon for them. Not only was it fascinating, but it helped me to suggest ways to better policies to the King. I was appointed a royal advisor on my twelfth birthday,” Evie shared casually, taking another bite of her empanada.

“Damn,” Uma muttered, eyebrows raising. “So why aren’t you off...taking field notes then?”

“No, M; it’s okay,” Evie assured, touching her hand to mine briefly before wiping her mouth on her napkin. “To answer your inquiry, the royal family always offers me a place in the castle over breaks. I used to live there when I was little; my inclination for politics was apparent shortly after arriving in Auradon. But life in the royal family was quite extraordinary, and I wanted to experience different narratives, so I spent my school breaks with different students to see what it was like to live in Auradon for them. Not only was it fascinating, but it helped me to suggest ways to better policies to the King. I was appointed a royal advisor on my twelfth birthday,” Evie shared casually, taking another bite of her empanada.

Mal, really; it’s okay,” Evie said, stroking my thumb with hers. Once I was placated, she continued. “I’m not always researching. Sometimes, I’ll stay with friends over break. This time I choose to stay here with Mal because I knew she wouldn’t have anywhere to go, and I wanted to be supportive. And even if Mal wasn’t here, I’d probably stay on campus anyway. Jay and Carlos are obviously busy with winter tourney camp, Jane and Lonnie are spending their break together, Audrey and her family are on vacation, I can only take so much of Ben, and Doug…” she paused to take a steadying breath, and I squeezed her hand encouragingly. “Because of my mother, most of Doug’s family wasn’t too happy to hear he and I were dating, and I’m certainly not welcome to stay with them over break...or ever.”
“Well shit,” Uma exclaimed, clearly not expecting to hear that. “I would have thought Auradonians would be less..” she trailed off.

“Vindictive? You seem to be forgetting they agreed it was a good idea to magically imprison all of their enemies, then,” Evie smirked.

Uma nodded. “True.”

“Auradon is far from perfect. Right off the bat, Ben’s approval rating as King was far below any royal before him, and not just because of his age. Many Auradonians believed taking anyone off of The Isle, even young children, would be the downfall of Auradon as they know it. That’s why they were so strategic about which children to bring over,” Evie continued.

The next thing she said had my mind racing.

“Carlos was selected because he was so fearful and Gil for his good heart and small mind. It was believed they would be easily manipulated in the new environment and would adjust well on their own. Next, Jay and myself were chosen for our charm. Despite the more intimidating status of our parents, they figured we could be bribed into pretending to be poster children for the program. And it worked. Jay got all the material goods he ever asked for, and I was treated like I was born into the royal family.”

“Damn, that’s fucked up,” Uma commented, eating her food as if she hadn’t just heard something scandalous.

“Evie, what the fuck? Why haven’t you ever told me any of this?” I asked, slightly hurt she withheld such incriminating information.

“I don’t know; it never came up?” she said lamely. “And I wanted you to like it here;“ she tacked on.

I rolled my eyes. “Gee, and knowing you guys were being manipulated or bribed the whole time wouldn’t make me like it here? Who would’ve thought,” I growled, stabbing my empanada much too forcefully with my fork.
“It really wasn’t that bad, M. We all adjusted pretty quickly on our own, and the royal court had minimal intervention after that. We genuinely liked it here, and we still do,” Evie frowned.

“So why’d they choose us then? What was their motive?” Uma wondered, chewing her food with interest.

“Auradonians wanted to make sure the villain kids they took on didn’t become evil at adulthood, so Ben was forced, in order to maintain approval ratings, to wait until we all turned eighteen to announce the Second Proclamation of The Isle. Because this took so long, and we desperately want to bring more kids here, we decided it was a good idea to take a huge risk – bring over the worst of the worst – no offense.” Evie explained.

Uma just chuckled, looking more proud than offended. “None taken.”

“If the three of you could adjust on your own and prove to not be a threat to the kingdom, we could easily garner approval for the Third Proclamation.” Evie finished.

My mind was still reeling, and I couldn’t gather my thoughts enough to comprehend how this new information was affecting me.

“You know what, Evie? I really respect your honesty,” Uma said, pointing the rest of her empanada at the other girl. “And your cooking skills.”

“Thank you,” Evie smiled genuinely.

“The Isle is a shitshow. It was fun terrorizing people and pretending to run things for a while, but no one can really have a life there. And the best part is, we never have to see our parents again. I’ve never felt so free, and there’s no way I’m jeopardizing that,” Uma confessed, popping the last of her food into her mouth.

Evie let out a breath of air. “I am so glad to hear you say that.”

While I couldn’t agree more with what Uma said, the ease at which Evie and Uma were getting along, paired with what Evie revealed and Uma’s earlier inexplicable actions, had me on edge. Tomorrow was definitely going to be interesting.
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

I know it's been eons since I updated last, but I've been incredibly busy! Fret not! Even though updates may be sparse, I fully intend on finishing this story and its sequel! I was 1/4 of the way through writing the next chapter when I realized it was the perfect place to add some more flashbacks! So, here you go!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“You cheated!”

“Did not!”

“There’s no way you got that much money! Last time we looked, Carlos was winning!” I argued, reaching over to try to sneak a peek at Jay’s cards. The telltale squeak of our hideout’s door sounded, but I was too angry to pay it any attention.

“That was, like, an hour ago! You were here the whole time! How could I have cheated?” Jay argued, pulling his cards out of my sight line suspiciously.

“Guys,” Carlos’ feeble voice spoke.

“Because you’re a sneaky little shi-“

“Guys!” Carlos said more forcefully, pulling on my jacket sleeve and finally earning my attention.

“What?” I asked, still agitated from losing our made-up game.

Instead of answering me, the boy simply pointed in the direction of our shared mattress in the middle of our little house-of-sorts. There Evie was, sitting tentatively on the edge of the bed, arms wrapped around her waist and her head hung low.
The three of us exchanged worried glances before throwing our cards down and making our way over to her. Jay swiftly leapt onto the bed, sitting behind her and wrapping his arms around her comfortably. She leaned into his embrace and sniffled, wiping her eyes with the back of her hand. Carlos crouched beside the two and held her hand, stroking it with his thumb.

I came around to the front of her, taking in her slightly disheveled appearance and fishy odor. I didn’t even need to ask to know Uma had something to do with her tears. My hands gently cradled her face and lifted it so she would look at me. “What’d she do?” I asked sternly.

Red-brown avoided my gaze and a rosy lip trembled.


“It wasn’t that bad. Really, I’m just being a baby,” she groaned, trying to put on a brave face.

“Evie,” I warned, not settling for anything less than the truth.

Her shoulders slumped as she sighed. “She called me a land whale and threw shrimp at me,” Evie revealed, still not meeting my eyes. Although it truly wasn’t that bad, the three of us knew Evie was really insecure about her weight. Her mom was on her case enough about it; Uma didn’t need to make her feel any worse.

“I’ll kill her,” I growled, already on my way to do the job. Her hand grabbed my wrist and held me back.

“No, Mal! Don’t hurt her!” she pleaded, eyes wide in fear.

“Why not? She hurt you!” I reasoned.

“Only my feelings!” she corrected.

“Fine, I won’t hurt her,” I agreed, taking my wrist back. “Physically.”
As we made our way to Ursula’s Fish And Chips, I formulated a plan to get back at Uma. It was simple, really, but hopefully effective. The four of us crept around to the back of the restaurant, where the dumpsters were located. It didn’t take long to find exactly what I was looking for — a plain metal bucket labeled ‘slop’. “Perfect,” I whispered, lifting the lid to see how full it was. My three companions gagged at the foul odor, but to me it just smelled like sweet, sweet revenge.

“Oh my evil!” Carlos exclaimed, pinching his nose between freckled fingers.

“I’m gonna be sick!” Evie cried, covering her mouth and taking a few steps backwards.

“Are those eyeballs?” Jay asked, approaching the bucket with morbid curiosity.

“Eyeballs, guts, bones — everything too nasty to eat,” I informed them.

“How long has that been out here?” Carlos asked, looking between the slop and the unrelenting sun shining down on it, heating its contents and making the stench that much worse.

“Couple days, probably,” I smirked, using much of my strength to just lift the damn thing off of the steps. As I walked down them, trying my best not to grunt with the effort, some of the slop splashed out and fell onto my boot. “Shit.”

“Aw, gross!” Carlos groaned.

I set the bucket back down on the ground, trying to decide how the hell I was going to get it to the front of the store. “You know, this thing’s pretty heavy,” I said pointedly.

“Looks like it,” Carlos stated, not moving an inch.

“Mal, we already have to burn your shoe; I’m not risking my own,” Evie declared, stepping back to punctuate her point.
So I turned to Jay, the only one who hadn’t turned me down.

“Fine,” he drawled, taking off his vest and throwing it at Carlos to hold for him.

“That’s a good boy,” I praised, and he fixed me with a fake smile before grabbing the other side of the bucket. Thankfully, transportation went much more smoothly with the two of us working together. We were in front of the restaurant in no time.

“What’s the plan? Make fun of Uma until she comes outside, then we throw the slop on her?” Jay wondered.

“Nah, if she doesn’t see all of us, she’ll be suspicious. We’re gonna put the slop bucket on the door frame then call her names her until she comes out. It should fall on her,” I revealed, eyeing up the doorframe.

“ Should? ” Carlos repeated, lifting his eyebrow skeptically.

“Yeah, just help me get it up!” I urged, eager to set it up before anyone noticed and notified Ursula, or worse, Uma.

“That’s what he said,” Jay snickered, his side of the bucket dipping slightly.

“Quit giggling, or we’ll drop it!” I growled.

“You can’t even reach that high! We’re gonna drop it anyways!” he pointed out, and my heartbeat increased with the realization.

“Shit!” I exclaimed, wondering what the hell I was going to do now.

“Ugh, move!” Evie grunted, practically ripping the bucket from my hands and easily sliding it onto the top of the doorframe using her height advantage. “There.”

“I’m sorry,” I apologized, well aware of how much she didn’t want to touch the slop bucket.
“So am I,” she responded, visibly flustered. “This better be good.”

“It will be. She’ll learn she can’t treat you like that!” I promised, taking her hand in mine and squeezing it.

In all of the commotion, none of us noticed the tiny girl with long, flowing braids sauntering over to us.

“Brought your bodyguards to hold your hand this time, big blue?” Uma’s voice sounded, and I’d be lying if I said I didn’t think we’d gotten caught.

The four of us spun around so fast we left dust in our wake. Thankfully, she seemed too busy staring at us to notice the change in restaurant decor.

Uma greeted us with a net full of fish and a cocky smile. “You’re in luck; I’m just bringing in the fresh catch,” she said, making a show of looking through the food before speaking up again. “Would you prefer sardines, squid, or shrimp again?” she taunted.

My blood boiled with her words, and I was about to take matters into my own hands when Evie untangled our fingers.

“I’d prefer you leave me alone, wharf rat!” Evie spat, grabbing the much smaller girl by the shoulders and easily shoving her towards the building.

The pirate’s tiny frame collided with the door violently, creating more than enough force to knock the slop bucket down. In mere seconds, Uma was completely covered in hot, stinky rotting fish parts. On top of that, the incident surely ruined her fresh catch.

“Guess there won’t be a special tonight, huh?” I joked.

“Seeing her learn her place is special enough,” Evie replied, smiling unkindly at her bully. “Never forget who’s in charge around here,” she warned, kicking the now-empty slop bucket into Uma’s legs before turning on her heels and leaving the girl alone, standing in shock. The rest of us followed Evie as soon as we had taken our fill of Uma’s look of horror.
The trip back home was glorious. We all walked with big grins on our faces and our heads held high. As soon as we were safely in our hideout and out of prying eyes, I tackled Evie in a tight hug from behind. She giggled as I made contact and did her best to hug me back, despite the awkward angle.

“Evie, Evie, Evie. Doesn’t it feel so good to be bad?” I purred.

She sighed contently. “Yes, Mal. You were right. It was totally worth it to see the look on her face,” she smiled, recalling it.

“I’m proud of you for standing up for yourself,” Carlos said softly.

“Thanks, ‘Los,” Evie replied genuinely, taking his hand and pulling him in to our hug.

“Hey, what about me?” Jay pouted, arms crossed.

Evie sighed in faux-contemplation. “I guess you helped, too.”

Jay’s eyebrows raised. “You guess I helped? I did more work than most o-“ he started, but Evie yanked him by his arm and kissed his forehead while the rest of us brought him into the hug. He looked like he wanted to wipe the spit off his head, but his arms were held captive.

The four of us stood there in our happy embrace for a few moments before Evie spoke up again.

“Okay, now get off me. We all need baths. You first, Mal. You smell awful,” she commanded light-heartedly.

I couldn’t even argue, knowing full well a bath was in order as soon as I touched the slop. Chuckles escaped me as I walked back towards the door. “Whatever you say, princess.”

“And don’t even think about bringing that shoe back in here! I was serious about burning it!” she yelled as I descended the ladder.
My lips pulled into a frown. “It’s my only pair right now!” I called back, pausing to wait for a reply.

“I’ll swipe you a new one by the time you’re back!” Jay yelled, and I believed him.

As I continued going down the ladder, I could still faintly make out Evie and Jay’s voices.

“Are you really going to burn her boot? She really liked that one,” Jay wondered.

“Uh, yeah! It’ll never smell the same after today!” Evie pointed out.

“Neither will Uma!” Jay chuckled, and I found myself laughing along with him. If anything was sure to be a good time, it was picking on Uma.

* * *

“C’mon, Uma. Don’t make me say it again,” I huffed, crossing my arms.

“You want to what?”

“You’re serious?” she pushed, not believing her ears.

“You know I wouldn’t be here if I wasn’t,” I said, gritting my teeth. Surely she knew I wouldn’t be meeting with my nemesis in the makeshift office of her mother’s restaurant unless I had a good reason.

Uma’s head nodded slightly as she thought it over, teal braids falling in front of her face for a second before she threw them back over her shoulder. “And why would I want you in my crew anyway?” she pondered, furrowing her eyebrows.

I balked, not expecting that in the slightest. “Excuse me?”
“What do I gain from you joining my crew?” she rephrased, waiting patiently for me to wrap my head around what she asked. When a few moments passed and she had not received a reply, she elaborated. “Do you know anything about ships? Sailing the seas?”

“No, bu-“

“You any good at sword fighting?”

“I’m good with kniv-“

“Not the same. Know how to navigate maps? Use a compass? Fish? Prepare food? Properly tend to wounds? Mend weapons and clothing?”

I could feel my face heating up with embarrassment and frustration. Even if I wasn’t a natural pirate, I was still a damn good villain. “I’m the daughter of the Mistress of Evil!”

“But you’re not the Mistress of Evil,” she reminded me, causing me to roll my eyes.

“People fear me!” I barked, but even I knew I had less of an impact now that all my friends had been living in Auradon for almost two years. Sure, I tormented someone here and there, but it wasn’t the same. I wasn’t strong like Jay, smart like Evie, or fast like Carlos. I just didn’t have the numbers or the talent to pull off bigger plans. People didn’t move out of the way for me in the streets anymore. People didn’t cower at the mere mention of my name. In fact, my mother’s henchmen had heard rumors about people thinking about testing me. It was the last straw.

“Not for long. Once everyone realizes you don’t have any backup anymore, you’re done. Every person on The Isle is going to chip a little bit off of you until there’s nothing left. You bully them, and now they’ll want their share of revenge.”

My palms were sweating, but I didn’t dare wipe them off and reveal my nerves. I knew she was right. “I’m still a valuable asset,” I claimed. “We’re the top two VKs on this island. If you and I come together, no one could stop us.”

“You know what your problem is, Mal?” she asked, tilting her head condescendingly.
“Enlighten me,” I growled, preparing for a list.

“You think intimidation and lineage will get you everywhere. It won’t. People will do anything you want when they fear you, it’s true. But when someone bigger and badder comes along, they’ll turn on you. There’s no loyalty when you rule like that.”

“And what? I don’t know anything about loyalty?” I guessed, annoyed with her criticism.

Uma laughed, her white teeth shining in the dim lighting. “You exiled your own second in command, and I’m pretty sure the De Vil kid only hung around so you’d be his guard dog. Jay may have been loyal to you, but he’s an ocean away now, and he’s never coming back. You’re done for if you don’t change your ways.”

A sigh escaped my lips. “So, is that the answer then? Loyalty?” I wondered honestly.

“Respect,” she revealed, leaning against the wall. “Do you want to know why people stand behind me even though I’m not the biggest or the strongest?”

“Or the best smelling?” I teased, raising an eyebrow.

Her big, brown eyes rolled good-naturedly. “Because I live in town with them, not far away in some big, fancy castle. Because I feed them and make sure my prices are low enough that they can afford three meals a day. Because I listen to their stories when they need someone to talk to. Because I know about their passions and their struggles. Because if someone asks to join my crew, I take care of them. In turn, they repay me in respect and loyalty.”

The air felt strangely light after her words. It seemed as though she wouldn’t turn me away, and for that I was grateful. I had been expecting her to mock me at the least, torture me as some kind of sick initiation at the worst. Now, I wasn’t sure what to do. “So, is that all you want from me? Just respect and loyalty?” I asked, biting my lip in anticipation.

“And for you to call me ‘captain’,” she stipulated with a teasing smirk.

I smiled back; I couldn’t help it. Maybe this whole alliance wouldn’t be so painful after all. “You’ve got it, captain.”
“Welcome to my crew.”

* * *

“Ah, shit” came Uma’s hushed voice, following a loud clattering echoing from the back entrance of Fish And Chips.

My body jolted awake, and I almost fell out of the chair in the office. “Uma?” I called, even though I knew exactly whose voice it had been.

“Ah shit,” she repeated, this time more forcefully.

At that, my eyebrows furrowed, and I got up, moving towards her voice. I found her in the back, crouched over a pile of rags. From the basket on the floor and the state of the rags, it was safe to assume she had knocked them onto the ground in the dark. “Here, let me help,” I offered, bending down to assist her.

“Wasn’t expecting you to be here,” she said, not unkindly.

Yesterday, I warned her I would be gone. Mother wanted me to explore a recently abandoned castle, and she was adamant I go alone. I was to retrieve some kind of necklace from it. It didn’t take me long to realize the building had been looted well in advance of my arrival. Even though it was a long walk, I made it back home with some daylight left. About two minutes went by before I got back up and walked to Fish And Chips. But, this was Uma I was talking to, so all I said was “Well, turns out I can’t stand to go a whole day without seeing your ugly mug.”

She only hummed in reply, continuing to gather the rags. She tossed one to the side. Even in the dim lighting, the shine of fresh blood was hard to miss.

“You okay?” I inquired, grabbing her arm to halt her movements.

She winced at the contact. “Yeah, just need to, uh, get these picked up. Ma hates when I leave shit all over.”
Something didn’t feel right. “Your mom never visits the restaurant anymore,” I pointed out, squinting at her suspiciously. In the dark, it was too hard to read her. With a snap of my fingers, a small flame ignited in my hand, just big enough to illuminate our faces.

“Mal,” she groaned, not expecting me to use my magic to expose her. And the light did expose her, in more ways than one. As I moved my hand, more and more damage was revealed. Her dark skin was covered in even darker bruises. Blood trickled down her face and arms from several lacerations and a busted lip.

“Uma, what the fuck?” I shrieked, using my free hand to look her over. “What happened?”

“Oh, you know. Someone thought they could just sneak onto my ship, kidnap me while my crew was asleep, and steal the vessel,” she shared casually.

“They took the ship?! Is the crew okay? Who was on watch tonight?” I wondered, a million thoughts running through my head.

“Everyone is fine; the ship is right where she always is,” she assured me. “Convinced She-who-shall-not-be-named it would be better for her image if she won the ship via single combat instead of just throwing me overboard and letting me drown. Not that that could kill me anyway...stupid bitch.”

“CJ did this?” I exclaimed incredulously. Harry’s sister, CJ, was the pick of the litter, Captain Hook’s pride and joy. The second he realized his only son would never never be as smart and capable as his daughter, he funneled all of his attention into training CJ to be his successor. Some even joked that her name stood for ‘Captain Junior’.

Years of being left out led Harry to spend most of his time wandering about and getting into trouble alone. It didn’t take long for Ursula’s daughter, who aspired to be the best pirate that ever was, to find him. Harry taught her everything he knew about being a pirate, and Uma gave him a place to stay where he was truly appreciated. We didn’t talk about Harry’s family, especially around him. He insisted that Uma and her crew was his family whenever the topic arose.

“You remember when I won my ship in that contest?” Uma recalled.

I nodded. Even though I had not been a part of Uma’s crew back then, the story of the eight-year-old sea witch beating seasoned adult villains in a sailing competition hosted by Captain Hook himself
was legendary on The Isle. That day, young Uma had won one of Hook’s own ships. A nice one, at
that.

“Turns out, the contest wasn’t just for fun,” she said cryptically, suddenly doubling over.

I lunged forwards, keeping her steady. With how dark the room was, I had missed it before. But
seeing the blood seeping out through her fingers tipped me off that something was horribly wrong.

“Shit, Uma!” I exclaimed, my mouth dropping open. I grabbed her hand and guided her to the
kitchen. The pounding of my heart nearly drowned out her story, but I managed to catch most of it.

“He wanted the best person outside of the family to win it so when CJ was ready, she could take it
back to prove herself,” she explained. “The only thing she proved was that she can’t play by the
rules. We agreed on one weapon each, but that dirty bitch pulled a dagger out on me when I let my
guard down. So I beat the shit out of her; fuck honor. She can wear her shame in the shape of my
bootprint on her face,” she spat.

When we arrived in the kitchen, I lit a few lamps with my finger. “I thought those pompous assholes
were happy playing pirate on their own ships. No one ever sees them. What’s CJ been up to all these
years, anyway?” I wondered as the last lamp ignited. Now the room was bright as mid-morning, and
what it revealed was not a pretty sight. Her normally teal leather jacket was nearly black with blood,
and there was a decent trail of the substance on the floor leading to where she sat.

“Studying the blade, apparently,” Uma joked dryly.

“This is no time for jokes!” I chided, trying to decipher how much of the blood was actually hers.

“My think a deathbed is the perfect place for jokes,” she argued, closing her eyes in pain.

My head spun as I grasped the meaning of her words. “Shit!” I exclaimed, eyes flicking to the hand
still clutching her side. The zipper of her jacket was cool against my shaking fingers as I worked to
get the garment off of her. Between the jacket and the wound was a folded up layer of blood-soaked
clothing — presumably her shirt being used as a makeshift bandage. Once I peeled that away, I got
my first real look at the injury. It was a pretty long laceration on her lower abdomen. The two ends of
it didn’t seem too bad, but the middle was deeper and bleeding profusely. “Shit!” I cursed again.
“Mal,” Uma groaned, weakly grasping my arm.

I grabbed her hand and pressed it firmly against the cut. “Keep pressure on it!” I commanded.

She coughed. “Neither of us were ever good at first aid, Mal. It’s no use.”

I scoffed, jumping to my feet.

“Wait! Mal!” she called out frantically as I ran down to the other end of the kitchen. With how she was sitting, she couldn’t see what I was doing. “Don’t leave me! I changed my mind; I don’t wanna die alone!” she said, voice cracking in desperation.

My heart ached at her words, but I was back by her side in an instant. “I’m not leaving you, dumbass. I would never leave you,” I confessed, locking eyes with her. When I held up a chopping knife for her to see, she nodded solemnly.

“Okay, but I-I wanna say some things first,” she urged, taking a deep breath carefully, as not to worsen the pain.

I lowered the knife. “Uma, we don’t have ti-”

“Make sure my mom knows I fought well and didn’t back down. Tell Harry that he’s the best first mate a captain could ever have, and that, even if I never made it off this gods forsaken island, I believe in him to fulfill that dream for the both of us. Tell him not to lose his sense of humor because life is hard. And short. And if I didn’t have him by my side, I wouldn’t have made it this long,” she rambled.

“Uma, I-“

“No, Mal. I-I’m sorry for all the shit I put you and your friends through when we were little. If we would have banded together from the start, we would have been unstoppable.”

“We are unstoppable,” I corrected.
A single tear rolled down her purple-tinted cheek, and she blinked back more. “Shh, Mal, please. Gods, where do I even begin? Ever since the moment I saw you, there was an instant pull. Like we were destined to be together somehow. As enemies, as partners in crime, as—” she cut herself off with a sigh. “I can’t tell you how happy I am that you joined my crew, how proud I am of what you’ve learned. I can’t think of anyone I trust more to take my place. Promise me you’ll treat them well?"

“Um—"

“Promise me!”

“Fine, yeah, I promise,” I swore, somewhat amused by the whole situation.

“And Mal?”

“Yeah?” I replied, playing along.

“Don’t forget me,” she pleaded, her eyes shining with desperation.

The look on her face was no laughing matter; the genuine fear exposed there was sobering.

So I took her face gently in my free hand. When I spoke, I made sure to hold her gaze so she knew it was coming from the heart. “Uma, you’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me. I could never forget you, even if I wanted to.”

And I sealed that promise with a kiss to trembling and swollen lips. Her soft hands, still warm and wet with blood, caressed my face so gently, so tenderly, I wasn’t even sure if they were there at first. But once I was sure, I made my move.

A scream of agony erupted as I placed the side of the knife, which I had been heating with my dragon fire as she rambled, against the laceration at her side.

The poignant stench of burning flesh replaced the ever-present scent of fish and the temporary hint of
copper. Uma’s body convulsed forward in pain, and I held my forehead against hers until I was satisfied with my work.

“Hades almighty!” she exclaimed once it was all over, trying to catch her breath. Her eyes raked over her marred skin. “You were just going to cauterize it? This whole time?”

I couldn’t help the chuckle that escaped. “What did you think I was going to do?” I asked, tilting my head innocently and twirling the knife in my hand.

“And you just let me say all that shit!” she yelled, embarrassed.

“Yeah, what was that part about the really strong feeling for me again?” I teased, getting closer to her.

I’m sure she was blushing under all of the bruises and blood. “Hate! Definitely hate!” she declared, crossing her arms.

I giggled again, leaning in for another kiss. “Well, in that case...I hate you more.”

Chapter End Notes

As always, I'd love to hear your thoughts and feelings! What did you like? What can I improve on? Thank you for reading and commenting!

End Notes

Thanks for reading! Let me know what you liked and disliked, what I can improve on, and what you think will happen next!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!