Hey There Little Red Riding Hood

by AltruisticSkittles

Summary

They should’ve never walked into those woods. Now Patton is running for his life and trying to protect himself from multiple things that would love to have him for dinner, and he doesn’t mean like a tea party.

Notes

Hello there! This was sparked by listening to "Little Red Riding Hood" by Amanda Seyfried, and I swear I’ve never written something so fast.

I’m unsure how many parts this will be, but know there will be at least 3 parts (because all I have written are 2 and it’s not resolved by the end of the second one haha)

But anyway, I hope you enjoy the long ramblings of something that I didn’t even promise y’all. :3

--

Chapter warnings: Violence, Blood, Snakes, talks of death, I think that’s it

Word Count: 4817

See the end of the work for more notes
Chapter 1

“I don’t know, Roman. The elders said we should stay out of these woods.”

“Oh come now. Where’s your sense of adventure?”

“But-”

“Do you want to help Joan or not, Patton?”

Roman held his sword’s hilt as he stared into the woods. It creaked under his grip, and he turned to face Patton with a determined crease in his brow.

“I’m going, with or without you, and you can’t stop me.”

Patton sighed and ran a hand through his hair. He pulled his red cloak tighter around his shoulders and shivered.

“I know,” he spoke. He swallowed and sighed. “Okay, I’ll go with.”

Roman offered him a smile and held out his hand.

“Don’t worry. I won’t let anything harm you. I’m not the captain of the knights for nothing.”

Patton smiled and took Roman’s hand, noticing how hot and sweaty it was. He watched the sun’s rays glint off of Roman’s armor as they stepped into the dead brush surrounding thick trees.

The transition from the meadow’s green glow to a toxic yellow stilled Patton’s heart. The last warm rays of the sun faded from his back and left him with a cold chill. Roman’s hand squeezed a little harder. He sensed Roman’s unease curl through his arm, and Patton gave a reassuring squeeze back.

“Legend says the sorcerer in these woods can heal a man seconds from death,” Roman mumbled, his voice drowned out by the hiss of wind, “and he’s buried deep in its depths.”

“Maybe for a good reason,” Patton replied. He thought of the kingdom obtaining the power to keep people from dying, and he shuddered. Immortality was a deadly plague to the human mind. Everyone who sought after it ironically died or went insane.

The bushes shuffled to Patton’s left, and he froze in his tracks. Roman pulled to a halt in front of him and turned.

“M-maybe we should head back-”

“Patton, there’s nothing in these woods that will hurt you, especially while I’m around.” Roman stepped a little closer. “It’s going to be alright. I promise.”

Patton swallowed and once again followed Roman on their trek. Not two seconds later, the rustling startled him again. The hair on Patton’s neck bristled.

“Roman, there’s something in there.”

“Will you relax?” Roman rolled his eyes.
“But-”

The bushes rustled for the third time, and Patton screamed as a black blur jumped out. Roman brandished his sword and pulled Patton close to his chest, protecting them both with his sword crossed over their chests.

The black blur hopped through the path, gave one look with bloodshot eyes, and into another bush beside them. Roman’s sword lowered, and he let out a low chuckle.

“See? T’was just a rabbit,” he sighed. “There’s nothing to be afraid of, Patton.”

Yeah but you grabbed onto me not the other way around, Patton wanted to reply but let the comment die. A normal person would argue it was Roman’s defensive reflexes, but Patton knew better. Roman was scared, but he was saving face for Patton’s sake. It wasn’t working well.

The path twisted through the dead trees; the yellow light from their leaves cast eerie shadows around them. Brown leaves crunched under their feet. A howl sounded off in the distance and sent shivers up Patton’s spine. He walked a little closer to Roman, keeping his eyes on the ground for any stray roots that could trip them.

A low growl sounded behind them. Patton’s whole body stiffened. He turned to look over his shoulder, but nothing stirred. Roman pulled out his sword once again.

“That wasn’t your stomach, was it?”

Patton shook his head. The growl rumbled through the trees, this time closer.

Roman pushed Patton in front of him, keeping his eyes trained over his shoulder. Patton swallowed. He did have a dagger at his side in case anything went wrong, but he preferred not to use it. Hopefully whatever it was would leave them alone.

A low rustle whispered through the trees. Roman stopped in his tracks and strained his ears to listen. He looked around them. A bead of sweat slid down his forehead and paused on his cheek. Nothing dared to move.

“You think it left?” Patton whispered. Roman continued to stare into the distance and studied every shadow.

“I don’t know,” he replied. He turned and put a hand on the back of Patton’s cloak, “but the sooner we find this sorcerer, the sooner we can get back to help Joan.”

Patton nodded his head. They began down the path again.

A low thud rumbled behind them, along with a snapped tree branch. Roman turned as it charged. A bear-like creature, its back entirely stripped of fur, charged toward them. Its eyes were hollow pits, and black smoke blasted from its nostrils. It bared its teeth as it leaped forward.

Roman held out his sword as it tackled him. He sliced under its front arm, earning a loud shriek. Patton covered his ears as the beast crashed down onto the ground. It stood on wobbly legs and lowered its head to flash its teeth again.

Roman twisted the sword in his hand, some blood flicking off into the grass. The beast circled around them with a slight limp on its side. Roman stepped in front of Patton and pushed them away from the beast’s presence.
“Roman, please,” Patton whispered.

“As long as it doesn’t come after us, I won’t hit it again. I’m sorry,” he said and looked at him. Patton swallowed as he brought a hand up to cradle his throbbing chest.

The beast charged again, claws outstretched. Roman held out his sword again. Black smoke circled around them. The two coughed as the smoke choked and blinded them. Roman’s back pressed into Patton’s chest.

“Move!” he managed to choke out. Patton took a few steps back before Roman grabbed his hand and took off running. They exited the smoke and straight into the beast’s path. It leaped.

Roman pushed Patton out of the way as its paw came down on his chest. He collapsed onto the ground. The beast lunged toward his head. Roman held his sword up and jammed it between the beast’s teeth. It snarled as it tried to push Roman’s blade out of his grip. Roman’s arm shook as he pressed back. His nose wrinkled as sour breath and spit sprayed his face.

A rock hit the beast’s right flank, and it looked up. Roman caught Patton holding another small rock, ready to aim. The beast lost interest in Roman and leaped forward. Patton took off.

“Patton!” Roman called out and scrambled to his feet. He chased after the two of them.

The beast’s speed caught Patton easily. It leaped on top of him, pinning him to his stomach. Patton yelped as his face smashed into the dirt below. His glasses flew from his nose and clattered to a stop out of his reach. Rocks cut into the skin on his cheeks. He felt the animal’s hunger through the claws in his back.

As the beast leaned down to take a bite, it reared back and let out a howl. Patton’s left leg burned, and he let out a cry as well. Roman backed up and yanked his sword from the creature’s back leg. He watched it turn and readied his blade again.

The beast leaped forward, this time a little slower, and Roman sliced into its chest. Its cry drowned out Patton’s on the ground. Roman used its discomfort to his advantage. He pulled Patton to his feet and took off running.

The forest blurred as they ran, but Patton blamed it on his lack of vision. He trusted Roman as they dodged trees and bushes. He heard the beast roar behind him and ushered on.

Roman slid to a stop by the side of a cliff. The roar of water below drowned out the pounding in Patton’s ears.

Roman looked around and spied a bridge to their left. Its ropes were frayed, and a few boards were missing, but if he could cross it and cut the ropes, they’d have a chance at surviving this.

Roman pulled Patton across the bridge. It creaked under his weight, and he slowed. His stomach dropped as he realized his armor might be too heavy and could snap the ropes. He started to back up with Patton in hand, but the creature emerged from the clearing. It spied them, and Roman’s heart rate pushed him forward.

“Come on, Patton, it’s just a little farther to the other side,” he yelled as he pulled Patton across the shifting bridge. They were halfway across when the creature took a step.

The bridge lurched, and Roman nearly lost his footing. He balanced Patton and spared a glance behind them. The rope creaked as the creature took another step forward.
“Go,” Roman pushed Patton forward. Patton tripped over one of the boards and braced the rope for support.

“Roman-”

“I said get across,” he urged. He sent a glance over his shoulder along with a weak smile. “Promise me you won’t look back until you’re fully across.”

“I-”

“Promise me, Patton.”

Patton nodded his head and whispered a promise. He continued forward, his hands keeping a tight grip on the ropes as he staggered across.

The creature’s full weight shook the whole bridge. It groaned, and Roman saw the rope beside him fraying. He took cautious steps backward.

Patton’s feet hit the grass on the other side, and he turned around. Roman was three-quarters of the way across, and the creature stood a few steps away in the middle of the bridge.

“Roman, I’m across. Come on!”

Roman looked over his shoulder. He took off toward the exit, and the creature raced after him. The shock from both their weight snapped the right side, and the bridge lurched. The creature lost its footing and tumbled into the water below them.

Roman lost his balance and fell sideways. He grabbed onto the side of the bridge and stopped his fall with his arms. He tried to pull himself up, but his armor’s weight kept him from making progress.

“Roman hang on!” Patton cried as he started to cross. His body’s tremors shook the whole bridge.

“Don’t.”

“But, Roman-”

“I can’t risk your safety for mine,” Roman replied. He tried to pull himself up again but ended up losing his grip. He cried out as he fell backward. The tip of his left fingers supported all his weight.

“Roman, please!” Patton choked out.

Roman glanced over at Patton, his own eyes tearing up. He sent a confident smile. The grip from his fingers slacked.

Patton’s stomach fell. He leaned over the side of the ledge and heard Roman splash into the water below.

“Roman!” he called out and hoped some sort of answer would follow. He couldn’t catch the glint of Roman’s armor in the water, and his poor eyesight stopped him from making out a body at all.

Patton’s eyes stung with tears. He leaned back onto the grass and covered his mouth as he gasped for breath. His situation pressed on his shoulders. He was alone, in a forbidden forest, half blind with who knew how many deadly creatures ready to devour him, only a dagger as his defense, and hopelessly lost.
Patton rose to wobbly feet and pulled his red cloak tighter around his shoulders. He wished they never came here. He wanted Roman back. He wanted to go home.

Sobs shook his body as he tiptoed through the forest. His only way out now would be if he magically found the sorcerer and they returned him to his village. Patton shivered as a breeze blew his hair. The leaves hid the sun and left his sense of time in the ashy dust surrounding him. On this side of the river, a thin mist covered the land and blurred his surroundings more than they already were.

Every tree looked the same. Every flower looked ready to jump out of its bed and bite him. Patton shivered. The elongated shadows left clues of nightfall and twisted the path in front of him.

A light chitter sounded to his left. Patton froze and held his breath. It sounded in pain. Patton’s heart rate quickened, and against better judgment, he walked toward the soft mewls beside him.

A brown blur with red streaks lay under a tree. Its soft cries echoed through the woods. Patton felt the fear rolling off its body, and his heart broke. He took a few steps forward. The creature stopped, and Patton saw its three golden eyes flash in his direction.

“Hey, it’s okay,” Patton spoke as he held out his hands. He watched it try to stand and collapse into the leaves with a huff. Its eyes closed in pain.

Patton stayed still, listened to its labored breathing for a moment, and crept towards it again. The creature raised its head and narrowed its eyes. Patton stopped as a defensive growl tore from the creature’s throat.

“I’m not going to hurt you,” Patton spoke. He knelt down on the ground. The creature was closer now, its brown and white spotted fur soaked with blood. It resembled a deer with three eyes. The one on its forehead closed as the others studied Patton. Three large gashes lined its throat and bled onto the ground.

Patton reached into the satchel at his side and pulled out some gauze. The creature bared flat teeth. Patton held his breath. The animal swallowed thickly.

Patton held out his hand in a peacemaking gesture and whispered, “I want to help you. It’s going to be okay.”

The animal’s pink nose reached out and smelled the tips of Patton’s fingers. Its body eased as Patton slid a little closer. Patton rested its head in his lap, and he glided his hand over its back. Its muscles relaxed as Patton stroked its fur in a comforting motion.

“There you go,” Patton whispered. The creature started purring, and Patton couldn’t help but smile. He ripped off a strip of gauze and wrapped it around the animal’s neck. It relaxed into his grip, its purrs of content rumbling through Patton’s own chest and easing his soul.

“I can’t heal you, but I can at least make you feel better,” Patton continued. “Maybe we can both be a little less scared then.”

The creature chirped and nuzzled Patton’s hand. He leaned against the tree behind them and looked up at the darkening sky. For a moment, Patton forgot he nearly died in the woods. He watched the leaves shift around the treetops, still blocking the sun’s setting rays. The strength in Patton’s body receded as he poured his soul into comforting the animal.

Against his better judgment, he allowed his eyes to close.
Patton woke from a dreamless sleep. He squinted and remembered why he was sitting half blind in a forbidden forest. The creature left his lap with a hollow warmth. Patton stood and stretched against the tree.

Guilt clutched his heart. Here he was sleeping when Roman could still be out there, hurt but fighting for life. He returned back to the path from earlier and sighed. Why didn’t he pick up his glasses before he ran?

The trees continued to blend together, and after a while, the path disappeared. Patton panicked and looked around. It stopped in the middle of the woods with no explanation or reason. If he continued any farther he’d surely get lost and never find his way out of here.

Joan was still counting on them. He needed to think of some way to mark his trail. Patton dug around the ground and pulled out several small rocks lying under the leaves. Every few steps, he’d lay one down on the ground to mark his path. He continued forward for at least a half hour. The path behind him disappeared long ago, but his rock trail kept his sense of direction for him.

Hissing once again sifted through the trees. Patton brought his cloak closer to shield himself from the wind.

Wait. There was no breeze, so why were the leaves making that noise?

Patton looked up at the golden blurs above him. Two green eyes stared back. Patton squealed as they descended toward him.

“Don’t be frightened,” the creature holding the shimmering emerald eyes whispered. “I don’t wish to harm you.”

Patton sensed its intentions and took a step back.

“You’re lying.”

The creature narrowed its eyes.

“What’s a clever little thing like you doing lost in the woods, hmm?”

It continued to slide until Patton could make out the snake-like body wrapped around the tree branches. Its golden scales looked like rippling wheat fields. Its eyes hypnotized with the entrancing green flicker in them. Patton felt his body ease. The snake brought its head closer, and Patton noticed two tiny horns protruding behind its eyes.

“I’m looking for someone,” Patton spoke, unsure if he should say anything.

“Oh?” The snake blinked. “Whoever for?”

“A sorcerer,” Patton replied against his better judgment. “He lives deep in these woods. One of my friends from the king’s court is gravely ill, and we need their magic to save them.”

“They’re worth stepping into these woods?” the snake hissed. “They must be very special to you.”

“They’re very special to our king,” Patton replied. The snake’s head circled around him, and Patton slid out from under its scales.

“Such bravery,” the snake mused, “to wander this far in the woods with only a dagger as protection.”
Patton’s eyes widened, “How-”

“I know a lot about you, Patton,” the snake’s eyes lit up as a green glow surrounded the area. “I know you are an Empath, a rare magical human who can feel emotions and give their own to surrounding souls. A useless power but apparently well liked in your village.”

Patton brought his hands up to rub the goosebumps away on his arms.

“You and I,” the snake continued, “are a lot alike. We both use our influence to make people around us feel different things. For you, its to bring a smile to their face. For me, it’s to gain their trust.”

Patton opened his mouth to ask why, but he knew already. The snake grinned and slid closer.

“I’m sure you’ve figured out by now you’re not leaving this forest alive on your own,” the snake whispered. “Stay with me. I’ll make sure you safely make it through these woods.”

“No thanks,” Patton said as he pushed past it. Its scales slid across his cheek. Patton took a few steps forward before his body froze in place. Patton could barely breathe. His heart pounded as the snake let out a low chuckle.

“What’s your hurry?” the snake mused. “Stay a while. Roman doesn’t need you that desperately.”

Patton tried to open his mouth, to scream, to alert someone that he was in need of help, but the only thing his jaw did was close tighter. He swallowed and watched the snake’s head slip over his shoulder. Its emerald eyes studied Patton, and its tongue flickered out and tickled the side of Patton’s cheek.

The snake wove around his chest and came round the other side to meet Patton’s eyes. Its body squeezed, hindering Patton’s already short breaths.

“You have a strong spirit,” the snake mused. “You should be honored. With your soul, I won’t need to feast for nearly a year.”

It opened its jaws, revealing two fangs. Patton’s heart slammed against his ribcage as it bit into his neck. The strength left Patton’s stiff body, and his weight fell into the snake’s thick coils. Patton’s vision blurred more than it already was. He closed his eyes, listening to the creature sucking on his neck.

The world faded to darkness before Patton heard a low rumbling growl.

The next thing Patton heard was running water. Patton couldn’t open his eyes, but he figured it was the river. He just didn’t know how he got there.

His body refused to respond. The cold earth below him supported his weight and cradled him in a thick patch of moss, or at least that’s what it felt like. Patton swallowed.

A low snort tickled his hair, and Patton’s ease disappeared.

“Hey, you dead?” he heard a voice ask. His hair moved as something sniffed it. “You don’t smell dead.”

Patton willed his eyes to open but they disobeyed. The nose left his hair.

“Hmm, still breathing, so you’re definitely not dead.”
Small thuds walked away from him, sliding through the leaves. Claws scraped surrounding stone. What was that thing? Patton tried to get anything to respond, but all he met was stiffness.

The voice continued, “I don’t know how long Neider’s effects last, but I know they’re temporary if his victim is still alive afterward.”

A heavy plop and a sigh of relief later, the world stilled into silence. Patton tried again to open his eyes, and this time did so with little pushback. The trees ahead of him no longer resembled golden blurs. He recognized the weight of his glasses sitting on his nose. Wait… how? Patton blinked a few times.

“Oh, so you’re awake.” A sigh of relief. “Good. I was worried I went through all that trouble for nothing.”

Whatever this thing was, it didn’t feel dangerous. It held a calm demeanor, almost confident, and reminded him of the way Roman felt when he returned from battle.

Patton tested his jaw. Its hinges creaked against his skull, but no noise came out. He closed it and let out a frustrated whine.

A low chuckle. “You probably won’t be able to move for a while. I’m surprised you made it this far.”

Patton slowly relaxed his neck muscles and allowed his head to turn toward the voice. His breathing hitched.

Laying a few feet away from him was a dark brown wolf. Its purple eyes with black spots underneath studied Patton’s movements. Its ears flicked as it listened to something from its left and turned back toward Patton. The wolf’s length was almost the same as Patton’s height. Its paws could easily crush his face.

It stood and shook its fur then sat in the grass.

“I’m sure you have a few questions, like what am I and why did I save you?” The wolf’s jaw didn’t move as it spoke. It walked back towards Patton. He swallowed the fear rising through his throat. “I guess I couldn’t see someone like you dying like that.”

Patton moved his mouth again, and his voice squeaked as he spoke, “Like… me?”

The wolf paused and looked away. It collapsed next to Patton, and the warmth from its fur sent comforting chills through Patton’s body.

“I was trailing you and your friend since you walked into these woods. I fully intended on devouring your soul. If I were you, I wouldn’t have even thought to come in these woods. You stick out like a sore thumb.” Its ear flickered. “Before I could, you were chased by Arthdu.”

“Arthdu?”

“The black smoking bear you encountered.” The wolf sighed. “I’m sorry about your friend, by the way.”

A sting hit Patton’s heart, and he looked away.

The wolf continued, “I followed you over the canyon. It’s easy for me to jump across. And then that’s when I found you with a Gobaith.”
“Is that what that was?” Patton asked.

The wolf nodded. “You know they bring you luck, right?”

“Of course. They taught me all about it during my training,” Patton spoke. “We learned a lot about mythological creatures in the forest.”

“Apparently not enough.”

The comment hurt more than it should have, but Patton swallowed his shame. He tried to push himself up into a sitting position. His stomach protested. Patton grunted and started to fall back down until a nose pushed from behind his back, steadying him.

The surrounding area looked less eerie. The familiar fog ghosted over the grass and danced over the babbling creek in front of him. Light rays shone through the trees and shimmered across the water. The brush was still yellow but looked more alive than the rest of the forest. No wonder Patton felt such peace here.

“You really should still rest,” the wolf mumbled.

“I have to find the sorcerer,” Patton spoke. “I have to get him to help my friend Joan, and if he can save Roman…” Patton’s voice caught in his throat.

The wolf sighed. “I doubt your friend survived a fall that far. And even if he did, he wouldn’t be able to protect himself if Arthdu found him first, unless he had a really strong grip on his sword.”

“I have faith in him,” Patton responded. He started to stand, and the wolf guided him up with its nose. Its fur tickled the side of Patton’s hand. The wolf’s shoulders stiffened as Patton ran his fingers through the fur.

“Don’t get comfortable,” the wolf growled. “Just because I saved you doesn’t mean I won’t eat you later.”

“I doubt that,” Patton responded. He looked down at the wolf. “I can feel you have no intention of hurting me.”

The wolf sighed and walked past Patton. It stood at the water’s edge and stared at its reflection for a moment. Patton noted how its fur absorbed all light and left no trace of the sun’s glow. He wobbled as his balance wavered, but a quick step backward braced him. The wolf’s gaze locked onto his eyes. Patton watched it glanced up and down his body before it sat.

“The sorcerer you’re looking for is named Logan, and he prefers not to be disturbed.”

Patton’s heart skipped a beat. “You know him?”

The wolf snuffed. “We may have crossed paths once or twice.”

“Then can you take me to him?”

The wolf’s body tensed, and he looked at Patton with a snarl. Patton took a step backward. His foot caught in his cloak, and he fell onto the grass below him. His whole body shook from the anger that rolled through its growl.

“I’m not some guard dog for humans,” it snarled.

“You- you don’t have to if you don’t want to,” Patton replied. “It was just a thought since I am
alone, and I-” Patton brought his hands up to rub his arms- “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have asked. I’m not your problem.”

The wolf sighed and shook its head.

“You know, I could’ve left you to die so many times in those woods,” the wolf growled, “but I didn’t. I took responsibility for your life without even meaning to.”

“Why?”

The question caught the wolf off guard, and both his ears flattened. Its head lowered, and it thought about its answer for a moment.

“Because you remind me of when I first entered these woods.”

The comment filled Patton with so much sorrow and pain he nearly collapsed. He held his ground and watched the wolf turn away from him.

“Thank you.”

The wolf turned his attention back to Patton, its head tilted to the side in question. Patton couldn’t help but smile.

He continued, “For rescuing me. I appreciate it.”

The wolf laughed and looked down at the ground, its ears listening for Patton.

“Don’t thank me yet. You’re still not out of these woods.”

Patton stood and brushed himself off. He pulled his cape closer around his shoulders and drew the hood over his head.

“I’m sure I can manage from here on my own.” He said a quick goodbye and started walking into the woods. Patton didn’t know where he was or where the path resided, but he was sure he’d find something. He had to pull through. Joan was counting on him.

Patton turned his head as soft paws padded through the brush. The wolf trailed behind him, its head lowered and tail swishing in annoyance.

“You’re going in the wrong direction.” It lifted its head. “Logan’s home is to the east. You’re going west.”

“Oh,” Patton let out a light chuckle. “I… thank you.”

The wolf sighed and walked to his side. “If we travel through the day, we should be able to make it by nightfall tomorrow.”

“We?”

The wolf looked up and nodded its head. Patton’s heart jumped as he looked down at the wolf’s eyes. It looked ahead and started to lead the way.

“I’m Patton, by the way.”

“I know.” The wolf laughed. “My name does not translate into your tongue well.”
“Try me.”

The wolf thought for a moment and spewed something from its mouth. Patton focused and creased his brow. The only thing he managed to make out was “virgil” through the onslaught of harsh sounds.

“Maybe I can call you Virgil, or Virge for short,” Patton mused.

The wolf let out a breathy laugh and shook its head. “Virgil it is.”
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

With Virgil at his side, Patton feels more confident walking the forest. Sure, things are still out to kill him, but it helps when you have a guard dog at your side. However, the forest is still dangerous, and Patton needs to remember not all that glitters is gold.

Chapter warnings: Minor injuries, blood, brief non-con (nothing sexual, just physical)
Word count: 5260

“So, tell me,” Virgil looked up as Patton stopped humming, “what’s someone like you doing in a hellhole like this?”

“I told you, I’m going to look for the sorcerer-”

“No, I mean you,” Virgil sighed. “Why did your king send an Empath into these woods? Isn’t this like a knight’s quest or something?”

Patton chuckled and looked down at his feet. “Well, yeah, that’s why my friend Roman was here. I was trying to stop him.”

“I see that worked well for you.”

“Roman’s always been headstrong,” Patton recalled the many adventures they had as kids. Usually Roman got into some kind of shenanigan, and he dragged Patton and Thomas along as collateral damage. Patton sighed and raised his head to the path before them, and continued, “but no matter what, he always managed to get us back out of trouble.”

Virgil flicked his ear behind them. He slowed his pace and raised his head high. Patton looked down at him and brought an eyebrow up in question. Without a word, Virgil returned to his normal pace. Patton shrugged it off.

Or at least he did the first three times Virgil did it.

“What are you doing?” he asked.

“Listening,” came Virgil’s short reply.

Patton fidgeted with his cloak strings. “Is there something following us?”

“No, I’m just listening,” Virgil responded. Patton sensed the unease pouring from Virgil’s taut shoulders and stopped. Virgil slowed to a halt and turned his head to glare at Patton.

“I can feel you’re nervous.”

“I’m always nervous,” Virgil snuffed. “There’s a lot of things out there that can kill you before you can blink. And now that I have a defenseless human to protect- no offense-”

“It’s fine,” Patton replied. He caught up to Virgil’s side and kept his pace. The odd couple shuffled
through the clearing side by side.

Either Virgil made the forest less spooky, or Patton looked less grim upon to his surroundings. The sky looked less like bile and more like a sunflower. The grass held more colorful plants. The breeze didn’t smell as sour, and the scent of honey replaced it. Its cool touch caressed Patton’s cheeks.

Virgil looked up at the sky. He stopped, and the scruff of his neck bristled. Patton stopped as a low growl tore through Virgil’s throat.

“What?” he asked. He looked up to try and see what Virgil spied, but only tree branches stared back at him.

“Back up,” Virgil ordered and took two cautionary steps backward. Patton obeyed and took a step back.

Several low chittering noises called from the trees. Patton looked around, but the only thing he saw were rows of leaves. A wave of anger hit Patton in the chest. Whatever those things were, they weren’t happy they were there.

“Virgil, what is that?” Patton asked.

“Rascadar,” Virgil replied, “nasty little territorial rats with wings.”

“Oh,” Patton’s voice cracked. He heard more angry growls join the chorus. “They travel in groups I guess.”

“What?”

A brown blur plopped onto the ground. The creature itself was no bigger than Patton’s chest. Two long white streaks ran down its eyes and met at the tip of its muzzle. Its beady brown eyes locked onto the two of them, and it extended its furry wings while hissing.

“Relax, we’re going,” Virgil growled. His ear tilted back as more hisses behind them, and he turned his head. Patton jumped back as one lunged for his head. Virgil snapped as it sailed past and nearly grabbed it in his jaw. The Rascadar squeaked in surprise. He let out a deep warning bark, shaking the trees around them.

The Rascadar seemed wary for a moment. They continued to congregate on the path but refused to touch either Patton or Virgil.

“How good are you at running?” Virgil asked.

Patton thought for a moment. “I guess I’m okay-”

“Then go!” Virgil pushed Patton forward with his nose. Patton took off. The creatures cried out as they pursued. Virgil kept pace with Patton and stole a glance over his shoulder every once and awhile.

“Don’t you move faster?” he growled.

“I only have two legs!” Patton shot back.

A yelp and Virgil left Patton’s side. Patton looked behind him as Virgil fended off a Rascadar attached to his back. More swarmed around him, and Virgil snapped at a few before catching up to
Patton’s pace.

Patton let out a surprised gasp as Virgil shoved his head into his backside. He lost his balance and toppled backward. Virgil’s soft fur caught his fall. His body shook, and Patton realized he was on Virgil’s back. He did his best to sit up without falling off. Virgil’s strong shoulder muscles rippled beneath his legs.

Patton’s eyes teared up as the wind stung them. He dug his fingers into Virgil’s scruff to steady himself. His back ached, and he stole a glance behind him. The Rascadar continued to follow them, their screeches of anger blurring Patton’s senses.

The two moved through the forest as one. Patton leaned low as a branch threatened to knock him off. Left, right, left, right. How did Virgil know where he was going? How could he move this fast? Virgil leaped over a log, and Patton grabbed on tighter to keep his balance.

For a moment, Patton felt like he was flying.

Virgil yelped as the ground opened up underneath them. His paws spread as they slid on dirt and rock. Patton’s balance capsized. He tumbled over Virgil’s shoulders and rolled down the steep hill. Stones scraped his clothing and tore it.

He tumbled to a stop at the bottom and groaned. Virgil landed to his left with a yelp. He pushed himself up onto his paws and cried out as pain shot through his left leg. Patton gasped. His wrist throbbed and felt broken. He cradled it close to his chest as he looked up.

The Rascadar screeched from the top of the hill and taunted them, but none dared go over the side. Relief slackened Patton’s shoulders.

“You okay?” Virgil asked. Patton snapped his head toward Virgil.

“I’m fine, but are you?” Patton asked.

He watched Virgil limp over to his side and flop down against his leg. Virgil leaned down to lick his front paw and flinched.

“I think it’s sprained, but I should be okay,” he replied. He rested his head on the ground. Patton noticed a huge tear on Virgil’s back where he was bitten. Several red streaks freckled his fur, but he couldn’t make out the cuts through Virgil’s thick hair. “My wounds heal fast, but this might put our journey off for a day or two.”

Virgil’s fur warmed Patton’s leg, and Patton leaned against the rock behind them.

The forest opened up into a meadow with wild red, orange, and yellow flowers. A breeze blew them side to side and created the illusion of dancing fire. A bird-like creature cawed as it sailed through the trees and swooped overhead; its long feathered tail trailed it like a scarlet scarf. For the first time in two days, Patton saw the sun in all its warm glory. He basked in its glow. The chills from earlier left him, and he relaxed.

Virgil’s breathing beside him slowed, and he raised his head.

“How… how are you doing that?”

“Doing what?” Patton asked.

“I can’t really control it yet, but sometimes I can make others feel what I’m feeling by accident if I feel too strongly.” He paused. “You feel me?”

“I do.” If Virgil was human, Patton was sure he’d be smirking right now. Virgil laid his head back down on the grass and let out a long sigh. Patton shifted his weight, trying to ease the pain in his back.

Patton spoke, “Is there anything I can do to help you?”

“You just sitting there is nice.” Virgil’s ears perked up in front of him, and he flicked away a bug at his ear. “I mean, whatever you’re doing is working, so don’t stop.”

“I meant for the wounds.”

“Heh, no.” Virgil sighed. “There are not many plants that can heal wounds fast here. We’ll just have to wait until morning.”

Patton nodded his head and rested it against the rocks behind him. He watched the colors dance before him. His peaceful smile burned his cheeks as it pushed on some stray scrapes. He brought his fingers up to touch his skin and wondered how badly they bled. His fingers came back dotted with blood. He rubbed them together and dried his stained fingers on his red cloak.

As time continued, the unease returned to Virgil’s stiff muscles. Patton thought for a moment. He lifted a hand and let it hover over Virgil’s fur. After watching Virgil’s breathing, he let his fingers caress the tips of Virgil’s fur. Virgil’s head snapped up, and his gaze caught Patton’s wide eyes.

“I’m sorry, I should’ve—”

“No, it’s okay,” Virgil replied and put his head back down to rest. “You just startled me is all.”

Patton waited for three heartbeats before he pressed his hand down onto Virgil’s fur. He glided it across Virgil’s back and noted how soft his fur was. Patton studied Virgil’s face for any signs of distress, but the wolf made no further expressions. Virgil’s ease settled in Patton’s stomach. He continued to pet him as long as Virgil wanted, and Virgil leaned into Patton’s leg.

For a while, all they did was sit together as Patton stroked Virgil’s fur.

“Virgil, what are you exactly?” Patton asked.

Virgil’s body tensed, and Patton let his hand slide off of the wolf’s shoulders. His ears pointed away from Patton, pretending to be alert elsewhere.

“It’s okay if you don’t want to tell me,” Patton continued.

Virgil moaned and mumbled, “Some things are better left unknown, trust me.”

“I know whatever it is makes you sad.”

Virgil raised his head to look at Patton, who offered a sympathetic smile. Virgil glanced down at his paws and sighed.

“I’m not upset about what I am,” Virgil replied. “It’s... how others perceive me when I tell them what I am.”

Patton sighed. “I won’t push you, but if you ever want to tell me, I’m ready to listen, and I promise I won’t judge you.”
Virgil snuffed. “I’ve heard that before.”

“No, really.” Patton’s smile beamed. “There’s nothing you could do to get rid of me now. You’re stuck with me.”

Virgil’s eyes locked onto Patton’s smile, and a swell of happiness lifted Patton’s heart. Patton leaned against the rock, aware the sun started to set on the horizon. The wind blew a chill through his hair. He pulled his cloak off his shoulders, shifted around so he no longer sat on it, and draped it over his body like a blanket.

Bright blue lights danced over the meadow. They calmed Patton further, and he let his eyes close. The lights sent him a nice dream of his childhood.

Every summer, Roman, Thomas, and he would wander out in the courtyard of the castle trying to catch Firebugs. The bugs migrated from the cold southern islands and into their kingdom for a respite. Like their name, if startled, they would catch on fire. Their blue fire wasn’t dangerous per se, but it did sting. Patton lost count of how many times his fingers burned, not from himself but failed attempts of capture from Thomas and Roman. Patton had a way with the bugs. They sensed his calm and flittered inside his jar on their own. The two other boys marveled at Patton’s talent.

As the morning sun’s rays woke Patton, he felt a heavy weight on his lap. He looked down and noticed Virgil’s head resting on his legs, his eyes closed and breathing light.

Patton risked running a hand through Virgil’s fur. The blood from earlier dried and matted in places. Patton searched for any scrapes, but not a one met his fingers. Even the gash on Virgil's back healed, leaving a scar and peaking fresh fur. His wrist no longer hurt, which meant Virgil’s paw healed overnight as well.

Man, Virgil wasn’t kidding about the quick healing thing.

Patton idly continued to stroke Virgil’s fur. Dark clouds lined the horizon, and he wondered if it was storming at the castle. Patton’s ease wavered. A morning storm didn’t bother him, but he realized he was very much out in the open and exposed to the elements.

His unease woke Virgil. The wolf raised his head, and a sense of embarrassment rippled through Patton.

“You’re awake,” Virgil spoke with a yawn.

Patton smiled. “And so are you.”

“I was not sleeping,” Virgil snuffed. He shook his fur. “I don’t sleep. I was merely resting my eyes.”

Patton rolled his eyes. He stood and tied his red cloak around his shoulders. Virgil rose to his feet, and Patton felt his wrist twinge. Virgil’s paw mustn’t have fully recovered yet.

Virgil noticed as well and laid back down, crossing one paw over the other.

“I’m going to rest a little longer. My paw should be fully healed in a few hours,” Virgil spoke.

Patton sighed. That was an awfully long time to wait, and he got bored so easily. He looked into the field at the flowers and hummed.

“Do you mind,” Patton hesitated, “if I go and soak up some of the sunshine before the storm
Virgil’s unease cut through Patton’s stomach, and he looked around.

“Anything could see you out there,” Virgil whined.

Patton thought for a moment. “With the area being as open as it is, I should be able to see a threat coming a mile away. And don’t forget, I do have a dagger for self-defense.”

“Like you’d use it.” Virgil rolled his eyes.

Patton puffed out his chest, but even he knew the wolf was right.

“It’ll be okay. I promise not to draw attention to myself.”

Virgil sighed and rested his head on his paws. “Fine, but if anything comes after you, I’m letting it take you.”

“Sounds fair.”

Patton straightened out his shirt and strolled into the field of flowers. His cloak brushed up against the knee-high flowers and trailed behind him. The sun warmed his skin, and Patton brushed the cloak up over his shoulders. He rolled up his sleeves to his elbows. Freckle kissed skin soaked up the sun’s rays like a sponge, and Patton lifted his head to chase the chill on his cheeks.

The warm breeze comforted Patton’s body. He opened his eyes and looked around the field and noticed he wandered out into the middle, making Virgil appear the size of a puppy at the end of the cliff.

Patton held his arms out and flopped into the flowers. He heard a bark and a whine from Virgil and poked his head up. The wolf studied him with alert eyes, and he gave a gentle wave. Virgil set his head back down.

Patton chuckled. Virgil acted like the sky would fall any minute.

The disturbed flowers smelled of burning wood. They warmed Patton’s skin more than the sun’s rays. Patton stared up at the blue sky. He missed the way the white clouds rolled off the horizon of the mountains surrounding the castle, how the sunrise set the sky ablaze with passion for the new day, and how the gentle breeze always smelled of fresh blooming flowers.

It might not have been home, but Patton knew this was the closest he’d get to home for a while.

A shadow flew over the sun and blocked out the light for a moment. Patton sat up in the field. His eyes squinted then widened. Was that a dragon? Patton leaned back on his hands in awe as it circled the sky.

At least he did until he heard Virgil bark his name.

The dragon descended from the sky at a fast pace. Patton’s heart jumped. He ducked down into the flowers as the dragon soared over his head, its claws grazing the flowers and sending torn petals everywhere.

Patton took his cue and started running back to the cliff. He heard a roar above him but dared not look up. Rapid wings crescendoed behind him. The sunshine left Patton’s back, and a large shadow erased his. Claws dug into the fabric on his shoulders. Patton jumped into the grass on his stomach,
letting the dragon carry his cloak up into the air. He heard an offended screech, and the dragon dropped his cloak in the distance.

Patton looked up. Virgil charged toward him as fast as his injured paw would let him. Patton scurried to his feet and tried to meet him halfway.

Again the dragon approached. Patton pushed his legs as fast as they would carry him. Just a little farther. Virgil’s teeth bared and he snarled at the dragon gaining on Patton.

Patton risked a glance over his shoulder. Black talons reached out and grabbed his shoulders. Patton yelped as the dragon pushed him into the ground face first. Its claws punctured Patton’s skin. He swallowed a yell as the dragon’s wings blew a strong gust of wind around his body. His stomach left the ground, as did the rest of his body.

“Patton!” Virgil barked. He leaped into the air and snapped toward Patton’s pants leg. His jaw missed by the skin of his teeth. Virgil collapsed into the flowers with a yelp.

Patton struggled to get out of the dragon’s grip until he looked down. The tiny tree canopy spelled out his death sentence if it dropped him now. However, the scariest part was: he couldn’t feel any sort of emotion from the dragon. He couldn’t sense its intentions or what it wanted with him.

After flying for ages, the dragon started descending toward a cottage by a mountainside. Patton felt his feet scrape the ground. The dragon dropped him, and Patton flopped onto his stomach with a light grunt.

The dragon landed and slowed to a halt. Its scales shimmered like rubies. Sapphire eyes locked onto Patton as it laid down next to the cottage.

Patton pushed himself onto his knees. The cottage, made entirely of wood, beckoned him forward. Could this be the home of the sorcerer, Logan? Patton’s legs shook as he stood and wobbled forward. The dragon’s gaze never left his form, but it didn’t move to touch Patton again.

As Patton raised a hand to knock, the door opened itself. Patton swallowed as he looked around.

“H-hello?” he called out.

The house opened to one room. A pot boiled in a stone fireplace. A spindle knitted a scarf on its own, and a bed made of straw rested in the corner. Patton stepped inside and took in the wooden surroundings. The door closed with a thud and locked behind him.

“Uh,” Patton looked around. He saw the dragon peering in through the window and swallowed his fear. “Is anyone here?”

An egg jumped near the fireplace. Patton froze. The egg was as large as his head and had green freckled spots on a red shell. It cracked open, and a small dragon head popped out. It let out a screech and fought the rest of its way out.

Patton watched the dragon fall as it tried to balance itself. It shook its head and nearly fell from the force.

A wave of awe hit Patton’s chest, and he knelted down on the floor. The dragon studied him before waddling over to his position. Patton held out his hand, and the dragon sniffed it. It nuzzled its head into his palm and let out a content chirp.

“You’re absolutely adorable,” Patton squeaked and stopped himself from picking up the wild
animal.

“And rare too,” a voice called behind him. Patton turned.

A young woman with ebony hair stood behind him. Her brown corset surrounded a plain yellow dress, and her dark eyes studied Patton. He rose to his feet.

“I didn’t mean to intrude,” Patton spoke. “It’s just… your dragon picked me up and brought me here.”

She put her hands on her hips and chuckled. “That darn thing always bringing me strays from the forest. I’m sorry dear. My pet is attracted to shiny things.”

Patton’s eyes widened. She winked as she lifted her pot lid to examine its contents.

“I do hope you don’t mind parsley stew,” she continued. “Picking have been a bit slim, and conjured food doesn’t have that same taste as fresh grown vegetables, but good luck growing them in this dead-ass place. What’s your name, dear?”

“Patton,” he answered.

“Such a cute name for an innocent little Empath,” the sorcerer mused.

“I’m sorry,” Patton’s voice shook, “but who are you?”

The woman straightened and looked at him. She shook her head with a smirk.

“Oh, I guess my legend has faded from the palace walls.”

“Your… legend?”

“My name is of no importance,” she spoke. “I have one, but I prefer no one knows. I don’t want it being used against me. True names hold a power over a person, so a sorcerer is usually reluctant to let on what it is.”

Patton’s heart pounded in his chest.

“Sit and stay a while, Patton.”

A chair slid across the floor, and Patton felt his body press into the back of the wood. He squirmed but couldn’t stand. A teacup appeared in his hand.

“Do you take any sugar?”

Patton’s stunned lips failed to answer. The sorcerer flashed two lumps of sugar in the cup as a spoon stirred itself.

“Am I the first sorcerer you’ve ever met?” the woman asked.

Patton nodded his head. He stared at his reflection in the cup. The tea wobbled and distorted his frightened eyes.

“You seem nervous. Is something wrong?”

Patton looked up and caught her dark eyes once again. He swallowed and spoke, “Well, I was picked up against my will and dropped in a stranger’s house. I’m a bit…”
“Shaken,” the woman clicked her tongue. “I understand. I think I’d be scared too if I was picked off the ground by my shoulders and taken to a complete stranger’s house, especially when you’re used to sensing someone’s intentions and unable to.”

Patton tried to stand again, but he found his body unusually heavy. The teacup shook in his hands.

The woman chuckled. “It’s not you, Patton. It’s me. I sold my soul a long time ago for my gifts, so there’s nothing for you to feed off of.”

The little dragon clamored about the house, letting out contented squeaks. The woman leaned down and brushed its head. It nuzzled into her cheek and extended its wings.

“Dragons are such gentle creatures if trained right,” the sorcerer spoke, “and the most loyal of pets. But then again, you would know all about loyal pets, wouldn’t you?”

Patton’s back stiffened against the chair. “I don’t have-”

“Oh please, I see how you have that wolf demon wrapped around your little finger.” She blinked and took in Patton’s expression. “Oh, you didn’t know you were traveling this whole time with a creature from hell?”

Patton couldn’t help but feel disgusted. That was Virgil’s secret to tell, and he felt gross hearing it from an outside source.

“Most things in these woods came from hell,” the sorcerer continued. “I should know. I brought most of them here.”

“Why?”

The sorcerer clenched her jaw. She opened the window and let the baby dragon outside. The other dragon let out a content growl as its child nuzzled against its muzzle.

She shut the window with a loud bang, and Patton jumped. Tea spilled over the side of his cup and onto the saucer.

“Why?” the sorcerer mocked as she kept her back to him. Patton wished he swallowed the question instead of his saliva. “Because I nearly brought your kingdom to its knees with them.”

Flashes from his history lesson danced in Patton’s mind.

An ancient sorcerer once threatened the kingdom. Back then, magic was outlawed, and magic users were treated as second-class citizens. The sorcerer planned on overthrowing the king to bring acceptance of magical creatures. She summoned a large army of demons to join her.

Some magic folk weren’t as keen and protected the kingdom they were born in, despite the law. One of these sorcerers was Logan. He used all his magic to seal the woman and her creatures in an inescapable forest at the cost of his own freedom.

Hence why the forest was forbidden in the first place.

“It’s different now,” Patton responded. “Magic is seen as a gift.”

“Oh? Is that why Prince Thomas keeps you as a pet for when he’s feeling a little down?”

Patton’s anger bubbled in his gut. “He’s my friend.”
“Of course he is.” The witch rolled her eyes. “That’s why he forced his Empath friend into a sea of aura sensing demons in a sealed forest with little chance of survival?”

“I chose to come.” Patton’s voice rose with courage. “I came to help a friend, one who still needs me. He’s sick, and I need Lo-” Patton cut off his sentence with a smack of his hand.

The witch perked an eyebrow. “No, continue. I’m interested now.”

Patton shook his head back and forth.

“Oh, come now,” the woman purred. “You know the sorcerer’s name that sealed me here? I’d love to pay him a visit with a proper greeting. Tell me, Patton. I know you want to.”

Patton’s lips parted, and he raised his cup to stop his voice from speaking. His words bubbled into the tea.

The sorcerer waved her hand, and the tea vanished from Patton’s grip. She leaned down close to Patton’s face, her dark eyes almost void as he stared into them.

“What’s his name?” she asked again.

Patton opened his mouth to speak. A howl interrupted him, and a bang pounded from the other side of the door. Claws scraped against the wood. The dragon beside the cottage let out a low roar and shook the room. The sorcerer straightened and clenched her jaw.

“Oh, your guard dog finally found us,” she purred. She waved her hand and allowed the door to fly open.

Virgil crashed into the room, his chest heaving. He twisted his ears back and bared his fangs.

“Well, it’s been a while since I’ve seen you,” the sorcerer purred.

Virgil turned his attention toward Patton, and his gaze softened. “Are you alright?”

“Please, he’s a guest, and I haven’t raised a hand to even touch him.” She turned her head. “Isn’t that right, Patton?”

The mention of Patton’s name shook a snarl from Virgil’s jaw. The fur on his shoulder rose.

“Don’t you dare-”

“Do what?” the sorcerer batted her eyelashes. “Oh, you mean name control? What’s the matter? Don’t want me to use his name like I used yours all those years ago?”

Patton’s lips parted to speak, but no words came out. He flashed his eyes over to Virgil, whose confidence wavered.

“Some loyal pet you are,” the sorcerer clicked her tongue. “He knows nothing about you. I thought friends don’t lie to each other or was that just a lie too?”

“Don’t-”

“What’s the matter? Did I strike a nerve?” She turned her attention to Patton and continued, “Your little pet here was one of the first sorcerers to turn against the king. He sold his soul to become that thing.”
The anxiety pulsing from Virgil’s form drowned Patton’s senses. Virgil wouldn’t look Patton in the eye and instead kept his eyes trained on the floor. Patton tried to open his mouth, to reassure Virgil everything was going to be okay, but his voice vanished.

“No matter. Your little friend Patton here was just about to tell me that sorcerer’s name, so I can get the heck out of here.”

The information snapped Virgil’s head up. She sneered at Virgil.

The sorcerer purred, “What do you say, Patton? Feel like sharing his name yet? I know you want to.”

Patton’s body shook as he used all his energy to keep his lips sealed.

Virgil flashed his teeth and lunged at her.

“Heel, Anx.”

Virgil fell to his stomach with a yelp. The sorcerer smirked and flicked stray hair out of her way. She knelt down to Virgil’s face and chuckled.

“Didn’t think I still remembered your true name, did you?”

Virgil let out a low growl and flashed his fangs.

“Stop it,” Patton spoke and broke her gaze from Virgil. Patton’s body shook, stuck between confidence and fear. “He didn’t do anything to you.”

The sorcerer snuffed. “If only you knew, sweet little innocent Patton.” She slid closer to him and put a hand on the back of his chair. Her breath tickled his nose.

“Get away from him,” Virgil growled again. The sorcerer ignored him.

“What’s his name, Patton?”

“Lo-” Patton clenched his teeth and hissed out the rest. She grabbed his cheeks and earned a surprised yelp.

“What’s that, Patton? I didn’t hear you.”

“Ah-” Patton coughed and cleared his throat.

“You’re testing my patience, and I’m running rather thin.” She squeezed harder. “What’s his name, Patton? Tell me now.”

“Logan!” the name tore from his throat. Patton’s whole body collapsed into the chair, exhaustion overtaking him.

The sorcerer released his head, and it dropped to his chest.

“That’s it?” she let out a low chuckle. “The great and powerful sorcerer that locked me in this hell for 400 years is named something as common as Logan?”

Her eyes flashed to Virgil, who rested his head on the ground and panted heavily. She hummed and stepped toward her door.
“Thank you, gentlemen. I’ll make sure to tell Logan you both said hello.”

With an open and close of the door, the two were left in the solitude of the house. Patton’s body finally lifted off the chair, and he nearly stumbled forward. Virgil rose to his paws as well. He refused to look up and meet Patton’s gaze.

“I’m sorry,” Patton spoke as tears slipped down his face. Virgil’s pain set in the depths of his chest.

“No, I’m sorry,” Virgil said as he turned toward the door. “I should’ve never brought you into this. It’s my fault. I never meant for you to get hurt.”

“Virgil, it’s okay,” Patton spoke as he took a step forward. Virgil backed up and let out a warning growl. Patton froze, and Virgil pushed through the door. “Virgil, wait!”

Thunder boomed in the distance as Patton chased Virgil outside. He nearly lost sight of the wolf, until he caught his tail disappearing into the forest. Patton took off in his direction.

The dim light messed with Patton’s sense of direction. Virgil’s fur gave great camouflage in the dark woods, and Patton slowed to a halt. He put his hands on his knees as he tried to catch his breath.

“Oh, Virgil,” he whispered into the void. He wished he had his cloak to comfort him. Patton slowly walked deeper into the woods.

Everything looked the same, and thunder reminded him of the pending storm. Patton rubbed the chill from his arms and began looking for some sort of shelter. His body ached from fighting the sorcerer’s spell. He leaned on a tree to catch his breath.

“Patton?”

His head snapped up. That voice- it couldn’t be. Patton looked around and caught a familiar suit of armor glistening in the low light. His vision blurred with tears of joy.

“Roman. You’re alive.”
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Roman is determined to find Patton, but he ends up finding someone else. This person, however, is intent on losing Roman. Hilarity ensues?

--

Chapter warnings: Claustrophobia, Injuries, Cutting, Blood, light swearing (like PG swearing)

Word count: 5476

Roman knew once his grip slid on the wood the bridge sealed his fate.

He glanced to Patton and felt a twinge of regret. He shouldn’t have dragged him along. Now Patton was blind and helpless in a forest that would probably kill him in worse ways than a fall to jagged rocks below.

“Roman, please!” Patton choked out. Strong waves of fear and sorrow cascaded into Roman’s chest. Involuntary tears pricked his eyes.

Roman swore. His last memory of Patton would be him scared on the side of a cliff, and he hated it.

He sent a confident smile, hoping he could ease Patton’s fear. Come on, just one more smile. For me. Patton’s body shook with a suppressed sob. Roman’s grip slipped, and he watched the bridge shrink as gravity took him.

The cold water shocked Roman’s body. He lost all the breath in his lungs. His armor pushed him to the bottom of the river, and Roman struggled to swim in it. The current carried him along the river’s bottom. His lungs screamed for air.

Roman kicked off the bottom and surfaced for a second. He swallowed as much air as he could before the waves swallowed him. His back crashed into a rock, and he thanked his breastplate for saving his spine. His head, however, smacked into the rock’s smooth edge.

Roman cradled the bump forming on the back of his skull as the current carried him farther. He kicked again against the current. Roman grabbed a protruding rock to steady himself. He broke the surface. Roman coughed and cleared his lungs of water.

When he finally regained his sight, he froze. Nothing looked familiar. The cliff disappeared, and only trees lined the side of the riverbed.

Roman pushed off the rock and toward the river’s edge. His hand slid on the grass, but he brought his other arm up for balance. Roman pulled himself onto dry land. He flopped onto his back and expanded his lungs to full capacity to cough.

His hair clung to his face. Roman let his eyes rest. He took several more breaths before he sat up. Reality shook him to the core.

He was alive but very lost.
Roman stood and observed his surroundings. If he followed the river, he should be able to catch up to Patton once again. At least, he hoped Patton stayed put. Roman pictured Patton sitting at the cliff’s edge, those fearful eyes burning Roman’s heart. He clenched his hands into fists.

He was going to find Patton if it killed him.

Roman followed the river for what felt like forever. The cliff towered above the trees, its side covered in jagged rocks. Roman cracked his knuckles and gripped onto one. He steadied himself before reaching for another. Rock by rock, Roman climbed the steep mountainside.

A stone gave way, and Roman lost his balance. He fell onto his back with a grunt. The air left his lungs, and a smack to his head brought back the pain from before. His vision blurred. He clutched his head and rolled over to his side, trying not to get sick.

More rocks slid down the side and pinged against his armor. He glared up at the cliff. Stupid rock. Stupid gravity. Now he had to start all over.

A growl shook his chest, and Roman looked behind him. The bear demon from before stomped toward him, its fur soaked and teeth bared.

Roman reached to his side. He grabbed air. His eyes glanced down, and he realized he lost his sword in the fall. Roman swallowed his fear and rose to his feet. His armor scraped along the rocks.

The bear charged toward him, and Roman ducked. It crashed into the rocks behind him with a cry of pain. Roman took off into the woods. He stayed along the cliff’s edge, hoping that he’d find an easier way up.

Branches tore at his skin and tried to hinder his progress. The bear roared, and the ground shook as it pursued him. Think, Roman, think! He noticed a small opening in the rocks big enough for him to squeeze into. Roman crawled through and pushed his back into the stones.

The bear stopped at the hole. Its nose pressed into the clearing, and it blew in a puff of smoke. Roman coughed. It stung his eyes and consumed him in darkness.

Hah, gave a new meaning to smoking someone out.

The bear roared. Roman heard claws scrape against the armor of his foot, and he pulled it closer to his chest. The smoke cleared, and Roman realized he was just out of its reach.

The bear growled in frustration. It stood on its hind legs and pounded its body into the rocks above him. Tiny pebbles fell from the walls and pinged against Roman’s armor. The bear continued to throw his weight around.

A groan, and the rocks in front of him gave way. Roman yelped and shielded his face as the cliffside caved in. A blast of dust and rocks hit his armor, and he choked.

The bear growled again, this time muffled, and Roman cracked an eye open. Darkness surrounded him. The bear scraped its claws against rock and let out a discouraged growl. He heard its footsteps disappear.

Roman’s heart rate quickened, and he struggled toward the opening. His armor kept hitting the tight walls around him. Scrapped hands met the entrance, and he pushed on the rock. It refused to move. His breathing hitched. Roman tried again. His foot slid on the ground as he pushed. Still, it refused to move.
Roman tried to search for another rock to push out of his way. None would budge.

No, no he wasn’t about to die like this. Roman continued to push through desperation. His body shook, and the strength left his arms. His stomach caved in. He couldn’t breathe. He couldn’t think. Escape. He had to escape. He had to-

“Can anyone hear me!” he shouted. He knew it was stupid, but he had to try. “Hey, I-I’m stuck!”

Roman gave one last shove before he rested his wet forehead on the rock. The jagged side bit into his skin. The pain eased his fear somewhat.

“Please,” he breathed out. He felt his eyes sting with tears.

So, this is how it ended. He must say, he would have preferred to go in battle with an arrow through his heart. He felt cheated. Of all the ways for him to die, it had to be scared and helpless trapped in a shallow cave.

Something tapped twice on the rocks. Roman held his breath. He thought it was his imagination for a moment.

A voice asked, “Is someone in there?”

Roman’s body fell into a heap on the rocks. He thanked whoever was watching over him.

“Yes,” Roman replied, “That monster caved me in.”

Silence answered Roman, and he felt his heart pound out of his chest. Did they leave? Was he imagining things?

“Are you uninjured?”

“For the most part,” Roman replied. “Can you help me out?”

A smug chuckle, and the rocks shifted. Roman backed up and blinked as a silver light filtered through the cracks. The rocks parted like the red sea and rested on either side of the entrance. Roman scrambled out and stood to his feet, his legs welcoming the return to their full height.

He turned to face a man standing beside him. His eyes were as deep a blue as the ocean. Roman thanked the stars that Patton couldn’t feel the emotion rising through his gut. He cleared his throat.

“Thank you,” Roman said with a bow.

“A knight trapped in the cliffside,” he hummed. “That’s definitely one to write down in the history books.”

A blush rose to Roman’s cheeks. He spoke, “If I may, can I know your name?”

The man thought for a moment. “It’s rude to ask someone without introducing yourself, is it not?”

“Oh,” Roman bowed again, “Prince Roman: Captain of the Royal Knights at your service.”

“Charming.”

Roman looked up. “Now may I know your name?”

“No.”
Roman froze as the man turned and walked away. His jaw dropped as the man sauntered back into the woods.

“Hey, wait a minute!” Roman called out.

The man sighed. “I don’t like staying in one place too long.”

“I just—” Roman straightened- “I wanted to know if you’ve seen another man walking these woods. Maybe yay high, cute freckles, usually has an infectious smile, wears a red cloak—”

“I assure you, you are the only person I’ve met in these woods who was alive in the past 400 years.”

Four hundred years? Roman swallowed the nerves in his stomach.

“Would you… do you happen to be the great sorcerer?”

That stilled the man’s steps. He looked over his shoulder and hummed.

“I don’t go by that title, but I’d be lying if I said I didn’t enjoy it.”

Roman’s smile beamed. He caught up to the sorcerer’s side and earned a raised eyebrow.

“We’ve been looking- well I’ve been looking for you.” Roman swallowed how wrong that sounded. “One of my king’s lords is gravely ill, and we need your magic to save him.”

“I am not some magic pet you can command to aid you.”

“That’s why I came to ask.”

The sorcerer sighed and continued forward. Roman kept his pace, much to the magic user’s annoyance. He flicked blue eyes in Roman’s direction.

“Are you not going to leave me be?”

“With all due respect, I lost a friend trying to find you—”

“Congratulations.”

“-so I’m going to follow you until you agree.”

The sorcerer stopped. He held out his hands and drew a small silver circle. Roman watched him swing his hands out, making the circle grow to his full height. The sorcerer drew symbols around its rings, and a bunch of lines criss crossed through the center.

The sorcerer turned and pushed it toward him. Roman shrieked as it crashed into his chest. His back smacked into the tree. The rune turned into silver ropes that wrapped around his chest, securing him to the bark. Roman struggled, but he couldn’t pull free.

“Now you will leave me be,” the sorcerer said and continued on his journey. “Good day to you, Roman, and good luck. You’ll need it.”

“H-hey!” Roman struggled. “You can’t just leave me here!”

“Falsehood. That’s exactly what I’m doing.”
Oh what Roman wouldn’t give to have his sword right now. He pulled harder, but the ropes pulled
tighter in response.

A bird chirped above his head, and Roman glanced up. He didn’t see anything, but that didn’t
mean there wasn’t anything there. Roman turned his head back in the direction the sorcerer and
realized he was alone again. He struggled once more before lowering his head against his cool
breastplate.

Well, at least he wasn’t stuck in a cave this time.

The sunlight, or what was left of the sunlight, started to disappear. The silver ropes around his
chest glowed in the dim light, and Roman cursed. That would attract a lot of attention. He rested
his head against the tree and took in calming breaths. His legs trembled from standing for so long.

Roman let his grip slack, and the ropes kept him upright. At least he didn’t have to stand to sleep…
well if he could fall asleep that is.

A twig snapped, and Roman stiffened. He looked around the clearing, but nothing moved. He
swallowed thickly.

The leaves shuffled, and Roman’s heart stopped. He watched a dark shadow emerge from the
leaves and walk toward him on four paws. Roman could barely make out the purple glow of its
eyes. The low light caught a flash of teeth.

The animal smelled Roman’s feet and lifted its head. It resembled some sort of wolf, dark as the
night, with even darker spots under its eyes.

“Well, aren’t you just waiting for the picking,” it spoke without moving its jaw.

Oh, it talked. Great.

It continued, “Tell me, how’d you piss him off that bad?”

Roman held his breath. This thing knew the sorcerer. He thought for a moment before replying,
“Well?”

It snorted. “Like I’m telling you his name. I’m not that dumb, Princey.”

Roman felt a heat rise to his cheeks, and he scowled. “How did you know-”

“I’ve been following you and your friend since you entered this forest. You’re very loud. No
wonder Arthdu found you so easily. You know it’s half blind right? If you would’ve stopped
making noise, it would’ve left you alone.”

An annoyed flame lit in Roman’s stomach. “Then why don’t you go find it and get lost?”

“Nah.” The wolf bared its teeth. It reached toward Roman’s chest and bit onto the ropes. The wolf
pulled, and they snapped in half. Roman collapsed onto his hands and knees. The wolf hummed.
“There, that’s better.”

“Thank you,” Roman said as he stood.

“Don’t thank me just yet.”

“Why?”
“Because I don’t kill trapped animals.” It bared its teeth. “I would’ve rather had your friend, but I’ll settle for you instead.”

Roman backed up. His hand went to his side to grab his sword. Oh, wait.

The wolf stretched. “Since I’m faster than you, I’ll give you a ten second head start. That’s fair, right?”

“Wha-”

“One.”

Roman stiffened.

“Two- you should probably start now.”

Roman found his leg control button and sprinted into the wood.

“Three,” he heard the wolf call out with a laugh.

Roman dodged low tree branches, fallen logs, and protruding roots as he ran. The low light messed with his sense of direction, but if he followed the cliffside, he should run into the edge eventually, right? Roman strained his hearing. Nothing appeared to follow him… yet. He searched the surrounding wood for any place to hide.

Could it climb? Could it fly? How far could it jump?

Roman heard a howl behind him, and he broke into a cold sweat. His legs carried him into a bog of sorts. Thorny trees scratched his armor. He held his hand up to protect his face.

The ground opened up, and Roman screamed as he fell onto his hands and knees in a small creek. Thankfully the water was shallow, but still. If he could stop falling into water, that’d be great.

He stood and shook the mud from his gloves. Roman glanced over his shoulder. The wolf didn’t catch him yet. Maybe he lost it? He trudged through the mud and water to the other side of the creek.

A chill ran up his spine, reminding him his clothes were very much damp under his armor. The night breeze held little comfort. He couldn’t risk a fire. Where would he even rest for the night?

Roman pushed into a thick patch of brambles and into a small thicket. The thorny protection eased his mind a bit. Perhaps here.

Roman sat down in the mossy patch, hoping he wasn’t intruding on something’s home. He stared up at the sky and wished he could see the stars. He wished he could see Patton. He hoped Patton was even alive on his own in this wilderness.

The sorcerer’s words haunted him. He hadn’t seen a man… alive… in 400 years.

No, he couldn’t think like that. He’d find Patton, he’d get the sorcerer to help him, and Joan would get better. He wasn’t a failure… yet.

Roman allowed his eyes to slip closed. They welcomed the relief, and Roman’s consciousness faded.

He woke to a cold pink nose poking at his cheek. He cracked an eye open and saw three golden
eyes peering down at him.

“Oh,” he spoke as he sat up. The quick motion shocked the deer-like creature. It backed up but didn’t run. “I’m sorry, is this your home?”

The creature flicked its ear, keeping its eyes on Roman. He noticed the white and red speckled bandage around its neck, and his breathing hitched. He knew those heart patterns stitched into the cloth.

Patton was alive somewhere.

“What did you come from?” he asked, hoping the animal could speak as well. It merely continued to watch his movements. It lowered its nose to the moss and nosed it around.

“Yes, I’m sorry,” Roman continued and offered a smile. “You have a comfortable bed.”

The animal picked its head up and bit off some berries from the brambles. Roman’s own stomach growled. He wondered if the berry was poisonous, but he didn’t dare find out.

Roman stood and stretched. His joints creaked as much as his armor. He pushed his way through the brambles and to the edge of the muddy creek.

The sunrise lit the area a little better. The ground lay caked with mud, and a few specks floated in the air. The water smelled of rotting fish. Roman wrinkled his nose as he lifted a boot from the mud, earning a sick sucking noise, and continued on the creek’s edge.

Maybe if he was lucky, Patton wasn’t far.

He continued along the water’s edge and noticed someone crouching down by a bushel of flowers. His heart soared. Patton would definitely pick flowers if he was stressed. He ran toward the black shadow.

“Hey!” he called out. The black form stood, a shocked expression on his face.

“How-”

Roman slowed to a halt. Oh, of course.

“I wasn’t looking for you,” Roman spoke and rolled his eyes. “I mean, I was, but now I’m more interested in finding my friend.”

The sorcerer sighed. “You don’t give up easily, do you?”

“It’s not in my vocabulary book,” Roman responded.

The sorcerer hummed. “You carry a dictionary?”

“Wha- no.” Roman chuckled. “It’s an idiom.”

“An idiot is more like it.”

Roman scoffed, “At least I know what a figure of speech is.” The sorcerer shook his head and went back to his work. Careful fingers picked a few petals from a pink and purple freckled plant, and he placed them inside a brown pouch at his side.

“What are you doing?”
The sorcerer sighed. “I’m working, and you’re annoying.” He rose to his feet and looked around. Satisfied with what he saw, he stepped away from Roman. His hands glowed that familiar silver as the brambles cleared a path for him.

Roman followed, and the sorcerer released the bush. He yelped as it scratched his face. Roman brought his metal fingers up to massage the area. How rude! He pushed them out of his way and let his armor take most of the damage. He could polish it later.

The scraping noise stopped the sorcerer, and he groaned.

“Must you attract so much attention.”

“Look, I had a rough day yesterday,” Roman grumbled, “and I could use a little more sympathy.”

“My apologies your highness,” the sorcerer mumbled.

“Apology accepted.”

“That’s-” he shook his head and continued forward. The screeches from Roman’s armor shot through his head and gave him a headache. “Stop.”

“You stop.”

“What kind of childish-” he pinched the bridge of his nose. A quick glance in Roman’s direction, and Roman saw blue eyes sparkle in some sort of light. “What do I have to do to relieve the figurative thorn in my side?”

Roman thought for a moment. “You give me my sword back, and I will.”

“That’s it?” the sorcerer blinked. “Had I known that, I would’ve conjured one for you eons ago. I’ll need a piece of metal you do not wish to keep.”

Roman furrowed his brow. He looked down at the guards on the top of his legs. The red leather from his leg pads should protect him. He pulled as hard as he could until it freed itself from the stitching.

“Will this do?”

“It’s perfect.”

The sorcerer snapped off a long twig. It bit into his skin and revealed a slow trickle of blood. The sorcerer rubbed the blood off on the twig and the discarded metal, and he placed the branch on top of Roman’s armor. After raising his hands to draw a silver rune, he ghosted his silver glowing fingertips over the branch.

The objects glowed. Roman watched the metal wrap around the branch and elongate. It melted into a bright silver blade with a gold and red cross guard and a black grip.

Roman marveled and picked the sword up in his hand. Its blade was still warm. He tested it out and swung. The blade was unbelievably light. He slid it in the scabbard at his side.

“Thank you,” Roman said with a smile.

The sorcerer nodded his head. “Would you like me to make sure you no longer lose it?”

“That’d be great,” Roman chirped. He reached out to hold Roman’s hand.
“I’ll need you to remove your dominant gauntlet.”

Roman unclipped the lock of his right gauntlet and slid it off. The black of his soaked shirt wrinkled his skin.

The sorcerer raised Roman’s shirt sleeve. His burning fingers made Roman flinch. The sorcerer looked up and caught Roman’s eyes.

“I need to pierce your skin.”

“Excuse me?”

“Do I have permission to cut your wrist?”

Roman pulled his hand back and cradled it to his chest. “Is it necessary?”

“I need your blood in order to bond your weapon to you,” the sorcerer replied, “so yes, it is very necessary.”

Roman hesitated. He looked at the sword at his side and sighed.

“Okay, but if I die-”

“Please, I have not killed someone by accident with magic since I was 70 years of age.”

The phrase would’ve made Roman laugh if he wasn’t so nervous. He let the sorcerer’s warm hand take his once again. The sorcerer pulled a dagger from under his jacket. He drew a line about a finger’s length vertical on Roman’s wrist. Roman flinched. The sorcerer steadied Roman’s hand and drew a line intersecting the first cut. The mark resembled a sword.

The wound was shallow, but a slow trickle of blood dripped from Roman’s wrist. The sorcerer pulled Roman’s sword from his side and held it under the blood. It dripped onto the hilt and glowed gold.

“Fascinating.”

“What?” Roman looked up.

“You have a gold aura,” the sorcerer mused. “People with gold auras are creative and drawn to leadership.”

“Sounds about right.”

“And they’re usually narcissistic and arrogant.”

“Oh.” Roman hummed. “Still sounds right.”

Either it was his imagination, or the sorcerer cracked a smile.

“Repeat after me.” The sorcerer spewed a bunch of magical words Roman couldn’t understand. He paused when he realized Roman wasn’t following along. “I need you to say the incantation, Roman.”

“Yeah, I got that, but I don’t speak magic.”

“The correct term is Runic,” he responded and adjusted his glasses.
“Well excuse me.”

“You are excused.”

Roman opened his mouth to speak but let his comment die.

The sorcerer continued, this time much slower, “Cad whein-” he waited for Roman to repeat him- “de gleddyf-” another pause- “braichn heyff-” once more- “yahme danagos.”

Roman’s arm lit up with a golden light. He stared in awe as his wrist tingled. It soon stopped and left him half blind from the intense light. The red lines on his skin replaced with a black tattoo of his sword.

“Whoa,” he marveled. He flexed his fingers. The pain was gone, and his arm felt a bit heavier than before.

“Now, conjure it.”

Roman’s eyes looked up at the sorcerer. “How? Do I have to say that phrase?”

“No,” he sighed. He held his hand up in front of him, “you should merely need to swing your arm to brandish your weapon. It needs to slide out of your wrist after all.”

Roman’s eyebrows rose to his hairline as he looked at his wrist. No wonder his arm felt heavier.

“Make a quick motion like this,” he said and demonstrated. Roman put his right hand into a fist and yanked across his chest from his left shoulder to his right hip. His wrist burned, and he flinched. As he looked down, the familiar weight of a sword rested in his hand.

“Wow,” Roman lifted the blade. The sorcerer backed up as it swung toward his face. He sent an annoyed glare at Roman.

“Good, now I’ll be off, and you’ll leave me alone as bargained, correct?”

“Hmm?” Roman looked up. Oh. “Oh, yes, of course.”

A sigh of relief. “Finally. Wonderful doing business with you, Prince Roman.”

Roman watched the sorcerer walk down the creek’s edge. His heart told him to follow, but the sooner he found Patton, the sooner he could get back to convincing him to help them.

The brambles to his right rustled, and he wondered if the deer was back. If he could find it, maybe it could lead him to where Patton was.

A low screeching noise called from the sharp twigs. They magnified as more joined in, sounding like a weird eerie chorus. As Roman inched closer to inspect, an unbloomed brown flower poked out of the nest of twigs. It slithered across the ground.

“What in the world?” Roman bent down to examine it. The flower rose and kept the tips pointed at Roman. Water dripped from the cracks and down onto the ground.

“Roman!” he heard the sorcerer call his name. Wait, why would he call his name? Didn’t he want him to leave?

The plant opened its flower petals and screeched. Roman fell backwards with a yelp. Rows of sharp teeth lined its brown petals, and a snake-like tongue extended where the stigma should’ve been.
Roman pushed himself to his feet as the plant dove down to bite him. He nearly fell into the water’s edge but kept his balance. Tightening his grip on his sword, Roman took a swing. The plant hissed. Roman severed its stem, and its head fell to the ground. Green slime coated his sword. The action earned more pained hisses in front of him.

“What are you doing?” the sorcerer yelled as he came to his side. He grabbed onto Roman’s wrist and gave it a pull. “You don’t just stand there and stare at a Cigion’s head!”

“A what?”

“Did they teach you nothing about demonic plants?”

“No, because I live where they don’t exist!” Roman snapped. More and more plant heads poked from the brambles, all screeching and baring their teeth. They surrounded them on both sides, blocking any chance of escape.

The sorcerer drew another silver circle. A flame appeared in the middle, along with four other circles around the sides. As he finished the last rune, an orange flame lit in his left palm and extended to his elbow. It danced between his fingertips and didn’t appear to burn his skin at all.

“You sever the heads and distract it while I find the heart and burn it,” he replied. “If I don’t, more heads will keep growing from the mother plant.”

“Sounds manageable,” Roman replied and twisted his sword in his hand. “Come at me, Audrey.”

The sorcerer raised an eyebrow but didn’t inquire. A head leapt toward them, and Roman swung. It fell with a weak cry onto the ground. Another lunged forward. The sorcerer extended his palm and lit the plant on fire. It yelled as it turned to ash, and the fire traveled down its stem. The action caught the attention of the other plants, who no longer focused on Roman as they realized who the real threat was.

“Watch it!” Roman called as he stopped one from nipping at the sorcerer’s side. He sent a grateful nod to Roman and continued to push through the branches. Roman flanked his back, cutting off heads like chopping onions.

Roman yelped as a tongue pulled his leg out from under him. He fell into the brambles, and thorns bit into his skin. The plant tightened its grip around his leg and retreated. Roman cried out as he slid across the ground. It picked him up into the air upside down.

Roman saw the nest from above the air. They weren’t far off, but he hated seeing a hole in the ground with rows of teeth. The plant hovered directly over it, and Roman realized he was about to become a substitution for photosynthesis.

A fire lit under him, and the hole screamed. Its heads yelled as the fire traveled up their stems and caught them on fire as well. The flower holding Roman released his leg, and he fell towards a literal hole to hell.

Also not a way he wanted to die.

A silver light surrounded his body, and Roman stopped inches from the bonfire. He turned his head, and the sorcerer had a hand extended toward him, the flames on his hand long gone. Sweat dripped down his forehead, and he looked like he was going to be sick. He moved Roman over to the side, and the light released him. Roman fell with a grunt onto the ground.

Before Roman could thank him, the sorcerer yelled. Roman looked up as a plant had bit deeper
into the sorcerer’s side. It pulled him down onto the ground. Roman struggled to his feet and charged. Before the plant did anymore damage, he cut the bulb’s head from the stem.

Roman pulled the flower’s teeth from the sorcerer’s side and examined the damage. Blood dripped from the wound and puddled on the ground.

“Can you move,” Roman asked.

The sorcerer struggled to sit up. He yelped and laid back down.

Roman picked the sorcerer up into his arms, despite orders for him to release, and took off down the creek’s bank. The plant cried out one last time as the fire is extinguished its life.

Once a safe distance away, Roman put the sorcerer down on the ground. Red lines speckled his armor, but the black clothing on the sorcerer hid his wounds.

“I’d thank you, but you got me into that mess to begin with,” the sorcerer sighed. He opened his shirt to examine the damage and grimaced. “Judging by the rate I’m bleeding, I only have 20 minutes of consciousness, and I don’t have the strength to create a healing spell. My magic is too limited here.”

“Tell me what to do.”

The sorcerer thought for a moment. “Get me to my home, and I’ll be able to create a tonic for my wounds.” Roman moved to pick him up again, but the sorcerer pushed him away. “At least give me the dignity to walk.”

Roman rolled his eyes. “You’ll bleed out faster.”

“I’ll be fine.” He stood but collapsed onto his hands and knees once again. With a moan, he continued, “Perhaps your arm under my shoulder would suffice.”

“I’ll take that.” Roman put his arm under the sorcerer’s uninjured side and held him up. “Now, which way am I going?”

“Head south from here. I live at the end of the creek’s pond.”

“Okay, and south is?”

“That way.”

The two walked as one in the direction the sorcerer pointed. He wasn’t heavy, but Roman knew he put most of his weight on Roman’s shoulders.

“I guess I should thank you,” the sorcerer mumbled. His words slurred slightly, and Roman grimaced.

“Just stay with me, okay?”

“I shall try.”

Roman sighed. “How much farther anyway?”

“Not far,” he sighed. “However I might lose consciousness before we get there.”

Roman stopped. He tucked his other arm under the sorcerer’s legs, despite his protesting, and
cantered through the brambles. The sudden action pinched his wounds, and the sorcerer hissed out for Roman to slow. However, Roman kept his pace.

“I’ll be damned if I let someone fall because of my carelessness,” he snapped. “I refuse to lose another person in these godforsaken woods to my own stupidity.”

His words quieted the sorcerer, who looked away with a sigh.

“You are a strange one, Roman.”

“I try.”

“Perhaps… perhaps we got off on the wrong foot.”

“Well, you did tie me to a tree.”

“Yes, my apologies.”

“Don't worry about it.”

A silence settled between the two of them, save for the rhythmic clinking of metal as Roman moved.

“If you so desire, you can call me Logan.”

The phrase stunned Roman, and a smile forced itself to his lips. He held back a laugh.

“What?” Logan raised a brow. “Did I say something to amuse you?”

“No,” Roman said. “Your name. I… didn’t expect it.”

“Would another please you?”

Roman’s laugh shook in Logan’s chest, full of joy and another feeling Logan couldn’t quite understand. His heart seemed to vibrate and relocate into his throat.

“You just focus on staying alive until we get to your house, okay? Then you can think up a new name if you want to.”

Logan sighed and rested his too warm of a forehead on Roman’s breastplate.

“I shall try my best.”
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Roman gets Logan safely to his house, but the battle isn't over yet. Logan's consciousness is fading, and Roman has to do his best to be his knight in shining armor. Good thing that plant didn't pierce his heart, or they'd both be in trouble.

--

Chapter warnings: descriptions of injury, self depreciating thoughts, talks of death, I think that’s pretty much it

Word count: 5796

Chapter Notes

Apologies for this taking so long! If you follow me on Tumblr, you'll notice another AU kind of took over. >w<

Plus, I couldn't find a good cutoff for this chapter, hence why it's so long. Hopefully, the length will make up for the ridiculous amount of time it took me to produce this.

Enjoy~

“You’re looking for a wall that isn’t there.”

Roman blew hair out of his face. Logan must be losing his mind with his blood because that made no sense. How could a wall not be there? Its whole purpose was to keep out intruders.

“Can you at least tell me what color it is?”

“It’s colorless. Weren’t you paying attention? It isn’t there.”

“Right.”

“You’ll know it when you see it.”

Well, that was good to know. Roman snorted and kept his pace even. His run long turned into a walk. The creek’s pond rested before him, but there was no wall anywhere in sight. If this was a trick-

Roman noticed the trees wobble like a mirage as he moved. He stood and blinked. Did he imagine that? They stood still now. Maybe he was so hungry he was hallucinating things.

Oh great, now he was going insane too.

“Do you see it?” Logan asked, noticing Roman’s confused expression. He tried to push himself out of Roman’s grip, but Roman held firm.
“I think so?” Roman stepped toward the waves. The light caught in midair and simmered like glass between two tall trees. Roman furrowed his brow. He quickened his pace toward it. The treeline rippled faster like the reflection of a stream. He stopped between the two trees.

“Well?” Logan looked up at him and rose a brow. “I’m dying, Roman-”

“Yeah, I know.” Roman thought for a moment. He stood on one foot and poked the other forward.

His toe sent ripples across the air and disappeared before Roman’s eyes. Roman sucked in a breath. He marveled at it for a moment. Okay, breathe in, breathe out. He took cautious steps forward.

Roman’s body tingled as he entered the invisible wall. His stomach backflipped. A warm light hit Roman’s face, and he squinted. When he opened his eyes, his jaw fell open.

He stood in a lush green garden. The tree line opened up to a powder blue, and white puffy clouds floated across the afternoon sun. Once sickly green trees now looked healthy and vibrantly green, almost unreal. A cool breeze shifted Roman’s hair. The creek no longer smelled of rotting fish, and the fresh sweet scent of stream water replaced it. Flowers bloomed in a garden, all colors of the rainbow, and added to the fragrance.

He looked behind him. The forest looked just as dead over the invisible wall as it had a moment ago. He turned back around and marveled at the serene yard.

As he walked over a stone laid path, he noted the brush covered a twisting stone tower. A house stood tall beside it, covered in the same silver stone, and must’ve stood three stories high. A wooden roof covered the top, and brown shutters stood strong at the windows.

Roman walked up to the wooden door and twisted the golden handle. It opened with a slight creak.

Inside the door, a room opened up to a stone fireplace in the back. A bundle of blankets lay on the floor beside it with a feather pillow. A table with wooden chairs stood in the middle. To his left was a wooden staircase that spiraled to the second floor.

Logan hissed in Roman’s grip. Oh-

“Where can I put you?” Roman asked.

“Over on the blankets,” Logan replied. Roman walked to the back, noticing three fur blankets and a hand stitched one resting by the fireplace. Did Logan really sleep on the floor? He carefully placed Logan on the blankets, careful not to move his abdomen too much.

Logan took off his shall and jacket. Fingers wobbled as he unbuttoned his shirt and pulled it off his shoulders. Roman forgot he had the option to look away.

The bite covered most of Logan’s midsection to his left hip and under his ribcage. Purple spots freckled the surrounding area. Logan grimaced.

“Remy,” Logan called out.

Wait, who-

A dramatic yawn called from the second floor, and small steps pitter-pattered down the stairs. A large silver cat, with dark stripes on its forelegs and ghost stripes on the rest of its back came down the stairs. Its fur was long and mostly silver save for its face, belly, and paws, which were white.
The cats puffy tail flickered in annoyance.

“This better be good. You’re interrupting my second nap of the day.”

“You’ll get over it,” Logan hissed as his fingers brushed the wound.

“Whoa, what bit you?” The cat asked, ignoring Roman and coming to Logan’s side. It sniffed the wound. “That’s pretty deep. Why didn’t you heal yourself?”

“Couldn’t,” Logan panted out. “Used too much energy.”

The cat hummed. It noticed Roman standing beside it. “Picking up strays to replace me I see.”

Roman was too stunned to answer.

“Remy, I don’t have much time. I need you to gather honeysuckle petals, elderwood root, peppermint oil, and toadwood sap,” Logan informed.

Remy’s ear twitched. He bounded away from Logan and jumped onto the table next to the fireplace. Paws shifted around the bottles until he came back with a clear green bottle between his jaws. Its contents sloshed around as he jumped down.

“Here, make yourself useful,” Remy mumbled through the glass and handed it to Roman. He put it on the ground. “Pour this over the wound. It’ll slow the bleeding until I can get everything together.”

Roman nodded and obeyed. His fingers pulled the wooden cork, earning a pop, and a foul smell hit his nose. He resisted the urge to vomit.

“What the heck-”

“Hibra egg yolks,” Remy called back. “Or as I call it, piss water.”

Roman covered his mouth and dropped it into Logan’s skin. Logan hissed as it poured over his bruised skin. True to Remy’s word, the blood started to slow. Logan pushed his head into the back of his pillow, his face eerily pale.

“Just hang in there,” Roman murmured under his breath. He removed his glove and felt Logan’s sweaty forehead. It burned his fingers and earned a frown.

Bottles clinked to his side, and Roman turned his attention to the cat. It shuffled through several vials before gathering the ones Logan wanted together on the floor.

Satisfied with its work, it turned over toward Logan and mewed, “You want to mix it up?”

Logan didn’t respond. He stared up at the ceiling, his breathing light. Remy growled and flicked his tail.

“Sweetie, please,” Remy came to his side and batted Logan’s cheek. “I need you to focus.”

Logan hummed and closed his eyes.

“No, no-no, don’t do that. Sleeping is my job.” Remy pulled at Logan’s blankets. “You have to get up and mix the salve. I can’t do that for you.”

Roman turned his attention to the bristling cat. “Is there anything I can do to help?”
The cat flicked its head up to him. “Can you follow directions and mix stuff?”

Roman tried not to be offended. He nodded, and the cat nosed the bowl in his direction.

“Okay, so you need to spoon out the toadwood sap first. It’s the clear looking one.”

Roman grabbed the clear bottle and a spoon. He pulled out a spoonful and tipped it. It stuck to the spoon like glue. Roman grumbled as he banged the spoon off on the side of the wooden bowl. The sap eventually plopped in.

“Good. You need three more of those.”

Roman repeated the process and set the spoon back in the vile with the toadwood sap.

“Great, you’re doing fantastic.” Remy glanced over at Logan. “Now, put in three honeysuckle petals, a finger’s length of chopped elderwood root, and four drops of peppermint oil, in that order.”

Roman opened the box labeled “honeysuckle petals” and pulled out three yellow and orange flower petals. He dropped them into the bowl and opened another box with “elderwood root” on it. Four sticks sat in the box, and Roman measured one out to the size of his finger. He broke it into pieces over the bowl, noting the musty smell they released into the air. Finally, he picked up a small plastic bottle and pulled the top off. He tipped it and let four drops of peppermint oil take over the musty smell.

Roman looked over his shoulder. Remy rested on Logan’s cheek, his tail spooning Logan’s head. His blue eyes, just as blue as Logan’s, watched Roman work from a distance.

“Now, mash it together with that block of wood next to you until the petals are all crushed. It should turn into a yellow paste when you’re done.”

Roman picked up the sawed tree branch ring and pushed it into the paste. It stuck in the sap and refused to move. Roman struggled to get it to mix. Eventually, it became more fluid, and the sap started turning a yellow color. The smell of honey and peppermint overtook the musk. Roman stirred the stump until it easily glided through the paste.

Remy came to his side and hummed. “Way to go. Now I need you to spread that on his wounds with your fingers.”

“I’m not a sorcerer.”

“I really couldn’t care less right now.” Remy flicked his tail tip. “I can’t do it, and Logan isn’t responding.”

Roman swallowed. Logan lay unconscious on the blankets, his breathing shallow. Roman shifted his body closer to Logan and pulled the bowl over. Logan’s already pale skin looked nearly transparent in the low light.

Roman dipped his fingers into the cool paste. He reached over to Logan’s skin. Careful not to press too hard, Roman ghosted his fingers over the wound and covered the holes. Logan showed no sign of noticing. He continued his work, each stroke earning a glance up to look for any sort of change.

Logan’s skin warmed the salve on Roman’s fingers as he spread it. Remy’s eyes followed Roman’s movements, his tail flopping up and down on the floor and ears alert to Logan’s slow breathing. Roman stopped when all the contents of his bowl were empty.
“Fabulous,” Remy mumbled. He nosed Logan’s cheek and got a ghost of a moan in response. “As long as he’s alive, the paste will work its magic.”

Roman exhaled and released the pressure in his chest. Oh, thank god.

“So,” Remy continued and turned to face Roman. “What brings you to our neck of the woods?”

“I was looking for help,” Roman replied. “A friend of mine is sick, and I needed him to… well, help.”

“Now that’s irony,” Remy said with a chuckle. “Here you came looking for him to heal your friend, and you end up healing him. That’s golden.”

Roman shifted his weight on the floor. “How long should it take?”

“I dunno,” Remy mumbled. He sighed and laid down on Logan’s chest, his paw directly over Logan’s heart. “He seems to be responding okay I guess. I just give the magic, so I don’t really know what I’m doing.”

Roman pretended to understand and nodded his head.

His confusion must’ve reached Remy, who sighed and continued, “I’m his familiar. We’ve been bonded for—” Remy paused—“600 years, give or take a decade.”

Six hundred… years? How old was Logan exactly? Doesn’t the average sorcerer only live to be half a century? Why wasn’t he old and gray by now?

“How?”

“Not my secret to tell,” Remy said and stuck his tongue out. He studied Roman’s face as Roman tried to put the pieces together. Remy laughed and shook his head. “You wear your heart right on your sleeve, don’t ya?”

“How?”

Roman looked at the cat, who seemed to grin at him.

“I mean, it’s been a while since I’ve studied human’s expressions and stuff because you know he’s as expressionless as a stump—” the insult brought heat to Roman’s cheeks—“but you’re so easy to follow. You’re like a kid’s book.”

Roman pretended he cared about what Remy was babbling about. He looked down at his armor. Now that he was sure nothing would eat him, perhaps he could start getting his own body taken care of.

Roman started with his gauntlets. His limbs thanked the respite from its heavy grip. Roman took the rest off piece by piece. He rested his armor over in the corner and took a much needed deep breath. He rolled his shirt sleeves up to his elbows and heard a low whistle from… the cat?

“You are gorgeous,” Remy purred. Roman blinked, and Remy laughed. “What? I know a hot human when I see one.”

“Are you—”

“Nah. Been a cat all my life.” He flicked an ear. “Oh, you mean gay?”

Roman cleared his throat. Was that the question he wanted to ask?
Remy studied Roman’s movements and flicked his ear toward Logan. “Only as gay as him, which is pretty damn gay. He just doesn’t remember.”

“Wha-” Roman sputtered. “He’s- no I didn’t- I didn’t mean- I wasn’t implying- I-”

“Sweetie,” the cat purred. “I told you I can read you like a book. It’s not that hard to figure out. Your pheromones are practically all over the place. I’m sure if you be yourself, you’ll have him head over heels for you in no time.”

Roman’s face turned bright red and he looked away. Was he embarrassed? He never got embarrassed! He charmed tons of men back at the palace, and not one time did it ever make him blush. What the heckity heck was going on? Was he sick? Was it that paste?

Remy stretched and extended his claws. He kept one eye on Roman as he let the other slip closed. “You really are a fun one,” Remy mused. He started to purr as the other eye slipped closed with a yawn. “Don’t worry. He has a thing for princes. Now, if you excuse me, I was interrupted from my nap, so I’m just going to go back to that, m’kay? Deuces.”

Before Roman could protest, the cat fell asleep on Logan’s chest. What did Remy mean when he said Logan had a thing for royals? Was he implying- no, there was no way. He was sure he annoyed Logan to no bounds, and he wouldn’t be here had Logan not needed help. Which if not for Roman, he wouldn’t have been in trouble to begin with.

Roman brought his hands up to rub his bare forearms. He still held a chill from the river, and he knew at this rate he’d probably get sick from having a low body temperature for so long. He spied the wood in the fireplace and stood.

Logan wouldn’t mind if he lit a fire, right?

Roman rubbed two sticks together and watched the fire spark. The fire ate the wood and started to crackle. The heat warmed Roman’s fingertips, and he relished the relief.

Roman spared a glance over at Logan and slid his shirt over his head. He shook it, draped it over a nearby chair, and returned to the fire’s side. The heat ghosted over his skin and settled in his heart. His legs begged for respite, but there was no way he was taking his pants off in Logan’s house. No way. He compromised and took his boots off instead, placing them at the base of the mantle.

For a while, the fire’s crackle kept him company.

Remy’s words repeated in Roman’s head. What did he mean Logan didn’t remember? Was something in Logan’s past haunting him? Did someone hurt him? He shook his head. This wasn’t any of his business, so why was he worried about it? He was probably looking too deep into it again like he always did.

Roman rested his elbows on his knees and put his hands to his lips, blowing into them softly. The fire started to dry his pants legs. They stuck to them in awkward wrinkles, and no doubt he’d be told about how dumb he’d been to not change it sooner when Patton found him.

Patton.

His heart pulled. Patton was alone for too long. He was too sweet and too innocent. Something had to have gotten to him by now. Roman imagined Patton dangling above that plant, fear in his eyes, and helpless to stop it. As his mind dropped Patton into the hole, Roman squeezed his eyes shut with a grown.
He promised to protect him. He promised it’d be okay. He let him down, just like he let Thomas and Joan and the whole kingdom down.

Why couldn’t he just do something right for once?

A gentle gasp caught Roman’s attention, and he turned his head. His body stiffened.

Cold blue eyes locked onto him and stole his breath away. Roman remembered he could in fact move and glanced around. He picked up a loose blanket and wrapped it around his shoulders.

“Oh, you’re awake,” Roman replied, too cheerful and too strained and too high pitched. Wow, he was a mess.

Logan stared for a few moments longer, his eyebrows brought together in concentration as he focused. Roman noticed the cat had moved from Logan’s chest and now lay curled against his side.

“Yes, I… I think I am dreaming.”

Roman laughed and shook his head. “No, I can guarantee you, you’re very awake right now. How are you feeling?”

Logan pushed himself up on his elbows. Remy moaned but didn’t wake.

Logan examined his stomach with a brush of his fingertips. The holes were the size of pinpricks now, leaving purple bruises in their wake. His lips pulled into a tight line.

“Satisfactory.”

Roman nodded his head and turned back to the fire. He watched the flames dance for a moment. Logan shifted behind him, but Roman didn’t dare bring his eyes to him. He sat beside Roman, crossed his legs, and rested both hands on his lap.

Logan took a deep breath before continuing, “I guess the proper thing to do is to ask how you are feeling as well.”

Roman hummed. He was so used to Patton absorbing his emotions and acting appropriately; people didn’t ask how he was feeling. How was he feeling? Roman brought up the corner of his lip in concentration.

“I’m fending, I suppose,” Roman replied. Wow, that was the best thing he could come up with? Even he didn’t know what that meant. Logan’s eyes studied Roman for a moment. He went back to looking into the fire as well.

“I’m pleased to hear that.”

The two sat in the silence of the crackling fire. It flickered toward them as if urging them to continue the conversation, but for once Roman was at a loss for words. He was too conflicted, too wracked with guilt, and not feeling too much like himself at the moment.

“Thank you.”

“Oh, think nothing of it. Just doing my duty- you know- rescuing people and whatnot.” He rubbed his arms beneath the blanket.

What engaging small talk. What even was this conversation?
Logan again examined the skin on his side. His lips drew into a thin line. “I imagine those are going to scar, but at least they won’t be infected.”

“That’s always a plus.”

“Indeed. Scars are much easier to correct than infections.” He turned his head to Roman. “I can correct yours as well if you’d like.”

Roman’s jaw dropped as his face paled. He pulled the blanket closer to him as his stomach threatened to release all over the floor.

Logan rose a brow. “Did I say something to upset you?”

“I…” Roman swallowed thickly.

Of course Roman didn't want them. Of course he stared at the mirror every day, tracing each scar and hating how his skin mimicked a stitched doll. People tried to change his mind. Inspiring, his father told him. Enticing, his mother told him.

The only two who seemed silent on them were Patton and Thomas. Roman didn't need to ask. He knew they hated how the scars reminded them of all the times Roman nearly died. Neither of them had to live the stories behind the wound, but they understood their weight.

Roman wished he had flawless skin like Thomas. His brother reminded him of what he could be. He would give anything to be as beautiful.

So why did he hate Logan asking to get rid of them so much?

Logan cleared his throat. “I did not mean to offend you. If you’d rather keep them, I will respect your wishes.”

Roman glanced over at Logan, who refused to look up at him.

“No, I just… It's not… You weren't supposed to see them.”

“Then why remove your shirt?”

“I merely wanted to get out of my wet clothes.”

“You were wet?” Logan paused. “For how long?”

“Um,” Roman laughed lightly, “since we first met.”

Roman jumped as Logan’s hand went to his forehead. He turned, and Logan’s face was dangerously close to his. Wow, was it hot in here? Did the fire swell?

“You have an abnormally high body temperature,” Logan spoke and studied Roman’s cheeks. “You are turning red as well. Are you falling ill?”

Roman’s voice cracked as he tried to answer. He cleared his throat. “No. Well kind of. I guess?”

Remy burst into a fit of laughter behind them and rolled onto his back. Logan turned and rose a brow, and Roman scowled over Logan’s shoulder.

“You two are the most ridiculous things I’ve ever laid eyes on,” Remy spoke between laughs.
“I fail to see how Roman being ill is amusing,” Logan grumbled.

Remy shook his head and stretched. “I’m gonna fade into the void. You two enjoy sitting here and pining for each other, m’kay?”

Logan opened his mouth to retort, but Remy jumped away and up the stairs before he could inquire further.

“Why would he suggest we are turning into trees?” Logan mumbled. Roman resisted the urge to laugh. Logan sighed and shook his head. “No matter. Do you want me to produce something to chase away your-” Logan paused- “chills?”

This time Roman did laugh. He shook his head and brought the blanket closer. “No, I’m fine.”

“If you insist.”

Logan’s glance up and down proved he didn’t trust Roman’s judgment, but he was thankful Logan was going to leave him alone. Now if he could stop looking at him like that-

“-friend?”

Roman snapped to attention. “I’m sorry, what?”

Logan pursed his lips and tried again, “I’m thankful for your help, but shouldn’t you be looking for your friend?”

Oh. Right. Patton.

Roman swallowed hard and rubbed his arms. “I’m afraid Patton hasn’t made it this far, unfortunately. If that thing almost got me, I…” His throat refused to finish that sentence.

Logan’s brows pinched toward his eyes, and a grimace set on his lips.

“I truly am sorry about your friend, Roman. He sounded like a good man.”

“The understatement of the century,” Roman said with a dry laugh. “Patton and I have known each other since we were children. His mother was a servant in our kitchen, and I met him while Thomas and I were trying to steal a piece of cake before our party. He wouldn’t let us have a lick, because he said his mother put him in charge, and he wasn’t going to let her down even if the princes demanded it.”

“Brave or foolish?” Logan asked.

A fond smile rose on Roman’s lips. “His loyalty knows no bounds.”

“An admirable quality.”

Roman hummed in agreement and thought his next words over carefully. “He’s… got magic, like you.”

Logan’s eyebrows rose, and he looked over at Roman. “Then why do you doubt his existence in these woods? I’m sure he’s more than adequate to protect himself-”

“Because it’s not your kind of magic,” Roman replied. “He’s… I believe he calls himself an Empath.”
Logan got quiet and looked away. Roman didn’t miss the sharp inhale of breath or the pained look that came over Logan’s face.

“What? What’s wrong?”

“I-” Logan looked up at the fire and swallowed thickly. “Yes, I do believe your friend is most certainly gone at this rate then.”

Somehow the confirmation from Logan kicked him in the gut harder than worrying himself. He hid his eyes behind the blanket. God, Patton. He should’ve never brought him here. It was his fault. It was all his fault. Why didn’t he leave Patton at the castle where he’d be safe? Now he was gone, and it was all-

He jumped as a hand placed itself on his shoulder. Logan looked over at him, those blue eyes somehow sending warmth through him.

“I am sorry if I upset you,” Logan replied. “I know what it’s like to lose a close friend to malicious magic.”

“Even if it was your fault?” Roman spat out, quite unintentionally.

Logan sucked in a breath and stiffened, and the motion quirked Roman’s brow.

“It was very much my fault,” Logan answered. “I… he should have never been put in the situation he was in, and it cost him dearly.”

“What happened?” Roman asked and then reconsidered. “You don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to.”

“He,” Logan took in a deep breath. “Well, you know the history of magic in your kingdom, yes?”

Roman rolled his eyes. “Of course. It was my many-o-great grandfather who lifted the ban, maybe 5 years after you sealed the witch in the woods.”

Logan rose his brows, and Roman could’ve sworn he saw a slight smile. “He did?”

“Well of course! He was so awestruck with how you protected him, he thought maybe magic could help keep the kingdom safe instead of destroying it, like prophesied all those years ago.”

“Well, at least my sacrifice was not in total vain.” Logan paused. “I’m sure the legends never told you, however, I worked in the palace.”

“They did. They said despite your curse, you spent many a day tending to the king himself, not feeling bitter in the slightest. Truly an inspiration.”

Logan’s face grimaced. His fingers rose to the crook of his neck, and he rubbed it. “Is that what they called it?”

Roman felt a heavy weight sit on his chest. “Yes, but you know how stories tend to get distorted as time goes.”

“I was very bitter,” Logan grumbled. “No one should be forced into slavery.”

The news slapped Roman in the face. He felt a burst of rage and shame bubble in his stomach, and he blew it away with a shaky breath.
“You’re right, and I apologize.”

“It’s not you who forced me. My parents were the one who handed me over. They feared my power, but that’s what happens when you are born of mortal parents.” Logan sighed. “I was not alone in that castle. There were two other sorcerers there with me, both around my age. One would grow to be the sorcerer who rose up against your kingdom, and the other was… my best friend.”

“And what of their names?” Roman asked.

Logan shrugged. “Sorcerers are reluctant to share their names, as they have the power to control others with dark magic, and we would never call each other by the names the palace placed upon us.”

“I’m guessing they weren’t nice?”

“If you consider demon child a proper name.”

Roman flinched. “I'm sorry.”

Logan exhaled. “No matter. Their meaning remains infinitesimal to the story. The lady sorcerer who worked in the castle, she grew tired of our bonds, and she tried to recruit me and my friend to her side. I was adamant that her plan would fail, but he saw a glimmer of hope in her words. She fooled him into believing they could rise up against the palace and bring upon their freedom, but all I saw was a reigniting true prophecy. I tried to get my friend to listen, but he refused, asking if my freedom meant less than my… compromised feelings.”

Roman tried not to dwell too long on that last statement. “I’m guessing this story does not have a happy ending for your friend?”

“He… he sold his soul to her to give her the power to overtake the kingdom, but it cost him greatly. My friend was no longer my friend, but a demon from hell.”

Roman furrowed his brow. “That's not your fault.”

“But it was my choice to get into an argument with him. Instead of coming to him with compassion, I came to him with accusations. I pushed him toward her, and I'll never forgive myself for it.”

“I'm sure he'll forgive you the next time he sees you.”

“On the contrary, he actively avoids me.”

Roman blinked. “You mean, he's still alive?”

“They both are. Why do you think I haven't dropped these walls?”

“But you all should be dead, shouldn't you? I mean, the average sorcerer only lives 500 years or so.”

“This forest distorts time and space. It allows demons to run free and people to not age, all while stopping vegetation from growing and keeping her power and mine locked inside. It is a literal Hell on Earth.”

“So, as long as this forest is up, you can't leave?”

“No.” Logan sighed.
Roman glanced from Logan to back into the fire. “All these years in solitude… it must've been lonely.”

“Well, Remy has been more than enough company for me.”

Roman thought for a moment. He stood up and walked over to his half soaked shirt and gave it a shake. “I… guess I'll be taking my leave then.”

“Surely you wouldn't want to go through these woods at night?”

“It's only noon.”

“Yes, but the wood's edge is a day's journey if you don't rest. You traveled quite deep. I was amazed to find you as far in the woods as I did.”

“Better get started then.”

Roman gathered his armor. He kept stealing glances over at Logan, who seemed to be fighting with his thoughts. Logan’s eyes searched the floor for an answer, and his lips formed arguments unspoken.

“I wouldn’t be opposed to you spending the night,” Logan replied. “It would give me more peace of mind.”

“Afraid you'll miss me?” Roman joked, but the look on Logan’s face spoke anything but. Roman took in a deep breath. He sighed and looked out the window. “Logan, I-”

“You mentioned you needed my help,” Logan interrupted. “I am unfit to travel for the rest of the day, and for me to accompany you out into the wood today would be unwise. The two of us would have better traveling odds tomorrow morning.”

“You… you want to help?”

“I would hate for your friend’s sacrifice to go in vain. I can wait for you at the edge of the forest, and you can bring your ill person into the wood’s edge. There I can heal him, and you can return to your life back at the palace.”

“You don’t have to.”

“But I want to.” Logan drew a breath and released it. “It’s the least I could do.”

Roman’s lips involuntarily smiled. He closed his eyes and blew through his nose.

“That’s the best news I’ve heard since I got in this wood. Thank you, Logan. You have no idea what this means to me.”

“I assure you, I do,” Logan replied. He spied Remy laying at the top of the stairs, his tail thumping back and forth and his lips pulled up into a grin.

Logan chose to ignore the cat and turned his attention back to Roman, who stared out at the wood through the window.

“If you don’t mind me asking, what were you doing out there in the woods by yourself this morning?” Roman asked.

Logan remembered the pouch beside him. He pulled out the petals and examined them.
“Dragonweed is very good at subduing dragons,” Logan replied. “Think of it like catnip.”

“There are dragons?” Roman shouldn’t have been surprised.

“Yes. Rare, but here. She controls them, and I believe she called herself The Dragon Witch? I’m unsure if that’s the alias she goes by anymore.”

“Did they ever find you?”

“Not here. Magical creatures cannot cross the walls into my domain unless I allow them to,” Logan replied. “Should they run into my wall, they will be teleported to the other side, like a magic portal.”

Roman hummed. “So we’re safe here.”

“Theoretically, yes. However, she can still cross over the wall.”

“Well,” Roman puffed out his chest. “I’d like to see her try to cross over while I’m here. I’ll make sure she doesn’t harm you or anything in this camp.”

The words were out before Roman thought of their implication. He looked over at Logan, who seemed to hold mirth in his eyes, and a light smile ghosted over his face. That time he knew it was a smile. A heat rose through his chest, and Roman cleared his throat.

“So, I am under the protection of a prince again?” Logan adjusted his glasses. “I refuse to call you my knight in shining armor.”

“You’re no fun.” Roman’s eyes widened. “Wait, again?”

“The king who freed all the magic people. Did it happen to be Pri-King Damien?”

“Yes, why?”

A fond smile lit on Logan’s lips, and he looked away. Roman connected the dots between Logan’s demeanor and Remy’s words.

“You loved him,” Roman concluded. Logan’s eyes widened, and he met Roman’s gaze. Roman winked. “Don’t worry. Your secret is safe with me. But I must ask, did he love you too?”

“He did. In fact, my confidence in him is what sparked me to rebel against her wishes. Damian confided in me that he planned on removing the magic ban, and I would be free to do as I wished. He may not have been able to make our love official, but he was determined to prove it to the world in the most unconventional ways.”

Roman hummed. “I always knew I liked Damien. This confirms it.”

“You have a bit in common, I’m assuming, with your sympathy toward magic users?”

“You could say that,” Roman said and folded his shirt back on the chair. He returned to Logan’s side at the fire and sat a little too close, but Logan didn’t seem to mind.

The biggest question Roman wanted to ask sat at the back of his head. He wanted to ask, but for some reason, his gut told him this wasn’t the time. Besides, they only knew each other for a day. And it was none of his business. And, when this was all over, Logan was still very much trapped in these woods, so their odds of ever crossing paths again were zero to none.
But still. That one question kept repeating over and over.

Exactly what were Logan’s feelings toward him?
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

It seems as if things are starting to get back on track. The quest to heal Joan is back underway, and Roman ends up reuniting with Patton. But things can never go that smoothly, can they?

Chapter warnings: Violence, descriptions of injury, blood, manipulation, mentions of torture (from chapter 2)

Word count: 6079 (long boi)

“Logan, it’s almost noon, and you told me we’d go at the crack of dawn. Is wrapping up all those bottles really that necessary?”

“If one smashes, we will be up against the figurative creek without a paddle, and I’d rather not.”

Roman pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed. Logan had been packing supplies for about an hour now. Remy entertained himself with a ball of forgotten string from Logan’s supplies and batted it around the house, but even that started to get stale.

Logan took one last count of the items in his shoulder bag and slid it over his head.

“Finally!” Roman said and threw his hands up in the air. Logan paid no attention and lowered his arm to the floor. He whistled, and Remy’s ears perked up. Remy climbed up his arm and crawled into the hood of Logan’s jacket.

“I believe everything is in order,” he said as he straightened out his jacket.

“About time, Lo,” Remy mumbled. “I was starting to wonder if Roman could bring them here faster.”

“Probably,” Roman replied and made sure his armor was secure for the fourth time.

Logan and Roman exited, and Roman took one last look at the lush greenery and clear sky surrounding Logan’s house. He’d be lying if he said he didn’t enjoy laying under the stars last night. Of course, Logan insisted he sleep inside, but Roman needed to gaze up at the heavens last night. He needed some sort of comfort from home, and he knew he wouldn’t be getting it for some time.

The two stepped through the barrier, and Roman nearly gagged on the sour smell that hit his nose. Logan seemed unaffected, and Remy started coughing. Remy’s head poked out of the cloth hood and shook.

“If you produce another hairball in my clothing-”

“Relax. I just forgot what this place smells like, m’kay?”

Roman watched the beautiful gray colored pelt from Remy disappear into a muddy brown. His eyebrow rose, and Remy caught his gaze.
“Camouflage, sweetie,” Remy mused and rested his head against the crook of Logan’s neck. “I’d be chow before we’d reach the forest’s edge.”

Roman made a hum of understanding, and the group made their way through the forest. Somehow being with Logan made the trees less eerie, but he figured that had to do with company giving comfort. Remy ducked back inside the cloth of Logan’s hood. He could’ve sworn he heard the cat snoring once again.

“If we keep moving at this pace, we should be able to reach the forest’s edge by tomorrow afternoon,” Logan replied.

Roman groaned. “Does that include stopping to sleep?”

“Yes, of course,” Logan replied. “The average human–”

“I don’t need math,” Roman growled. Logan narrowed his eyes and looked away.

Remy’s head poked out of Logan’s hood, and Roman heard a low growl tear from his throat. Logan stopped in his tracks.

“Remy?”

“Her familiar is nearby,” Remy growled. Logan’s eyes widened, and he pulled Roman into nearby brush. Roman let out a yelp, and Logan covered his mouth. He resisted the temptation to lick Logan’s hand.

A low whooshing flapped over the sky, and Roman looked up to see the underbelly of a shimmering red dragon in the sky. His mouth opened in awe. Logan, however, clenched his teeth and pulled down into the brush deeper. Remy’s eyes were narrowed, and his lips curled back into a low hiss.

The dragon passed over them and disappeared into the distance.

“Was that really a dragon?” Roman spoke as he stood up from the brush.

“Unfortunately,” Logan replied. He looked around before hastening down the path. Roman followed and kept glancing over his shoulder. “I suggest if you don’t want it to catch us, you keep up.”

“I’d slay it before it could raise a hand to you,” Roman spoke and then paused, “or anyone else for that matter.”

Logan rolled his eyes. “You’d be turned to ash before you could produce a sword.”

“I beg your pardon!” Roman scoffed.

“You are excused.”

Roman sputtered, and Remy held in a snicker. He drew his head into Logan’s hood as Roman shot him a dirty look.

A low roll of thunder cascaded over the tree canopy, and the forest settled into a dull gray. Roman groaned. Of course there was a storm while they were in a hurry. Logan didn’t seem to care, or if he did he hid it well. Remy, on the other hand, started complaining about his fur getting wet.

“I’m dry clean only, you know,” Remy mumbled. “The rain always makes my fur all smelly and
poofy, and let me tell you, no one wants to see me on a bad fur day—"

Roman strained his ears as he heard a voice.

“...and do you know what happens if I start to smell like rotting fish? Things start to—”

Again, that voice. He knew that voice.

“...often, and I’d rather not—”

Roman shushed him. He froze in his tracks and held his breath. Remy’s ears perked up in Roman’s direction, and he hissed.

“Did you just—”

“Please, shut up,” Roman spat. Logan stopped and rose a brow.

A distant cry, someone calling out for a Virgil, echoed through the wood. Roman’s heart skipped a beat. He knew that voice!

Roman took off in the direction of the sound, leaving Logan calling after him. He jumped over logs, dodged tree branches, and nearly tripped over a large stone. His feet slid to a halt.

Resting against a tree a few paces away was Patton. His Patton. Roman fought the tears of relief rising to his eyes.

“Patton,” he called out. Patton’s head rose up to him, and he watched his friend’s form stiffen. Roman approached him, his steps gaining speed as he moved.

“Roman, you’re alive!” Patton cried as he leaped forward. The two crashed together. Roman picked Patton up in his arms and swung him around. Patton let out a giggle and wrapped his arms around Roman’s neck. Oh, did Roman miss that laugh! He put Patton’s feet back on the ground and rested his head on Patton’s forehead. His hands cradled Patton’s cheeks.

Patton was covered in dirt and had a few scratches, but for the most part, he appeared okay. Exhausted, but okay, and most importantly alive.

“You lost your cloak,” Roman noted.

Patton sighed and nodded. “I’m sorry. I know it was your favorite.”

“It matters not. I’m just grateful you’re still alive,” Roman spoke. He moved his hands to Patton’s shoulders. “I’m so sorry. I should have never brought you here.”

“It’s okay,” Patton replied and slid his arms around Roman’s neck. “I’m okay, and you’re okay, so everything’s going to be okay, okay?”

“Okay,” Roman replied with a light laugh.

Patton looked over Roman’s shoulder at the man approaching, and Roman turned his head. Logan’s posture was stiff, a bit too stiff, and Roman’s smile slipped away a little.

“Who’s that?” Patton asked.

Roman turned back to Patton. He knew Logan was hesitant to give his name, and after what Logan said about name control, he decided to use a title Patton would surely know. “The great wizard. I
found him.”

Logan kept his distance, and Remy’s head poked out of the back. Patton squealed out an “aww a kitty” before Logan started to approach them both once again.

“I’m glad you found your partner,” Logan spoke, his voice low. Roman flinched at the sudden sharpness.

“He’s not my-”

“Nice to meet you,” Patton interrupted and bowed. “It’s an honor, really.”

Logan hummed and walked past them. “If we want to make it, especially with your friend, we should keep moving. He’s going to attract a lot of unwanted attention.”

Patton rose a brow and looked up at Roman, but the latter didn’t say another word as he followed Logan at a distance. Patton caught up with Roman and kept close to his side, and Remy’s eyes kept trained on Patton. He smiled and waved, and the cat flicked its ears.

“His aura is-”

“Yes, Remy, I’m aware.”

“But the color-”

“I said, I’m aware, Remy.”

The cat turned his head and drew his lips into a curl. “Oh, this is golden. You’re jealous.”

“I assure you I am most certainly not.”

“Logan, please,” Remy purred. “As long as I’ve known you, only one other person could get under your skin like that-”

“Don’t-”

“-and you know how close he looks like-”

“Remy, I will turn you into a mushroom.”

The cat closed its lips and glanced back. He hummed in amusement and rested his head against the cloth of Logan’s hood.

A low chittering noise called out behind them, and Logan stopped in his tracks.

“Now what?” Roman groaned. Patton glanced over his shoulder, his eyes scanning for the noise as well.

Logan’s eye caught the trees moving behind them. Roman pushed himself in front of Patton and unsheathed his sword, earning a small gasp from Patton behind him.

Out of the bushes scampered a tiny dragon. It chirped upon seeing them and shook its wings. Roman lowered his sword slightly.

The dragon let out a happy chirp and charged forward. It scampered between Roman’s legs and crawled up Patton’s body, clung to his shoulder, and rubbed its head against his cheek. Patton let
“Well hello there,” Patton spoke. Roman turned to get a better look.

Logan produced a rune behind them, his eyes concentrated on Patton. Roman stepped in front of his friend.

“Don't you dare.”

“Roman, do you know what that thing is?”

“Yes, it’s a dragon, but you’re not blasting it while it’s on Patton’s shoulder.”

The dragon curled around Patton’s shoulders and let out a screech at Logan. Patton swallowed and brought up a hand to pet its head. The apprehension from Logan brought unease in his chest.

“Now, can we talk about this? It didn’t do anything to you,” Patton spoke.

“Patton, I assure you, that creature is anything but innocent.”

“But it’s not even a day old yet.”

Logan lowered his rune, his eyes wide. “How would you know that?”

“Because I was there when it hatched.”

The expression that came over Logan’s face sent chills down Patton’s spine. He took a step backward, feeling the rage crash into him like a horse.

“You mean, it imprinted on you?” Logan asked. His eyes narrowed.

“It… what?”

“Now wait a moment,” Roman spoke, his sword still kept at his side, “I’m not sure if you’re insisting what I think you are, but you are not killing it. It's practically defenseless. There's no honor in that.”

“I assure you, Roman, that thing is far from defenseless, even at a young age. It’s one of hers. I’m sure of it. Where did you see it hatch, Patton?”

Patton’s stomach dropped. He recalled the events from that morning, but for some reason, he couldn’t bring himself to tell them a witch trapped him in her house and nearly tortured him for fifteen minutes. Logan took a few steps forward, and Roman held his sword out at point.

“Stay there,” Roman ordered.

“You are being unreasonable,” Logan growled.

“No, you’re being heartless.”

“Roman—”

“Logan—”

The surge of emotions from both Logan and Roman choked Patton’s lungs. He took a few steps backward, his arms cradling his chest. The dragon squeaked at his side and nipped at the bare spot
on his neck.

“Are you sure this is your Patton, Roman?” Logan asked.

“Of course!” Roman snapped. “Who else would it be?”

“She is very good at shapeshifting.”

“You can't be serious.”

“Clearly I am.”

Roman turned and saw Patton backing up, his arms cradling his stomach and body shaking. Roman swallowed hard.

“Patton, what am I feeling right now?” he asked.

“Too much,” Patton managed to choke out. The dragon burrowed its claws into his hair as if massaging it and let out a screech in Roman's direction.

Roman turned in time to see Logan finishing up a rune, his eyes locked on Patton.

“Stop!”

He knew he wouldn't reach Logan in time. He stood his ground and tarnished the shot Logan had. The sorcerer narrowed his eyes.

“Don't make me disenchant you too. I worked hard on your arm.”

Roman held his form stiff and squared his jaw. Logan took in a deep breath, and Roman watched Remy’s ears flatten against his skull.

“Logan, you think maybe we should chill? She doesn’t give off an aura, and Patton’s is really bright.” He snuffed. “This is no time to let your emotions get in the way.”

Logan’s eyes shifted from Roman to Patton, and he took a deep breath. As he opened his mouth to speak, a low growl rolled from the brush.

“I’d listen to the furball if I were you.”

Patton’s eyes opened, and his head snapped up.

Virgil emerged from the brush, fur bristled, head low, and teeth bared. Logan took a step back as Remy hissed from Logan’s shoulder.

“Virgil!” Patton called out.

Virgil kept his eyes trained on Logan.

“Drop it.”

“You!”

Roman tightened the grip on his sword. Ignoring Patton’s advice, Roman charged at the wolf. Virgil twitched his ear in Roman’s direction. He backed up as Roman swung down. He jumped away from Roman, his interest from Logan stolen.
“Hey, I’m on your side!” Virgil barked, but Roman took another swing.

“You think I don’t remember you?” Roman yelled.

Virgil’s ears flattened as Roman’s sword nearly cut his paw. He glanced over at Patton, who started to walk forward but stopped as Logan told him not to move. A flame lit in Virgil’s chest. He let out a loud bark and tore passed Roman. Claws extended, he tackled Logan to the ground and pinned him on his back. Remy rolled out of Logan’s hood and landed with a yelp.

Virgil growled with his teeth bared. Logan stared back at his reflection in purple eyes.

“Virgil, don’t!” Patton cried out as he ran forward. Virgil’s ear twitched in his direction, but his gaze stayed on Logan.

Patton swung his arms around Virgil’s neck and pulled him into a hug. The action startled Virgil, and he let out a soft gasp. Patton burrowed his nose into Virgil’s fur and took in a deep breath. The dragon cried out from his shoulder and climbed down his back to the ground.

“Please don’t hurt him,” Patton mumbled into Virgil’s fur. “I don’t want anyone to get hurt anymore.”

Virgil lowered his head until it rested on Patton’s back, pulling him closer. His tail lowered, and he sighed.

“Are you okay?” he asked.

“I’m fine,” Patton assured, a much needed comfort rolling from Virgil’s body into his own, “at least now I am.”

Virgil closed his jaw and snuffed, blowing Logan’s hair backward. He removed his paw from Logan’s chest and stepped off.

Roman lowered his sword as Logan sat up. They shared a confused glance, but neither of them said a word. Virgil backed up from Patton’s side and stared down at the baby dragon in the grass.

“It followed you.”

“Yeah,” Patton replied and laughed nervously. The dragon circled around Patton’s legs and rested at his feet. “I think it likes me.”

Virgil’s ear flickered backward to listen for any threats. He raised a paw and batted at the dragon. The tiny creature climbed back up Patton’s body and rested on his head, its eyes staring at Virgil as if challenging him to a duel.

“There are worse things that could attach themselves here,” Virgil replied, “but I’m worried she’ll find you again through it.”

“Again?” Roman’s voice called from the side. “Who is she?”

Virgil’s head swung back, and he connected his gaze with Roman’s. Patton swallowed thickly.

“Can she do that?” he asked.

Logan piped up, “She controls all dragons in this wood. Chances are if it’s here, it’s acting like a spy for her, intentionally or unintentionally.”
Virgil pretended Logan didn’t exist and answered, “We have to get rid of it before she can track you.”

“But it’s just a baby,” Patton protested.

Virgil snuffed, “Yeah, a baby that could get you killed. It’s not a puppy, Patton.”

The dragon screeched at Virgil and slipped inside the back of Patton’s shirt. Patton wiggled around and laughed as it poked its head back out the front of his shirt.

“I don’t think it plans on going anywhere,” Patton replied. He pet its head, and it began to purr. Virgil rolled his eyes. “You sure it’s out to hurt us?”

“Absolutely,” Logan replied, somehow making it to Patton’s side without the two of them noticing. Virgil let out a warning growl, and Logan glanced down at him. “If I may, Patton, I’ll take it from you.”

Patton took a step backward, his eyes not leaving Logan’s. “You’re not going to hurt it, are you?”

“Patton, this is no time for sympathy.”

“It’s just a baby.”

“And a dangerous mythical creature.”

“I still think killing it is wrong.”

“You haven’t had to do it for 400 years.”

Patton’s eyes narrowed, and he held the dragon close to his chest. “You’re not touching it and that’s final.”

Logan opened his mouth to argue but closed it and sighed.

“Patton,” Roman spoke as he approached. “I know your heart is in the right place, but we really don’t have the time. Joan is dying, and we need to get back to them before something happens.”

That seemed to shake Patton, and he looked down at the tiny creature in his arms. It had its head nuzzled under his arm, and its body shook. Patton could feel the tiny bout of fear in its chest, and his heart ached.

“If you’re that worried about it, you two go and help Joan. I’ll figure out a way out by myself.”

“Absolutely not,” Roman protested. “I just found you. I’m not leaving you alone in these woods.”

“I won’t be alone,” Patton replied and looked down at Virgil. “At least, I hope not.”

Virgil let out an annoyed snort, and he swallowed thickly. “I still don’t think it’s a good idea to keep the thing, Patton, but… but if you’re that adamant about not getting rid of it.”

“Surely you’re not serious.”

Virgil growled and looked up at Logan, who did his best to look unfazed. “No one asked your opinion, you heartless-”

“Virgil,” Patton scolded, but Logan shrugged it off.
“It’s quite alright. I refuse to stoop down to his childish insults. He was the one who turned on me after all.”

“And you were trading me for your crush. Did you forget what they did to you, Logan? What they made us do? But because you fell for a pretty face, you wouldn’t help us out—”

“I told you Damian intended on freeing us,” Logan snapped, “but you decided to listen to her lies and became that thing.”

Virgil took a step back, teeth bared and ears flat. Logan swallowed thickly. With a low growl, Virgil nuzzled the small of Patton’s back, urging him away from the toxic conversation.

Logan sighed, “Virgil—”

“No, you said enough. I’ll get him out of these woods safely. You worry about your own skin like you always have.”

Roman took a step forward, and Logan held a hand out to stop him.

“Virgil, this doesn’t feel right,” Patton whispered. He stopped in his tracks and stole a glance back at Roman, who currently argued with Logan about following them.

“He’s not going to change his mind,” Virgil replied. “Once he thinks he’s right, there’s no way to make him think otherwise. If we stay with him, he’ll definitely kill your dragon.”

“But I don’t want to leave Roman, not after I just found him.”

Virgil sighed and stopped. He looked down at the ground. “Well then, what’s your choice? We can stay with him and leave the dragon, or we can get it as far away from him as we can and keep it safe. There is no inbetween.”

Patton looked down at the bundle of scales sleeping against his chest. He took in a deep breath and released it.

At some point, Roman must’ve pushed past Logan and marched toward them. Virgil’s ears perked as he approached, and he resisted the urge to growl.

“Patton, are you sure this dragon means that much to you?” Roman asked, his voice holding a softness to it. Patton swallowed hard and slowly nodded his head. Roman looked back at Logan then blew sharply through his nose. “It won’t be able to leave the forest with us, and you’ll have to leave it anyway. I hope you know that.”

“I just don’t want him to hurt it,” Patton replied. “It’s wrong, no matter if it hurt anyone or not.”

“Okay,” Roman spoke and put a hand on Patton’s shoulder. “I promise if you stay with us, I’ll help you keep it safe until our journey is over.”

“Oh really?”

“On my honor as a knight.”

Patton wrapped an arm around Roman and let out a small giggle, careful not to crush the dragon between them. Roman patted his back and stole a glance at Virgil. The wolf looked annoyed but not opposed. Roman pulled back and lead Patton toward Logan.

“He keeps it,” he replied.
“Then I hope you can find your way out on your own,” Logan replied. Remy, who at some point climbed back into the hood of Logan’s jacket, eyed them over his shoulder. “I refuse to travel with any one of her creatures.”

“And what’s wrong with my creatures?”

Logan turned, and a hiss tore through Remy’s throat.

The sorcerer flicked her hair over her shoulder and whistled. Patton squirmed as the dragon poked out from under his shirt and scurried across the grass toward its master. It burrowed down onto her shoulders and turned its head back toward them.

“I knew it,” Logan hissed.

“So nice to see you again,” the sorcerer called out with a smile.

“I wish I could say the same to you.”

“I was talking to your friends, Patton and Anx,” she replied.

Logan turned his head, and all the color drained from Patton’s face. Virgil pressed his fur into the side of Patton’s leg.

“We don’t want trouble,” Roman warned. The sorcerer tilted her head and hummed.

“I don’t think I’ve met you yet,” she replied. “Care to formally introduce yourself?”

Roman opened his mouth to speak, but Logan interrupted, “Leave. Now.”

“Leaving, hmm, now there’s an idea.” The sorcerer started walking toward them.

Roman drew his sword from his arm and held it at the ready. This slowed her down, and she rose her brow.

“You honestly think a sword would stop me? You must be dumber than you look.”

Roman scoffed.

“What do you want?” Logan asked. “You have your dragon, now leave us in peace.”

“I'd love to,” she replied, “especially since your friends were so nice to share a bit of personal information about you.”

Logan rose a brow. “That I cannot stand your company? That's far from personal.”

“I mean they gave me the key to my freedom, Logan.”

“How did you…” Logan narrowed his eyes, “when did you hear that name?”

The sorcerer's eyes flashed, and she kept her eyes locked on Logan. “I order you to lower these walls so that I can finish what I started all those years ago.”

Logan’s shoulders trembled, and he kept his eyes locked on her. A devilish smile came across her face.

“Well? I'm waiting,” she purred.
“I’m afraid,” Logan replied as a grin slid onto his lips, “there’s been a bit of a misunderstanding.”

Her smile faltered. “I understand plenty, Logan. Now, do as I command.”

Logan folded his arms, and his body stopped shaking. Remy burst into laughter over Logan’s shoulders, and he shook his head. “Wow, I thought you said Roman was the dumb one.”

Logan adjusted his glasses. “Did you honestly think I would trust anyone with my true name? Only one person knew, and I assure you, he’s long gone now.”

The sorcerer clenched her jaw and scowled. Her eyes flickered to Logan’s side, and her smile returned.

“Well, I assure you, there’s more than one way to kill you off.”

“Please, you’ve been trying for years, and you and I both know you haven’t come close yet.”

“Perhaps not,” she replied. “But he might. He is my pet after all.”

Virgil growled low and took a step backward.

“Haven’t you done enough to him already?”

“He chose this,” she replied. “He hated you so much he’d rather see you dead than believe you and your precious prince.”

Logan’s eyes widened. “You knew.”

“Of course I knew,” she said and rolled her eyes. “I overheard you and Damian talking in his chambers. He said once he became king, he’d free us all. But you know how many times I heard that before? None of them ever followed through. The whole family tree is tainted with lies. They build their kingdom on the power of fake hope, and once they no longer need your services, they toss you aside like some used doll, because you’re nothing like them, and you never will be.”

“I’m sorry your brother treated you that way, I really am, but Damian was different—”

“Damian was a pretty face and you fell for it!” Tears escaped her eyes, and she brushed them away quickly. “I couldn’t watch you destroy yourself like I did. I loved you too much. I did this for us, for all of us. Doesn’t that matter?”

“You’re being nonsensical,” Logan scoffed.

“Just like always, right? I’m glad to see nothing changed. Even after all these years of solitude, all you’ve ever cared about is yourself.” She turned her attention to Virgil, and her eyes glistened. “Anx, I order you to kill him and anyone who gets in your way.”

Logan’s head turned back to look at Virgil, who stiffened with his ears flat against his skull.

“Don’t stoop down to their level,” Logan spoke.

“Too late,” she spoke and shook her head. “Four hundred years too late.”

With a wave of her hand, she disappeared into a cloud of dust. However, her words still hovered over the group.

Virgil’s body trembled as he stared down at the ground. Logan took several steps backward, and
Remy jumped off his shoulders in front of him.

“Patton, Roman, get as far away from us as you can,” Logan ordered.

“There’s no way I’m leaving you to deal with that,” Roman replied and readied his sword.

“You cannot stop him,” Logan replied. “Once the curse is cast, there’s only one way to stop it.”

“So use your name control power to order him to stop!”

“It doesn’t work like that. Besides, I took an oath to never use name control to further my gain.”

“Well, you better think up something quick, or this is going to get messy.”

Virgil snarled, and he jumped toward Logan. Remy met him at equal speed and leaped forward. He clawed onto Virgil’s back and bit into the scruff. Virgil yelped and tried to reach him. Logan prepared a rune, drawing shapes similar to the one he tied Roman to a tree with.

Virgil rolled onto his back, and Remy fell with a cry. He shook his fur and again charged at Logan. The sorcerer knew he wouldn’t finish his spell in time. His eyes widened as Virgil jumped, claws outstretched and teeth severed.

Roman slid in front of Logan and swung his sword. Virgil yelped as the blade cut him across the chest and threw him to the left. He rolled in the grass, pushed himself back up, and charged at them again.

“You better work fast,” Roman warned. He swung at Virgil. Virgil dodged under the blade. Teeth flashed and met metal. Roman’s blade cut across Virgil’s muzzle and earned another yelp. Virgil backed up and shook, his paw rubbing the spot for a moment. He growled low. Roman circled the wolf, his eyes studying every move.

Roman caught Patton on his knees in the grass, far away from them. No doubt he felt every slice of Roman’s blade. He silently apologized. Hopefully, Patton would forgive him.

Virgil lashed out. Roman held up his sword. Paws scraped on metal, and Virgil pinned Roman to the ground. Roman’s head collided with a rock below, and his body went limp with a sharp gasp.

As Virgil lashed down at Roman’s neck, a cluster of vines collided into his body. He yelped and rolled to the side. The vines circled around his paws, body, and neck, pinning him to the ground. He let out a yell and struggled to chew on the rope around his front legs.

Logan knelt at Roman’s side and shook him. After getting no response, he looked up and shouted, “Patton, Remy, we have to get Roman out of here before Virgil frees himself.” His eyes widened as Patton slowly made his way over to Virgil. “Patton, don’t!”

Virgil noticed Patton’s presence and stopped chewing. He let out a warning growl, and Patton stopped in his tracks. However, after a few seconds, he started again.

“It’s okay, Virgil,” Patton spoke, his voice low. “It’s just me.”

Virgil’s violet eyes watched Patton as he knelt onto the ground. He snapped his jaw, and Patton recoiled for a moment. Virgil lost interest and went back to gnawing on the vines.

“Patton, it’s no use. Once someone is under the name spell, it’s impossible for us to break it until the task is completed,” Logan spoke. He struggled to get Roman up into his arms and looked over
at Remy. The cat stood a few paces away from Patton, his eyes alight with curiosity. “Remy—”

“Shh,” the cat snapped his head up, “Logan, at least let him try.”

“He’s going to get himself killed.”

The cat flicked his ear and continued to watch. Patton got close enough to raise his left hand to Virgil’s fur. The wolf barked and bit into Patton’s wrist.

The world froze. Patton swallowed a cry of pain as Virgil’s teeth drew blood. The wolf neither pursued his intent nor withdrew his jaw. He instead settled on growling, holding him and Patton in the same spot for what felt like ages. The vibrations rose through Patton’s arms and shook his chest. Virgil’s feeling of regret overshadowed the pain in his arm, and Patton swallowed hard.

“You don’t have to listen to her,” Patton spoke. “I know it’s hard. I’ve felt it too, but you can fight it off. You’re stronger than her.”

Virgil’s body shook. His jaws released and pressed back into Patton’s skin repeatedly. His eyes squeezed shut, and his chest heaved. Logan started to move Roman away from the clearing, preparing for Virgil to free himself and come after the both of them. Remy moved closer to Patton, his eyes drifting between Virgil and Patton as his tail swished back and forth.

Patton swallowed his pain and continued, “Come on, kiddo. I believe in you.”

Virgil’s body went limp, and his jaw released Patton’s arm. He licked his teeth and rested his head on the grass, his chest heaving with each gasp through his nose. Patton cradled his injured arm to his chest and examined the damage. He rose his other up to run a comforting pet through Virgil’s thick fur, just like he had that morning.

“Patton,” Virgil’s voice shook as he spoke.

“I’m right here,” Patton replied.

Virgil rested his head against Patton’s legs, and his body shook once more. He closed his eyes and let out a low whine.

“I’m sorry.”

“I forgive you.” Patton buried his head in the scruff of Virgil’s fur. He wrapped his arms around Virgil’s neck and pulled him as close as he could.

Remy hummed and padded over to Patton’s side. He examined the damage and looked over at Logan, who looked stuck between running and staying.

Remy leaped over to Logan’s side and spoke, “Well, how about that? It worked.”

“I’m surprised,” Logan replied, though his voice held exhaustion.

“I’m not,” Remy spoke and glanced over his shoulder. “Did you see the way he treated Patton? There’s definitely something there, and you know the name curse can only be broken by someone you love.”

Logan took a deep breath and nodded his head. “Yes, I’m aware.” Sensing the tension release, he rested Roman down in the grass and examined his head. A large gash cut through the skin, matting his hair with blood. Logan reached into his bag and pulled out a glass bottle of healing salve. He
spread it over the back of Roman’s head and watched the cut slowly start to disintegrate. It couldn’t disappear fast enough for Logan’s taste.

“Close call there too, huh?” Remy mused.

Logan ran his hand through Roman’s hair and felt his forehead. Roman held no fever. Satisfied with the results, he turned his attention to Patton, who currently sawed at the bonds around Virgil’s paws with a small dagger.

“Hopefully she’ll leave us be for now,” Logan mumbled, “but we can’t stay here much longer. If she gets ahold of him again, there’s no telling what she’ll do.”

Remy hummed in agreement. Patton finished the last of the ropes, and Virgil stood to shake his fur. He whined as he jostled the cut across his chest and looked down. It didn’t bleed nearly as much as it had before, but the soreness still held.

“Are you going to be okay?” Patton asked.

“Me?” Virgil snuffed. “You’re the one with a bleeding arm. I should be asking you that.”

“It’s not that bad.”

“Patton, don’t lie.”

He flinched at Virgil’s words as his wound throbbed, proving the wolf’s point. Patton looked down at his arm and took a deep breath. He reached into one of his pouches and pulled out a white cloth.

Patton spoke as he wound the cloth around his arm, “I’ll be okay. Back at the palace, healing was my specialty. I mean, I’m not a doctor, but I could mend wounds and stuff. With how often Roman opens his wounds because he refuses to rest after an adventure, it’s a handy skill.” Patton let out a light laugh. The bandage slipped, and Patton tried to wrap it again. Weaving a cloth around his own arm proved more difficult than he thought.

“Allow me,” Logan spoke as he knelt down at Patton’s side. Virgil kept his eyes trained on Logan but didn’t speak. Logan rubbed a bit of his healing salve on Patton’s arm and started to wind the cloth around it. “Did you know that would work, or were you just being reckless?”

“What would work?” Patton asked and tilted his head to the side.

“Coming to Virgil’s side and talking him out of the spell.”

Patton shrugged, “No, not really, but I had to try.”

Logan’s eyes flickered up at Patton’s face before they returned to his work. “You are either the most foolish person I’ve ever met or the truest hearted.”

Logan tied the end of the cloth and made sure everything was in place. He let out a low sigh and turned his attention back to Roman. Patton studied his gaze and followed it.

“He’s going to be okay, right?” Patton asked.

“He should wake soon,” Logan spoke. “I’m going to need help moving him until he does, however.”

“I’ll carry him,” Virgil spoke. Patton looked ready to object. “My chest should heal fast, and it’ll
help us get moving. It’s the least I could do for slowing you down.”

“If you’re sure,” Logan replied. He and Virgil walked over to Roman’s side. Virgil knelt down, and Logan helped steady Roman on his back. Once he was sure the knight would not fall, Virgil stood to his full size.

Remy climbed back up into Logan’s hood and spoke, “We should probably get moving while we still have light. I really don’t want her to find us here in the dark.”

“We can make camp farther down the path,” Logan informed. “There’s a group of trees that I can enchant like the one at my home. There, we can rest until we are able to travel again.”

The group of misfits started back into the wood, hoping to leave the sorcerer and any further complications behind them.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

This nightmare is almost over. Roman makes a promise, and Logan is deathly afraid he’ll do whatever it takes to make it a reality. Mistakes are made, and it may cost them more than what it was worth.

--

Chapter warnings: Manipulation, nerds who don’t know how to admit their feelings, that’s pretty much it
Word count: 5640

Chapter Notes

I apologize for nothing~

“Looogaaaan I’m exhausted. Can’t we rest for the night?”

“You’ve been sleeping in my hood all day. How can you be exhausted?”

“I’m hungry, m’kay? Fighting cursed demon wolfs takes a lot out of you- no offense!”

Virgil rolled his eyes and shook his head. The sun had started to set, and the forest around them shifted into a deep orange.

“The clearing is not too far from here,” Logan replied. He glanced over at Virgil’s back where Roman still rested, and he forced his attention back to the road. “Once we get there, I’ll put up the barrier and we’ll rest for the night.”

“Fine,” Remy mumbled and placed his head on Logan’s shoulder. His eyes glanced over to Patton, who had been rather quiet the whole journey. Remy noted how Patton’s white aura glowed like a lantern in the dark of night, and he wondered how the Empath had lasted so long on his own. Of course, it helped when you had a giant wolf protecting you. Remy smiled and slipped back into the cloth of Logan’s hood.

These losers better wise up about how they felt for each other, or Remy was going to throw a hissy fit.

“There,” Logan spoke and gestured to a meadow to their right. It was no bigger than a small pond, but it would house the five of them for the night. Logan stepped inside and looked around.

Virgil followed him in, and he looked around the clearing. “I don’t sense any danger, so you’re clear to set up.”

Patton came to Virgil’s side and looked around. “You sure you’ll be able to keep this place guarded?”
“Please,” Logan smirked and straightened out his jacket. “Protection spells are child’s play. I can hold them in my sleep.”

Remy jumped out of Logan’s hood and stretched in the grass. He shook his fur and glanced up at Logan, waiting for the signal.

Logan held his arms out in front of him. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes. Remy’s blue eyes lit up, and he sunk his claws into the dirt.

A gentle breeze blew around them. Logan’s arms flew out to his sides, and a silver circle sailed under his feet to the edge of the clearing. Virgil’s paws tingled as the magic snuck under them, and he shook his fur.

Logan’s hands floated in the air as if conducting the wind. Patton watched symbols start to glow on the ground and light up like numbers on a clock. Once they surrounded the circumference of the circle, a second circle jutted out from Logan’s feet and locked the letters in a transparent ring.

Logan opened his eyes. His blue irises glowed a soft silver. Logan’s hands gestured from one rune to another, connecting them with silver lines across the clearing.

Logan glanced down at Remy, and the cat walked across one of the lines to the top rune. As Remy’s paws touched the mark, it glowed brighter, sending a white light up in front of it. Remy bounded between the symbols, and a white wall of light followed him around the edge of the circle. Soon they were surrounded.

Logan lowered his hands, and the light started to fade away. The trees on the outside rippled like waves. Soon, the spell beneath their feet faded as well, but the magic still sat heavy in the air.

“Virgil, I would advise against going outside the circle,” Logan spoke, his voice echoing. “You may not make it back inside.”

“Noted,” Virgil replied. He collapsed into the grass with a large huff. Patton reached over and slipped Roman off of Virgil’s back, earning a soft moan from Roman. He held his breath. Roman’s eyes didn’t open, and Patton let out a heavy sigh.

Remy shook his fur and blinked the glow in his eyes away. “Okay, now I’m really tired.”

“You did well,” Logan spoke and leaned down. Remy climbed up into his arms and purred. Logan scratched him behind the ears as he strolled over to his three other companions. “How is he?”

“Still no fever, so that’s good,” Patton replied. “He still won’t wake up.”

Virgil looked away with a low whine. The blame he placed on his shoulders vibrated through Patton, and he swallowed Virgil’s regret the best he could.

“He may wake in the morning,” Logan spoke. “Would it be possible to get him out of his armor for the night?”

“He’s slept in it before,” Patton replied.

“Yes, but it gets very cold at night, and the metal may cool his body temperature too low.”

Patton sighed and nodded his head. Moving on memory, he started unlatching Roman’s gauntlets
first, like he’d seen him do so many times before. Piece by piece, they peeled Roman out of his armor and set it on the grass.

“It should be easier for him to breathe as well,” Logan spoke. “I can’t imagine that armor is light.”

“It’s not,” Patton replied. “I’ve tried moving in it before. It didn’t go well.”

The vision of Patton wearing Roman’s armor brought a laugh through Virgil’s throat. Patton glanced up, and Virgil cleared his throat and looked away.

Reducing Roman to the black underclothes of his armor reminded Patton he lost his red cloak. He wished he could wrap Roman up in it to help keep him warm. He settled for resting Roman’s head in his lap.

Logan set Remy down in the grass and stretched. He laid onto his back, folding his arms behind his head to look up at the speckled sky above them. Thankfully, the storm decided to pass them, or this would’ve been a miserable night. Remy nestled beside Logan’s chest and brought his tail over his nose with a contented sigh.

“We’ll continue when the sun rises,” Logan spoke. “Hopefully Roman will be well enough to travel on his own by then.”

Patton swallowed hard. What if Roman didn’t wake up? He ran a hand through his friend’s hair and sighed through his nose. Logan watched Patton’s movements from the corner of his eye and sighed.

“You and he must be very close,” Logan continued.

Patton nodded. “He and Thomas were my only real friends growing up. My mom kept me inside the palace walls because she was too afraid people would use me.”

Logan turned his head, and Patton’s lips moved a bit before he decided not to continue.

“I’m sure that it was for the best. Your world is different from the one I grew up in, but I imagine there are still people with malicious intent for people like us.”

Patton shrugged. He looked over at Virgil, who rested his head in his paws. The wolf flicked his ear as a bug flew toward it and let his eyes slip closed.

Logan’s voice grabbed Patton’s attention back, “What exactly do you feel toward Roman?”

“What do you mean?” Patton asked and tilted his head to the side.

Logan took a deep breath and chose his next words carefully. “Do you feel like you’d risk your life for him?”

“Well, of course. He’s done it so many times for me-”

“No, I mean, if it came down to a situation where it was life or death, would you stand in front of him and make sure he lives, even if your own life perishes in the process?”

Patton thought for a moment. Virgil’s head perked up, and he studied Logan’s constipated expression.

“I suppose. I would do my best, because I don’t like when anyone gets hurt, but I’m not too good at fighting.” He rose a brow. “Why?”
Logan took a deep breath and held it. He released it through his nose and looked up at the sky.

“Because it’s a protective feeling I haven’t felt in a while, and it concerns me,” Logan spoke.

“That’s because you have a crush on him,” Remy purred from his side.

“I most certainly do not,” Logan grumbled. “He just reminds me of someone I did protect long ago, nothing more. It’s an unconscious reaction to a nostalgic feeling.”

“If that’s what you want to call it,” Remy said with a yawn. He burrowed his head deeper into Logan’s side.

“I think,” Patton spoke and kept his eyes trained on Roman, “it’s a bit more than that.” Logan returned his attention back to Patton, and Patton felt the apprehensive and defensive emotions from Logan burrow through the ground into his stomach.

“Please clarify.”

“Well,” Patton spoke and swallowed hard, “I know what Roman feels toward you, kiddo, and it’s nothing he’s ever felt towards anyone at the palace before.”

Patton’s words rose Logan’s eyebrows, and a new emotion overtook Patton. Relief. He let a smile slide across his lips.

Patton continued, “Don’t tell him I told you, but I do think that deep down, Roman does feel something for you, Logan. He’s just really… insecure about being vulnerable. Roman’s been told since he was little his brother’s protection rested on his shoulders, and he couldn’t show weakness. The problem was, Roman was a very soft-hearted kid, and his father berated him for being himself, so he developed this persona where he had to be strong no matter what, and showing love was not considered a strength.”

“He had no problem showing you compassion when you met.”

“That’s because I’ve always encouraged Roman to be himself. It’s wrong that he was told from the day he was born he’d have to carry the burden of protecting the entire kingdom by himself. He shouldn’t have to, but he does.”

“And that’s why you stay with him.”

“Well someone has to watch out for him.” Patton ran his hands through Roman’s hair. “I don’t think he’d be here anymore if he didn’t have someone.”

“Reckless, I’m presuming?”

“Very,” Patton let out a light laugh. He took in a shaky breath and swallowed thickly as he recalled so many close calls with Roman’s life ending.

“You are a loyal and good friend to care for him.”

Patton, for once, didn’t know how to respond. He settled for a nod and looked out into the trees.

The forest looked eerie beyond the walls, but Patton knew nothing could get them. He had faith in Logan’s spell. So why wasn’t he tired? He ran his hand absentmindedly through Roman’s hair as he thought. He didn’t realize he was shivering until black fur pressed up against him.

“Lean back onto me,” Virgil spoke.
Patton turned and saw Virgil’s head to his right. The wolf’s body cradled the area around his backside, and Patton did as he was told. The black fur blanketed his shoulders, and he maneuvered Roman until he rested comfortably against his chest. Patton stretched his legs out, noting one was asleep, and leaned his head back. Virgil cradled his nose against Patton’s thigh.

“I can’t keep you totally warm,” Virgil continued, “but it should help at least keep the chill off your back.”

“Thank you,” Patton replied and smiled. He turned his head and nuzzled his cheek into Virgil’s soft fur. Within moments, he was out like a lantern.

The warmth from Patton eased Virgil’s soul a bit. He took a deep breath and tried to close his eyes, but his nerves still crept up on him. Someone was watching them, he knew it. He just couldn’t figure out what. His eyes darted over to Logan, who blinked up at the stars.

“Trouble sleeping?” Virgil mumbled.

Logan took in a breath and exhaled. “I am simply preoccupied thinking of tomorrow’s events.”

“Worrying isn’t really your style.” Virgil flicked an ear. “A coin for your thoughts?”

“Well, eventually Patton and Roman are going to leave the forest.”

“Yes, that’s the whole point of our trip through creepy Narnia.”

“And we cannot follow.”

“Yes, I-” Virgil paused, “I didn’t really think about that.”

Virgil looked at the two humans laying on him and sighed. He didn’t think he’d get this attached to Patton, even if he only knew him for three days, but here he was.

Patton’s face grew pained as he slept, and Virgil held his breath. In a moment’s time, he relaxed back into his peaceful sleep, and Virgil exhaled. What was Patton thinking about? Did he catch the way Virgil felt, even in his sleep? He couldn’t imagine being able to feel other people’s emotions 24/7. It was a wonder how Patton wasn’t exhausted all the time.

“You think they’ll ever come back?” Virgil asked.

“Of course. They are going to retrieve a friend for me to heal. That is the point of all this.”

“Well no duh, but I mean like… just to come and see us?”

“Highly doubtful. They have their own lives past us.” Logan sighed.

Virgil rested his head down on the grass. He knew it was probable that Roman and Patton wouldn’t return, so why did Logan confirming it hurt so much? He took a deep breath and tried to get some form of sleep.

The morning’s light crept up on him faster than he thought. He opened his eyes and watched the sky glow orange from the sunrise. Virgil’s jaws opened wide as he yawned. He stretched out his paws and almost stood, until he remembered Patton was leaning up against him.

Logan was awake and looking through a book. He let out a yawn, and Remy stretched out in the space between his lap and the book.
“Were you up all night?”

Logan made a hum of acknowledgment.

Remy cracked an eye open. “He was too worried about Roman waking up in the middle of the night.”

Virgil was surprised Logan didn’t argue, but he blamed that on fatigue.

As if on cue, a low groan called out from on top of Patton’s chest. All three heads perked up in Roman’s direction. The knight rubbed his head before mumbling something. He opened his eyes and blinked up at the sky.

“When did… it get morning?” he grumbled, his voice heavy with sleep.

“About 30 minutes ago,” Virgil spoke to his side and let out an amused chuckle.

Roman grunted and sat up. He rubbed the back of his head where his wound should’ve been and looked rather surprised when he felt nothing.

“How are you feeling?” Logan asked.

“Okay, I guess.” He looked at their surrounding and hummed. “We moved.”

“You’re welcome. You know, if you weren’t so heavy, we probably would’ve made it to the border by now.”

Roman let out an offended gasp, and Remy laughed as he rolled out of Logan’s lap. As Roman twisted to sass Virgil, he realized he was a lot lighter than he should’ve been. He looked down to see nothing but his black underclothes, and his head whipped around in search of his armor.

“Patton and I agreed it’d be easier for you to sleep without the extra weight of your armor,” Logan explained.

Roman’s eyes settled upon the armor to his left, and he furrowed his brow.

“Where is Patton?”

“Check your bed.”

Roman rose a brow in Virgil’s direction and turned around. Patton was still sound asleep against Virgil’s fur, and a tender smile fell on Roman’s face.

“He wouldn’t leave your side until you were well again,” Logan commented.

“That’s Patton for you.” Roman brushed a stray hair out of Patton’s face, and a smile ghosted onto Patton’s lips. “He knew he could feel me better if we touched while he slept, so if I was in any pain last night, he’d know.”

“Well, I’m satisfied to see you are unharmed.” Roman glanced up at Logan for a moment and smiled. He stood up and straightened out his outfit.

“We should get going. If we want to reach the castle by nightfall, we need to make it out of these woods by noon.”

Logan swallowed hard and connected with Virgil’s eyes. “I assure you, Roman, we will definitely
be there earlier than that.

“Splendid.” Roman started attaching his armor to his body, and Virgil nuzzled his nose against Patton’s cheeks. Patton made a contented sigh, rolled over, and wrapped his arms around Virgil’s neck. The action stilled Virgil. Logan watched with interest as Patton completely curled into a ball against Virgil’s side.

Remy scratched his neck. “Must be dreaming about hugging a giant teddy bear.”

Virgil willed his mind to work. His voice softened as he coaxed, “Patton. Hey, Pat. Time to wake up.”

“Five more minutes,” Patton mumbled into his fur.

“No, Patton,” Roman spoke to his left and leaned down. He shook Patton’s shoulder. “I’m afraid we have to get a move on. Joan is counting on us, remember?”

Patton moaned, and his eyes fluttered open. He realized he was holding onto Virgil’s neck, and he slowly unwrapped his arms to stretch his sleep away.

“You okay, Ro?” He asked through his yawn.

“I’m fine, thanks to you.”

“No, that was Logan who healed your head. I just made sure you were warm last night.”

Logan cleared his throat as Roman looked over at them. “Shall we? I’d like to return home as soon as possible.”

“Onward,” Roman called out, and he left the sanctity of the circle. Patton stood, and Virgil stayed by his side as he followed Roman out of the circle.

Logan watched the three of them leave before sighing. Remy eyed him curiously. Logan rose his hands, put them together and rubbed them around. The spell under them started to glow. Logan separated his hands, and the barrier broke. A gust of wind blew about them, and Logan stared into nothingness for a moment.

“You gonna be okay?” Remy asked.

“I’ll be fine,” Logan responded. “Holding onto three protection spells was more difficult than I thought, but it was worth it.”

Remy climbed up his shoulder and into his hood. “Yeah, now go and spend what time you have left with your Prince Charming.”

Logan took a deep breath in and returned to the path with his companions.

They walked in a stifling silence. Not even Remy opened his mouth to complain. The trip to the edge of the woods took maybe an hour, and Roman ran to the edge of the clearing.

“Oh, I never thought I’d be so happy to see green grass,” Roman chirped. He jumped out of the brush. “Come on, we have a Joan to rescue.”

Patton smiled and followed him out. Roman ran into the field and turned around. His smile fell as only Patton followed him out. Virgil and Logan both remained inside the forest.
Oh. Right.

Roman turned and walked back to the woods to stand at Patton’s side.

“You two going to be okay waiting for us?” Patton asked.

“We’ll be fine,” Virgil replied. “Not many creatures venture to this part of the wood anyway.”

“Besides, it should only take you two days to return, correct?” Logan asked.

Roman put his hands on his hips. “Well, yes.” He looked down at his feet.

“Something troubling you?”

“It’s just… it’s not fair,” Roman’s voice rose. “You don’t deserve to be trapped in here with that dragon witch.”

“Life is not fair, Roman.”

“Still-” He ran a hand through his hair. “Is there no way you can release the spell for a moment just to leave yourself?”

“A spell this powerful requires the host to remain inside,” Logan replied. “Unfortunately, Virgil and I are permanent residents until the end of time.”

Virgil sighed and nodded his head. “You get used to it after a few decades.”

Roman came close to Logan, inches from his nose. Logan flinched backward, and a ghost of a rose color lit up on his cheeks.

“You have my word, as a prince and a knight, that I will find a way to free you from this place. I won’t rest until I do.”

Logan struggled to keep his voice under control. “I appreciate the sentiment, Roman, but that is unnecessary.”

“Even if I have to come in there and slay her myself.”

Patton’s head darted over in Roman’s direction, but he didn’t comment. Roman took a deep breath before straightening his figure.

Logan sighed through his nose and took off his glasses, which were fogging up. He rubbed his eyes and responded, “If you insist.”

Now satisfied with the turn of events, Roman motioned for Patton to follow him toward the kingdom. Patton nodded and looked down at Virgil.

“You take care of each other, okay?”

Virgil let out a light laugh. “Yeah, you got it. And you take care of Prince in Distress over there. Who knows what trouble he’ll get himself in to?”

Patton sighed and nodded his head. He got down on his knees and wrapped his arms around Virgil’s neck. For once, Virgil didn’t pull away, and he pressed his nose into Patton’s back. A warmth settled deep in his chest, and at this point, he wasn’t sure if it was because of Patton or his own feelings.
"Please be safe," Patton whispered into his fur.

Virgil snuffed and rubbed his cheek on Patton's back. "Just get to the castle and come back, so you don't worry yourself out of your mind."

Patton laughed and squeezed a little tighter before letting go. Virgil let his head slide against Patton's cheek as he stood, already missing the warmth and comfort of Patton's touch.

After waving and saying a quick goodbye, the two castle dwellers ventured out into the meadow and disappeared into the distance.

Logan sat down in the grass and pulled out his book once again. Virgil, despite being reassured twice nothing was going to happen, kept pacing back and forth. He still felt like they were being watched all day long. The sun started to set over the horizon, and the stars appeared one by one in the darkened sky.

"Please, you're making me nervous," Remy mumbled from his nap beside Logan's leg.

"They are in familiar territory," Logan added, "and if they kept up their pace, they should safely be at the castle by now."

"I know," Virgil replied, "but it's just… something."

"Like what?"

"I don't know… something."

"That's reassuring," Remy yawned and stretched his back leg. "Well, when you figure out what this something is, you make sure to wake me up."

Virgil's ear twitched as he looked over his shoulder. His ears flattened as he let out a low growl.

Logan furrowed his brow, until Remy let out a sharp hiss as well, and he turned his head. A figure emerged from the bushes, and Logan rose to his feet to prepare a rune.

"Relax, I only want to talk," the sorcerer purred and held up her hands in defense.

"Please, you never just want to talk," Logan spoke and folded his arms.

"I have a proposition for you."

The sorcerer raised her hand and circled both Remy and Virgil in a black bubble. Logan gasped and tried to disenchant it. No matter what, he couldn't produce a spell strong enough.

"Don't bother. I know you drained yourself protecting your little family of misfits last night," she purred. "Really, I could kill you now, but I'd rather watch you suffer."

Logan turned to face her with a scowl. "Let them go."

"In a moment. I can't have them ruining our talk." She tilted her head and dug through the bag at her side. Her hand pulled out a curved piece of black metal. "You remember this?"

Logan's hands rubbed at his neck, and he took a step back. "How could I forget it?"

"Crushes can make you forget you're their slave," she said with a shrug. "I want to make you a deal."
The sorcerer stuck her hand into her chest and winced. Her arm trembled as she pulled out a ball of purple light where her heart should’ve been. It sparked as she held it between her fingers. Her eyes flicked up to Logan, and she smiled as shock overtook his expression.

“You know what this is?” she asked.

“Is that-”

“His key to freedom.” She looked over at the black mass. “I don’t have a use for- what did you call him- Virgil? Obviously, with your friend Patton able to snap him out of my little spell, my name control is meaningless for him. So, I’m willing to end his contract.”

Logan narrowed his eyes. “That’s awfully generous of you.”

“He is still a friend of mine, or at least he was. It’s the least I can do.”

“So what do you want from me?”

“Since there’s no getting out of this forest until you can’t power the spell keeping us trapped here, I’m proposing a deal. You wear this, and I’ll-”

“Absolutely not.”

“You don’t want Virgil to have his soul back?” She tilted her head. “That’s rather selfish of you.”

“Do not twist my words. He would not want you to be set free if it meant acquiring his soul and you know it.”

“You sure?”

“Why else would you keep him trapped so he cannot add in his opinion?”

“So he can’t take his soul before you can go back on the deal.”

Logan rolled his eyes. “If I know Virgil, who willingly gave up his soul to begin with, he wouldn’t want to take the risk. Besides, I like it here, and seeing you miserable for all these years has brought me no greater joy. I would gladly trade his soul to watch you try to figure out how to end your torment.”

“Hmm, I wonder what your friend Roman would say about that.”

Logan felt a deep fire set in his chest. He balled his hands up into a fist. “You leave him out of this.”

“Oh, did I hit a sore spot? Don’t think I missed how much he resembles Damian. The way he talks, the way he looks at you, the way you fell head over heels for him in such a short amount of time-”

“He did nothing wrong to you.”

“Maybe not him, but his family sure did. He shouldn’t be in power right now.” She twirled the ball of light in her fingertips. “He’s going to come back eventually. Didn’t he say he’d find a way to get you out of here?”

“A child’s wish, nothing more.”

“He’s still going to come back for you, you know. I know a stubborn spirit when I see one. You
can’t protect him forever, and unless you sit at the edge of these woods, who knows what will find him first.”

“You wouldn’t dare-”

“You think I’m above using your crush to get back at you?” She grinned.

“I know you’re not, and you wouldn’t dare. Anything you do to him I’ll throw back at you ten fold.”

“True, but even “The Great Sorcerer” can’t bring back the dead.”

Logan swore under his breath as he tried to get his magic to respond. The rune fizzled out at his fingertips, and he felt a bead of sweat run down his forehead. She watched him struggle and clicked her tongue.

“So how about it, Logan? You wear this, and I swear I will not harm a hair on Roman’s head on top of getting Virgil’s soul back. Think about it. It’s a two for one deal. You’d be stupid not to take it.”

Logan stared her down, and a grin crept on her lips. He looked back at the black mass over his shoulder.

“You swear on the heart of Merlin you will not go back on your word?”

The sorcerer rose her finger and made an “x” on her chest. A green light rose where her finger ran over her chest then dimmed.

Logan’s hand squeezed before he dropped them to his side. Slowly, he approached her. Her gaze softened he stepped forward.

“Well, I guess that’s a deal?” she purred.

Logan’s head rose, and he stared at her like she was mud on his shoe. “You better not go back on your word.”

The sorcerer held the collar out to Logan, and he ran his fingers over it. Even in his hands, he could feel his power dulling.

“I’m not getting any younger,” she taunted.

Logan swallowed hard. He brought the metal to his throat. It clicked shut on its own, and Logan let out a choked gasp.

The forest around them groaned. Trees rustled, the wind blew, and the bushes began to rapidly die. Everything rotted to its core and disintegrated around them. Unholy noises echoed throughout the whole forest. Light filtered through the trees and ate away at the dead plants. A blue sky opened up, and the forest sunk into the grass in a brown puddle. A fresh breeze blew the sour smell away.

Everything was alive and clear and yet so very wrong.

Logan fell to his hands and knees, struggling to breathe. He coughed twice, and the sorcerer ran her hand over his back. He shivered at her touch.

“It’s been a while since I’ve seen you like that… broken and defenseless. I couldn’t be happier.”
She walked past him and snapped her finger. The black bubble surrounding Remy and Virgil disappeared. The two of them blinked the too bright light away. Remy let out a distressed cry and ran to Logan’s side, nuzzling under his chin and nipping at the skin around the black collar.

Virgil stood frozen in his spot, his eyes settled upon a purple orb in her hand.

“A deal is a deal. You’re free from servitude,” she spoke and released the ball of light. It flew forward and slammed into Virgil’s chest.

Virgil’s whole body convulsed, and he collapsed onto the ground, panting hard. The fur around his body shed at a rapid rate. His body shrunk, and he curled into himself. For the first time in forever, he wrapped his arms around his shoulders and pulled his knees to his chest. Everything ached, and he could barely focus on the sorceress walking past him.

“Now, if you don’t mind, I have some business to finish. I’m about 400 years late to my own party,” she mused. With a whistle, her dragon flew in from the sky and swooped down. She mounted its back and shot a glance over her shoulder. “I’ll send Roman and Patton your love for you.”

The sorcerer blew a kiss, clicked her tongue, and sailed over the meadow toward the castle walls.

Virgil groaned as he pushed himself up onto his hand and knees. Wow, was he cold. He shivered and pulled his jacket closer around his exposed midsection. How did that spell keep his clothes exactly where they were? No matter, he would rather be confused than naked out in the open. Logan would never let him live it down-

Logan.

Virgil remembered he had to move his mouth if he wanted to talk.

“Logan,” he called out through a cracking voice. He tried to stand up, but his balance eluded him. He stumbled his way over to where Remy and Logan resided. Remy saw Virgil approaching and started meowing like crazy. Virgil squinted at the cat. “Ha-ha, very funny Remy. Is Logan okay?”

Remy let out an annoyed meow. He trotted over to Logan and rubbed up against Logan’s shoulder, as if urging him to stand.

Logan let out a shaky breath as he rose a hand to scratch Remy’s ears. Remy backed up and hissed.

“No doubt you’re cross with me,” Logan choked out. He blinked the blur in his vision away and stood on shaky legs. “I don’t blame you.”

Virgil opened his mouth to speak again, but his eyes settled on the black collar around Logan’s neck. He covered his mouth and took a step back.

“Logan-”

“I know,” he sighed. “I… may have made a rash and foolish decision.”

The shock faded into anger, and Virgil grit his teeth. “So, what, you traded your magic for my soul?”

“Half the reason, yes.” Logan looked at the sorcerer disappearing into the distance with her dragon. “No doubt she’ll burn the whole city to the ground now.”
“What on earth were you thinking!” Virgil snapped. “Patton and Roman are there, right now. They could be hurt, or worse! How could you let her free?”

“Because she promised me,” Logan replied without meeting Virgil’s eyes.

Virgil’s eyebrows furrowed. “Promised you what?”

“She wouldn’t harm Roman.”

“So? He was safe out there with her in here!”

“So what happens when he comes back for us? You heard him. He wouldn’t rest until we were free. What happened if he challenged her when I’m not there to protect him? I couldn’t live with myself if something ill were to befall him due to my imprisonment.”

“That’s not your job. Roman’s a big boy, he can-” He paused as his face lit up with realization. The way Logan held his arms, the way he wouldn’t meet Virgil’s eyes, the way he kept blinking away fresh tears- “You really do love him.”

“I was emotionally compromised, and she knew it,” Logan mumbled.

Virgil cursed under his breath and bit his fingernail. Boy, did they grow longer than he remembered them being.

“We gotta stop her,” Virgil spoke.

“Please, I can’t use my magic, and you can barely stand, let alone walk.”

Virgil put his hands on his hips. “Cut me some slack! I’ve been walking on four paws for a long time. I’ll get the hang of it again, but not if we stay here.”

Logan’s blue eyes scanned the horizon. He swallowed, noting how the metal bit into his neck with a heavy familiarity, and sighed. He put his hand on the ground and whistled. Remy’s ears perked up with a light meow, and he scurried up into Logan’s hood.

“I just hope we’re not too late to help them.”
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

With the dragon sorcerer on her way to right an old wrong, Virgil and Logan do their best to try and stop her, even if they’re powerless to do so. However, when they get to the kingdom, everything is... okay? Shouldn’t it be in chaos right now? Turns out they might find more than they bargained for.

Chapter warnings: Manipulation, panic attacks, minor injuries, blood mentions, cursing (one word), puns :D
Word count: 5410

Chapter Notes

Two chapters in two days? It's more likely than you think.

I wanted to end this one differently, but it got waaay too long, so I chopped it in half, hence why you're getting this one early. I hope you enjoy~

The town bustled as Roman and Patton made their way through the palace gates. Patton inched closer to Roman, dizzy from the high amount of strong emotions flung his way. Roman held onto his hand to ground him, and sent a reassuring smile.

“Captain Roman!” one of the knights greeted him. “Sir Patton. You’re both alive!”

Roman gave a quick one-armed hug to the soldier and nodded.

The other knight beside him added, “Your brother sent every search party available out to find you. Where have you been?”

“On a long journey, but I assure you, it’s almost over. Where is my brother now?”

“In the palace worried out of his mind. You should go see him.”

Roman nodded with a quick word of thanks, and the two travelers made their way to the castle doors. As Roman entered, several servants greeted him and asked if he was okay. Each time he brushed them away, using Thomas as an excuse. He didn’t feel like explaining himself ten times in a row.

Roman pushed both doors to the king's throne room open and held his form high.

The man at the end of the hall jumped. He studied the two figures entering his court and sucked in a deep breath.

“I heard someone missed me,” Roman called out.
The man charged forward and pulled Roman into a tight hug. Roman pulled him in close as well.

“Thank goodness you’re okay,” he spoke. “Do you know how worried I was about you?”

“I assure you, Thomas, both Patton and I were in no real danger.”

Thomas pulled away, and he went from Roman to Patton. The two held a little longer than Roman and Thomas did. No doubt Thomas needed the reassuring vibes Patton produced through their touch.

“What happened? Where did you run off to?” Thomas asked and lead them both inside to sit at his table. “Tell me everything.”

Both men retold the tale of the past three days, each story raising Thomas’s brows further. They decided to leave out a few details, but they were only minor life-threatening events and certainly nothing Thomas needed to worry about right now.

“Well, I’m glad you’re both safe,” Thomas said with a sigh. “Tomorrow morning, we’ll get Joan to the edge of the forest so they can finally be healed. Then maybe this nightmare will be over. Noble Talyn is staying in our spare guest room, so if you wish to talk to them and catch them up, I’m sure they’d appreciate it.”

“Of course,” Roman said with a nod. He turned his attention over to Patton, who stared out the window and tapped a finger lightly on the table. It wasn’t strong, but he could feel a nervous aura waving off his shoulders.

“What’s up, Padre?” Roman asked. Patton jumped as Romans spoke, and he turned away with light lips.

“I don’t know. I just feel… off.”

“I assure you, there’s nothing to worry about,” Roman said as he stood and put a hand on Patton’s shoulder. Through his touch, he realized the magnitude of just how distraught Patton was, and he recoiled his hand. “Joan is going to be healed tomorrow. We’ll make it, I promise.”

“It’s not Joan that has me worried,” Patton replied. He chewed on his bottom lip.

Roman nodded in understanding. “We will find a way to free them, Patton, I promise you.”

“I know,” he said with a sigh, “and that’s what worries me.”

Roman opened his mouth to speak when he heard shouting down the halls. All three men turned their attention to the doors. A loud bang blasted through the halls, and they were all on their feet in seconds.

“Stay here,” Roman ordered and ran through the double doors. Smoke started filtering through the hallway, and he covered his nose with his hand. A knight sailed through the air and tumbled to the end of the hall. Roman ran to their side.

“What’s going on?”

“A woman,” the knight replied as they struggled to sit up, “is attacking the castle. She is a sorcerer of some sort.”

Roman’s head rose as he heard footsteps approaching. An all too familiar woman stepped out
through the smoke, and Roman’s jaw dropped.

“It’s nice to see this place is exactly how I remembered it,” she said with a hum of approval. Her head turned down toward Roman, and she grinned. “You look shocked. Did you miss me?”

“How?” He managed to choke out.

“Oh, I came to an agreement with your dear Logan.”

Roman’s anger coursed through his whole body. He slid his sword from his wrist and spoke through clenched teeth, “What did you do to him?”

“Nothing he didn’t want. Relax, he’s still alive. Just… different from how you remember him.”

Roman cried out as he lashed forward. He swung his sword, but it sailed through her. Roman regained his balance and turned his head around in all directions.

“Show yourself, you coward!”

Hot breath tickled his neck, and Roman spun around. Once again, his sword met air.

“You see, Roman, I am in a bit of a dilemma. I made a promise not to harm you, but I know you are going to get in my way.” Her voice echoed off the walls, and Roman spun his head around. He gripped his sword tight in his hands.

“And why would you make a promise like that?”

“Because Logan made me. It was the only way he could be free. Isn’t that what you wanted? To free him, so you could be with him?”

Roman’s eyes widened. The hall grew still, and sweat tickled his cheeks. He brushed it away quickly and looked in all directions. The hairs on the back of his neck bristled. Strong waves of fear crashed into his heart, and he took off toward the throne room.

The doors slammed shut in his face. Roman tried to open the doors, but they stayed firmly shut.

“Hello, my great nephew,” he heard her say on the other side of the door.

“Don’t you dare!” Roman yelled and pounded his fist on the door. He raised his sword and swung at the wood, barely splintering any of it. He had to find a stronger weapon. Roman prayed they both would hang on just a little longer. He wouldn’t let them down. He refused to.

As the woman approached, Thomas grabbed the sword at his side.

“State your business,” Thomas ordered.

“I just want to talk,” she spoke. “But first, I must know the name of my dear nephew.”

Thomas opened his mouth to speak.

“Don’t,” Patton advised him. The sorcerer turned her attention to him, and Patton swallowed.

“You know, there’s more than one way to skin a cat,” she purred. Patton shrunk in on himself.

“What do you want to talk about?” Thomas asked, hoping to divert her attention.
“Only what was stole from me years ago. By birthright, I should’ve been first in line for the throne, but because I was—” she clenched her hands—“a cursed child, my parents passed it off to my brothers. Do you know what that’s like? I’m assuming not. Roman doesn’t seem the type to give up power.”

Patton bristled at the mention of Roman’s name, and Thomas quirked a brow. “Just who are you?”

The sorcerer mocked a low bow and spoke, “I am the ancient sorcerer that almost brought this kingdom to its knees many years ago, and now I’ve returned to finish the job.”

Thomas took a step backward. “How—”

“Seems the one keeping me captive had a soft spot for your captain. Now,” her attention turned to Patton, “care to tell me what your king’s name is?”

A loud thunk echoed through the door, and she sighed through her nose. She continued, “It appears I’m going to have to make this quick. Patton, tell me what your king’s name is.”

Patton opened his mouth and covered it soon after. His shoulders trembled, and Thomas took in a sharp breath.

“What are you doing to him?”

“He’s the one making this harder than it has to be.” She slowly walked over to him.

“Stop,” Thomas ordered. He moved in front of Patton.

She let out a loud cackle and shook her head. “You, ordering me around? That’s definitely not how I saw this going.”

The thunks from the door grew heavier and more frantic. Thomas backed up and pushed Patton along with him.

“You stay back.”

“Just give me what I want, and I’ll leave you both alone. Deal?”

“You feeling okay there, Logan?”

“Slightly dizzy, but I’ll be fine.”

Virgil made a whine in the back of his throat, and he stopped in his tracks. Logan stopped as well, his arm sliding off of Virgil’s shoulders. He put his hands on his knees to try and catch his breath. Remy poked his head out of Logan’s hood and licked the back of his neck.

“We can’t keep going like this,” Virgil mumbled.

“Why? I’m useless anyway.”

“Don’t,” Virgil growled, and Logan laughed at his weak attempt at being intimidating.

“Do you even remember how to use your abilities?”

“I can try.”
Virgil sucked in a deep breath. He stared down at his hands. A purple spark danced between his fingers, and he clenched his palm. His hands tingled, and Virgil looked up. Aiming at a tree, he held his palm forward. The bolts of electricity fizzled out, and Virgil grit his teeth. He tried again. And again. Sweat lined his brow as he tried a final time, but each one ended the same.

“Don’t harm yourself,” Logan spoke. “You’ve been away from your familiar for too long.”

Virgil ran a hand through his hair. “I don’t even know if he’s still alive.”

Remy made a noise in Logan’s jacket. Logan furrowed his brow and sighed heavily through his nose.

“I’m unsure of what he said, but I believe a familiar lives as long as their sorcerer does.”

A happy chirp called out soon after as if confirming Logan’s words.

“So, he could still be out there somewhere.” Virgil’s heart beat faster, and a ghost of a smile dawned on his face.

“It’s a possibility. It’s also a possibility he could’ve been killed by something else in the meantime, however, I’m certain you would’ve felt it.”

“You think if I whistle, he’ll come to me?”

“If he’s in range, I have no doubt he’ll try to find you. A familiar can feel their sorcerer’s magic through the earth. Chances are, if he’s nearby, he’ll find us.”

A new sense of purpose coursed through Virgil’s veins. He looked at the stars above them and took a deep breath.

“I still think we should rest for the night. If we’re going to face her tomorrow, we’re going to need our full strength, even if our full strength is the bare minimum.”

“Perhaps you are right,” Logan mumbled. The two rested in the tall grass and stared up at the stars.

Logan forgot what it felt like to be this vulnerable. Even with Virgil and Remy beside him, his nerves refused to settle. Is this what Virgil felt every day without his magic? He looked over to his longtime friend and noticed Virgil’s own eyes lined with worry.

“Everything will be okay. I assure you.”

“Easy for you to say. You know Roman’s going to be safe.”

Logan sucked in a deep breath and released it. “I have no doubt Patton will be fine as well.”

Virgil made a noise of disgust deep in his throat and rolled over so his back faced Logan. He curled up into a ball and rested his head in his arms.

Logan swallowed hard and continued, “I truly am sorry for all this, Virgil.”

“Yeah,” Virgil grumbled and sighed heavily.

Logan sensed Virgil no longer wished to speak to him and tried to close his eyes. Remy’s weight on his chest gave some sort of warmth, even if the person beside him was colder than the night air.

By daybreak, the two managed to somehow get enough rest to make the rest of their journey.
It took about two hours to reach the city’s walls. They stood at the gate and stared up at the large pillars surrounding open wooden doors.

“Never thought I’d be standing here again,” Virgil mumbled. Logan gave a nod, and the two walked into the city’s limits.

People clamored as they went through their normal lives. Children played, and dogs barked as they chased after them. People bargained for materials, and lively chatter filtered through the air.

Virgil made himself as small as possible as they walked through the unfamiliar crowd. Logan took in the sights, and the more he looked at it, the more off it felt.

“She should have arrived here by now. Why is everything not in chaos?”

“This isn’t chaos?”

Logan noticed the purple sparks flying off of Virgil’s shoulders. Some people did as well, but they said nothing and continued about their business.

“Virgil, calm yourself.” Logan grabbed onto Virgil's hand, and a bolt of purple light shocked him. He recoiled, and Virgil held his breath.

“Sorry,” he mumbled. More and more sparks lit up, and Logan stiffened. People now stopped to stare at the spectacle before them, doing nothing for Virgil’s mental health. His eyes darted around them, looking for someplace, any place, to run and hide.

“Give us space, please,” Logan called out. The people, thinking it was some sort of show, did as they were told and formed a circle around them. Virgil’s breathing shortened more and more as time passed. A few knights had stopped to watch. Logan started to fear the worst as Virgil’s breaths came out heavy.

Through the crowd, Logan heard a long, high pitched whine. Remy perked up in Logan’s hood, a curious mew ringing through his chest.

A canine emerged from the crowd, its fur a dusty brown, and darted over in Virgil’s direction. Logan watched it raise its nose, inches from touching Virgil’s own.

“Hey, it’s going to be okay,” it spoke.

Virgil’s eyes widened, and he stopped breathing altogether. Its ears perked up, and its head tilted to the side.

“I know that smell,” its tail started to wag. “Virgil?”

Virgil choked back a sob and collapsed onto the ground. The wolf caught him and nuzzled his head close. It lowered itself to the ground and nudged Virgil until he was on its back. Then, it took off, leaving a very confused Logan and crowd in the dust.

“Hey!” Logan called out. He chased after it, calling out for Virgil to wait. The wolf ducked down an alleyway, and Logan eventually caught up to them.

Virgil sat on his knees, his face buried in the animal’s fur, and stroked the back of its neck. The wolf brought a paw up to hold him close, his nose pressed against Virgil’s back.

“It’s you. You’re alive,” Virgil painted into its fur. His fingers clung to the wolf like it would
“Me? You’re the one I thought was dead all these years,” it answered with a chuckle. “The last time I saw you, you were… well… you know.”

“I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to abandon you like that. I-”

“Shh, it’s okay. I forgive you.”

Logan slowly approached the two of them, and Remy crawled out of his hood. The cat trotted across the dirt, happy chirps escaping his throat.

The wolf let go of Virgil and leaned down to smell the tip of Remy’s nose. Remy rubbed up against its muzzle, and the wolf licked his head. Remy let out a disgusted noise and shook his fur.

“What happened to you, Rem?” it asked. “Cat got your tongue?”

Remy hissed and let out a discontent meow. The wolf’s head rose, and it studied Logan as he approached.

“Well, you look like you’re on a short leash,” it mumbled. “I thought Damian got rid of that thing.”

“He did,” Logan replied and folded his arms across his chest. The wolf went back to Virgil and sniffed his neck. Virgil let out a light laugh as it tickled his skin.

“You’re okay though, right? I mean, I still have a connection to you, so I’m guessing you’re okay.” It perked its head back up. “Let’s stay together from now on though, okay? I don’t like long-distance relationships. They get wooden after a while.”

Virgil let out a snort through his nose.

“I see you still kept your sense of humor after all these years, Emile,” Logan sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose.

“Wouldn’t be me without it.”

The wolf sat down in the dirt beside Virgil, who was still recovering from his panic earlier. His hand kept stroking the back of Emile’s scruff, and every once and a while, he’d dig his fingers into the fur, and Emile would nose his cheeks with a lick.

“Did the old witch finally die?” Emile asked. “Not that I wanted her dead, but you know, you were kind of stuck with her here.”

“No,” Logan said and looked away. Emile connected the dots and nodded his head.

“Well, you’re both back, and our family is mostly back together again.” The wolf nuzzled his head into Virgil’s stomach and took in a deep breath.

“Emile, has she come this way at all?” Logan asked. “Last I knew, she was headed for the castle.”

Emile perked his head up in Logan’s direction. He hummed and tapped his tail on the ground.

“I think I would know if she was here. I mean, I can smell her dragon breath from a mile away. Besides, the guards would be all over the place by now.”

Logan and Virgil shared a look. They knew they saw her fly off in this direction. She should’ve
been here by now. Why was she not wreaking havoc?

“She can’t block her aura or anything?” Virgil asked.

Emile shook her head. “Magic doesn’t work that way. But, with how open we are to magical creatures here, it might be possible I mistook her for another magical being. I mean, I don’t know if you heard, but magic isn’t outlawed anymore. Turns out Logan was right, and Damian was different than the rest.”

Virgil looked away with a low sigh through his nose. Emile sensed his discomfort and nosed him on the cheek.

Logan paced once through the open area and looked into the distance. From here, he could make out the high towers of the castle, and he sighed through his nose.

“Any chance we can hold a meeting with the king?”

Emile’s ears perked up. “Of course! We’re buddies.”

Both Logan and Virgil looked down at Emile, and he looked between the two of them.

“You know Thomas?” Logan questioned.

“Yes, and most of the royal court. You make a few friends when you’re lonely. Usually, they give me the table scraps after a large meal.” He licked his lips. “You haven’t lived until you’ve tasted Patton’s lemon-berry pie.”

“You know Patton?” Virgil asked, his heart skipping a beat.

“Yeah, he and I are pretty good friends.” Emile’s ears perked. “Wait, how do you know Patton?”

“It’s a long story. Do you know where he is now?”

“He and Roman came back last night from some sort of mission. I think they were helping a noble who is sick.”

“Did they leave this morning?”

“Of course not! Usually, after they come back from a long mission, Thomas holds a feast in Roman’s honor, usually because he’s still miraculously alive.”

That definitely didn’t sound right. Logan and Virgil shared a look, and Virgil stood up from his spot next to Emile. The wolf stood as well and stretched his paws out in front of him.

“We need to speak to them, now.”

“Okay, I can lead you there, but I’m sure you remember the way. It’s kind of set in stone.”

Logan ran a hand over his face. “I remember why I disliked your company now.”

Emile sent a cocky smile, and he kept Virgil’s balance as they walked toward the castle. Remy climbed back up into Logan’s jacket, and he whined as he slipped inside. Logan scratched him on the head before following them.

It only took minutes for them to arrive at the castle gates. No guards stood posted at the door, a warning sign if they ever saw one. Emile tilted his head in confusion and stepped through the large
doors.

“Usually Terrance and Jamal are out on watch duty in the morning. I wonder where they are.”

The courtyard was eerily quiet, and the palace doors rested ajar beyond the stone steps. Emile was the first inside, and he lowered his head as his ears flattened against his skull. Remi reacted a similar way, and he nipped the side of Logan’s cheek.

“Something’s not right,” Emile mumbled. “There’s some really dark magic here.”

“That’s her,” Virgil growled. “Can you find where it’s coming from?”

“It’s-” Emile’s head went from side to side- “all over the place, like she’s in multiple places at once.”

“Keep your eyes open,” Logan instructed. The four of them snuck through the halls and up toward the king’s courtroom. As they approached, several things were knocked out of place. Blood lined the walls, and a few sets of armor rested in the halls. Every person they checked was alive but stuck in unconsciousness.

As they rounded the corner, Virgil gasped as they nearly ran into someone in a rather familiar red cloak.

“Patton,” Virgil breathed out.

Patton stared up at him like he saw a ghost, his hands going to his side to pull his cloak closer.

“Logan?” He looked over to his left. “How did you get here?”

Virgil took a step toward him, but Emile blocked his path. A low growl echoed through his throat. Patton looked down at the wolf and blinked twice.

“What’s wrong with your friend?” He asked.

Virgil’s lips hung open. “You… don’t know who this is?”

Patton shook his head. “I’ve never met it before. Is it one of yours?”

Virgil swallowed hard. He watched Patton glance from the wolf to him, and he narrowed his eyes.

“Patton, how did you get your cloak back?”

Patton looked down at his outfit and shrugged. “I have a lot of red cloaks. I put one on when I got back of course.”

Virgil studied his eyes, and chills ran up his back. Patton’s eyes were unusually dark. Before he could say anything, Emile lashed forward, his teeth bared. Patton let out a scream as he held his hands up in defense. Emile pinned him down with his paw and narrowed his eyes.

Virgil took a step forward, “Don’t-”

Logan held a hand out, stopping Virgil from advancing. Virgil looked ready to argue, but Logan kept his eyes trained on Emile and Patton.

“Get off,” Patton cried out as he struggled under Emile’s grip. “Please, let me up!”
Emile’s ears perked up, and his nose stood moments away from grabbing onto Patton’s neck. “You aren’t fooling anyone.”

“What are you talking about?” Patton asked and squirmed again. “Let me up. Logan, Virgil, please~”

Virgil’s heart broke, but Logan’s eyes hardened. “How would you know if Virgil is here?”

“He’s right next to you!”

“But how do you know what he looks like as a human?”

“I… he…” Patton took a deep breath in, and he let out a long sigh. His lips curled into a smile, and a light laugh escaped his chest. “Darn, must’ve slipped my mind. Of course he wouldn’t know what Virgil looks like now.”

A dark shadow coated Patton’s whole body. It shifted its shape until the familiar form of the sorcerer laid under Emile’s paws.

“Where is he?” Virgil growled.

“Relax, your precious Patton is safe. He’s getting ready for the big night.”

“What big night?”

“Oh, don’t you know? The whole town is invited,” she purred. Her body melted into a shadow and slipped out from under Emile’s paws. It reformed a few paces away from him, and she sent a large grin their way. “The coronation of the new queen is tonight.”

Logan narrowed his eyes. “What did you do?”

“I didn’t do anything,” she said and put her hands on her chest. “Thomas arranged the whole thing on his own. Well, maybe I helped a little, but it was all by his word.”

“That’s a bunch of bullshit and you know it.”

“Language, Virgil. I don’t think Patton would want to hear you talking like that.”

Virgil grit his teeth and took a step forward, but Emile blocked his path. The sorcerer clicked her tongue and pulled a pocket watch out from her pocket.

“You’re a little later than I anticipated, or I’d chat more. So sorry boys, but you missed your meeting. You’ll just have to wait now.”

She rose her hand, and a black darkness started to swallow their feet. No matter how hard they tried, they couldn’t move away. The darkness swallowed them whole, suffocating whatever air was left.

When the darkness disappeared, the group found themselves in a large cell. Virgil reached out to grab the bars, but they burnt his hands when he touched them. Any attempt to use his magic fizzled out.

Logan let out a long sigh and slid down the wall of the cell. Remy crawled out of his hood and over his shoulder to rub against his neck. Logan rested his head against the cool stone and stroked Remy’s fur absentmindedly.
“You come back here and face us, you coward!” Virgil yelled out. He kicked the bars with his boot, ignoring the pain it sent through his leg. He began pacing back and forth. “I can’t believe we fell for her trap.”

“I can’t believe I didn’t sense something was wrong sooner,” Emile replied. He flicked his ear and rested his head between his paws.

Virgil turned his head back to look at Logan, and his heart nearly broke at how defeated he looked. He let out a long sigh and sat down next to him, sliding down the wall himself and letting his hood enclose his head.

“I’m sorry,” he mumbled.

Logan snuffed. “For what? I’m the one who is at fault here.”

“Yeah, but if I would’ve listened to you years ago, maybe we wouldn’t even be in this mess.”

“You cannot change the past, Virgil, therefore there is no use dwelling on it.”

“Wanna take your own advice there, old man?”

“Please, I am just as old as you are.” However, the crack of his smile showed Virgil’s roundabout way to cheer him up worked.

Virgil blew thickly through his lips. “So now what?”

Logan shrugged. “I guess we await our fate.”

“Wow, never thought I’d see you so quick to give up.”

“I know when I’ve been defeated, Virgil. We’re in an enchanted cell, one you cannot use your magic on, and I doubt they’ll be handing over the key if we ask politely.”

A low moan caught their attention, and they held their breath. Logan turned his head until he saw a pile of blankets moving in the cell across from them. Virgil looked around him, and his eyebrows rose up to his hairline.

A head poked out from the material, and half-lidded eyes blinked at them. Logan’s breath caught in his throat.

“Roman,” he breathed out.

It took a moment, but Roman registered what he was looking at. He threw off the pile of blankets and jumped forward, but his arms caught on the chain keeping him secured to the floor. He jolted with a low cry and started pulling at them.

“You’re going to cut your wrists open,” Virgil warned.

“Already did,” Roman replied, his voice deep, like he screamed all night long. He let out a frustratedly long sigh and let his hands drop to his side. “She got you too, I see.”

Roman looked over his shoulder, and Logan recoiled at the sight. His eyes were red, and the bottom of his lip scabbed over, dried blood staining his chin. His armor was missing, and all he wore was the black shirt and pants from under his armor.

“What happened?” Logan asked.
Roman sighed and ran a hand through his hair. “That witch showed up last night and started attacking the palace. She got Thomas and Patton before I could stop her, but because someone made a certain promise, she couldn’t do anything to me. So, she locked me down here so I wouldn’t get in her way.”

Logan flinched at his words and looked away. Roman crossed his arms and looked ready to continue, but something told him Logan was beating himself up far worse than anything he could say.

“At least we know you’re alive,” Virgil mumbled. Logan glanced out of the side of his eyes at him, and he blew heavily through his nose.

Roman watched the stranger beside Logan with curiosity. He turned his attention back to Logan. “Who’s your friend?”

Logan let out a light laugh. “You don’t recognize him without all the fur, I’m presuming.”

Roman narrowed his eyes, and he tilted his head to the side. However, a moment later, they sailed open with his jaw.

“No, it couldn’t be… Virgil?”

“Sup?” He said with a flash of his fingers.

Roman smirked. “I imagined you taller.”

Virgil bristled, but he chose to ignore the comment. “What happened to Patton?”

“The last I saw of him, he brought down all these blankets for me.” He sighed and a light laugh cradled the air. “Even under her spell, he’s still as compassionate as ever.”

“What spell?”

“The control spell, of course. The one that made you attack Logan. I watched her put my own cloak that I gave him around his shoulders with a spell to keep him under her influence.”

“Why Patton? He’s not a fighter,” Logan mumbled.

“No, but he’s really good at making people feel certain things, like trust and reassurance,” Roman replied. “If he’s by her side, the people will believe what Thomas is saying is the right thing, because they all know Patton wouldn’t betray them. My thought is she’s going to use him at her coronation to win the people over.”

“She really thought this through, didn’t she?” Virgil said and ran a hand through his hair.

“It appears she did,” Logan answered. He looked around the cell, hoping to find some sort of weak spot. A crack about the size of a small animal rested against the stone. Logan squinted, and he stood up to walk over to it. Virgil rose a brow and followed his actions.

“Roman, what’s on the other side of these cells?” Logan asked.


Logan leaned down and examined the hole with his fingers. The rock crumbled at his touch, and he rubbed his skin together.
“Is there anyone who can help us on the other side?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know who she got to or who’s still on our side.”

“Remy, if we make the hole big enough, do you think you could squeeze through it? Once for yes and twice for no.”

The cat trotted over to Logan’s side and nosed the hole. At the moment, it was about the size of his head. Remy stood and flicked his tail, his bright blue eyes blinked up at Logan. Logan watched the cat squeeze his head through, and he nearly grabbed his side to pull him back out. However, Remy easily slipped through, and he let out a light meow on the other side.

“I need you to find someone with a set of keys,” Logan ordered. Without another word, Remy disappeared from sight. Logan’s heartbeat jumped, and he did his best to look through the hole. He silently hoped Remy would be okay. He couldn’t mess something else up because of another dumb decision. Logan rested his head against the brick with a heavy sigh.

“He’s gonna be fine,” Virgil spoke. “If I know Remy, he’s twice as clever as anything those guards could dish out.”

“Yes, and he has a horrible sense of direction. If he gets lost, there’s no way for me to communicate with him, and I’m unsure if whistling will summon him.”

“I… yeah we’re screwed.”
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Leave it to Remy to turn a simple task of finding keys into a grand adventure. Full of food, discovering strange and new humans, and maybe getting lost in more ways than one, he tries to search for a way to save the others from their imprisonment.

--

Chapter warnings: Cursing (one word), implied manipulation, and Remy can’t focus to save his life

Word count: 4746 (this is shorter because I had to cut the last chapter in half)

Remy snuffed as he heard their conversation through the wall. He had an excellent sense of direction, m’kay? What were they talking about? He never left the house because he wouldn’t get back in. It wasn’t because he got lost and nearly got eaten… absolutely not the reason at all.

Besides, it couldn’t be that hard to find a set of keys in this place, right?

The cat flicked his ear and traveled down the corridors. Oooh, where was that delicious smell coming from? He padded from the servant’s corridor to the kitchen and raised his nose high. That was definitely some sort of bird.

Remy jumped on the counter. A spread of corn, potatoes, turkey, butter, jams, bread, and an assortment of pastries sat on the table. Remy licked his lips and picked out a cookie for himself. He jumped off the table and munched on it. He could eat chocolate, right? Oh well, no better time to find out.

The doors opened, and Remy flinched. He got down as small as he could and surveyed the scene in front of him.

“I still don’t trust her,” a person spoke as they came to the table. Remy swallowed the bit of cookie in his mouth.

“I know, but Thomas and Patton are both really sure she’s fit.” The person beside them picked up a large plate of food before walking toward the door.

“I know, and that makes me feel a little better, but I still don’t like it. Thomas is the king for a reason.”

“Maybe he’s tired of watching Roman destroy himself in his name.”

“I am too, but that’s no reason-”

The door closed, and Remy took another bite of his cookie. Good, they didn’t see him. What were they squawking about? Remy finished the sugary treat before deciding whether he should grab another or not.

What was he supposed to be doing again?

Oh, right!
Remy popped out from under the table and surveyed the door leading out. He pushed through a tiny crack under the door and back into the hallways.

The palace’s candlesticks cast his shadow on both walls, giving him the appearance of a mighty warrior. He held his head proudly.

Sir Remy the Vaillant-hearted; Lord of the Land of Naps. He liked it.

Remy stared up at a large piece of armor on the wall. He imagined himself as a human, wearing it and fighting alongside the brave knights of the castle. Beloved by all and taken seriously by those he protected, he would do anything to make sure-

Shh, stop laughing. It could happen! It wasn’t like he was lazy or anything.

Remy walked a little farther down the hall, and some light humming caught his attention. He peeked inside the cracked door. A person sat at the vanity brushing through rather short blue fur-er hair- while they stared into a mirror. Remy slipped through the crack of the door. He tiptoed over to them and smelled the bottom of their pants.

The person seemed oblivious to his master skill of hiding, and they sighed as they leaned onto the vanity. Their eyes drifted over to a sleeping figure on the bed, and they stood. Remy backed up so they wouldn’t step on his tail.

They ran a hand through the person’s hair and felt their forehead. A frown settled on their lips, and Remy wondered if there was something troubling this strangely colored human.

“Noble Talyn,” a voice called from the doorway. The person jumped as they looked at the door.

“Yes, what is it?” they answered.

The door pushed open, and Remy watched two people walk in the door. One he recognized right away, and he had to hold back a hiss deep in his throat.

The other looked like Roman but yet not. He was definitely thinner and walked with his shoulders high but relaxed at the same time. His eyes were a honey color with a yellow ring around the pupil. He wore a golden band around his forehead with a star in the middle. Remy could’ve sworn it had words written around the ring, but he couldn’t make it out from here.

Not Roman smiled and gave this Talyn person a hug. He spoke, “How’re they doing?”

“Still holding up, but not well. I’m afraid they’re not going to make it much longer.” Talyn turned their attention to the woman behind him, and their brows knitted together. “Who did you bring?”

“This is my aunt, Dragana. You remember when Roman and Patton disappeared, right?”

“Of course. You went nuts for three days,” they smiled and turned their attention to her. “It’s an honor to meet you...” They looked unsure for a minute.

“My lady is fine,” the sorcerer- oh excuse me, Dragana spoke with an all too sweet voice. Remy curled his nose. Who did she think she was fooling with this poisoned honey attitude?

“My lady it is then,” Talyn responded with a nod.

Not Roman continued, “The two of them found this sorcerer in the woods. Apparently, she saved the kingdom long ago, and now she’s found a way to free herself.”
Remy’s jaw dropped. How dare she?! How dare she take Logan’s credit? If he wasn’t in the middle of hiding he’d-

“I heard your engaged partner, Joan, is sick,” Dragana added. “I had to help the moment I heard.”

Remy resisted the urge to hack up a hairball.

“Can you do that?” Talyn asked; their voice shook with apprehension.

“I am a sorcerer of the shadows. If there’s evil inside of him, I’ll be able to snuff it out,” she answered.

Talyn nodded their head and stepped aside. Remy peeked out from his hiding spot to get a better look.

Dragana rose her hands over Joan’s body and closed her eyes. When she opened them, a yellow glow lit the iris, ironically the same color as the glow around Not Roman’s eyes, and she put her hands down close to Joan’s chest. Their body stiffened, and Dragana furrowed her brow in concentration. A black mass started dripping out of Joan’s body like a dark cloud and absorbed into the palm of her hands.

Within minutes, the smoke cleared, and Joan breathed hard to catch their breath.

Talyn sat on the bedside and ran their hand through Joan’s hair. Their eyes glanced up at the sorcerer, and they took in a deep breath.

“He should be fine in a few minutes,” the sorcerer replied. “What did you run into to put a curse like that on him?”

Talyn looked away and swallowed hard. “We were on our way here when we ran into a strange creature. I don’t know what it was, but it wasn’t happy we were there. It bit into Joan’s leg when they pushed me out of the way, and they haven’t woken up since.”

“Could be the bite of an Escurelis?” Dragana asked. “Was it small, furry, and did it have razor-sharp teeth?”

“Yes,” Talyn seemed to perk a bit. “Then they’ll be okay?”

“They will now, I assure you. However, if we would’ve waited any longer, your partner would’ve had the life force completely drained from them. It’s a good thing I arrived when I did.”

“Thank you,” Talyn spoke, their eyes tearing up. Dragana nodded her head and went to walk out.

“Wait,” Not Roman said and grabbed onto her wrist. The sorcerer turned to look at her nephew, a concerned brow raising. He pulled her into a hug, and she stiffened at his touch. After a moment, she realized what happened, and she wrapped her arms around his shoulders. “Thank you so much. I don’t know what I’d do if I lost them.”

Dragana smiled and ran a hand through his hair. “It’s the least I could do. I’m sure I’ll have more challenges to face like that when I’m the queen, so it was good practice.”

Remy rolled his eyes. Fat chance that was going to happen.

Not Roman pulled away and nodded his head. She put a hand on his shoulder and looked over to Talyn.
“Your partner should be fine by the coronation tonight. If I may, I’d like to speak to them before the ceremony.”

“Of course,” Talyn replied. They ran a hand through Joan’s hair, relieved when the fever had gone down considerably.

Remy watched the witch and Not Roman walk away, and he padded out from his hiding spot. Is this how she was worming her way in? Were they really eating up these shallow acts of kindness like dessert? Remy shook his fur at the thought. Just what kind of dark spell did she put over this place?

Remy lost interest in Talyn and this partner of theirs and ventured back out into the halls. He looked right. He looked left. He looked right again.

He came from that way… right?

What was he supposed to be doing again?

Remy groaned and looked down at the floor. He shook his fur and concentrated. Think, Remy, think. What were you supposed to be doing?

A song drifted through the air, and Remy’s head rose up. He blinked as he followed the strange sound. It was beautiful, whatever it was. It sounded like someone was singing some sort of lullaby because it soothed Remy right to his core.

Remy walked down the hall, his head lowered to try and divert suspicion. He pushed his nose through a door, noting the singing getting louder. The calming aura of this room made every tense muscle he owned relax. A person walked around the room, organizing something Remy couldn’t see. They wore a long red cloak with the hood over their head, hiding their face from Remy’s view. They turned, and Remy watched large brown eyes scanning over a book in their hand.

Wait, he knew that person.

Patton!

Finally, someone that could help!

Remy let out a loud meow, and Patton jumped. The book in his hands closed on reflex, and he glanced down at the cat.

Remy rubbed his whole body around Patton’s legs.

“Aww, kitty,” Patton said and leaned down. He rubbed his hand over Remy’s back, and Remy jumped to push his fur into Patton’s hand. “Where did you come from?”

Oh, that’s right; Logan, Roman, Virgil, and Emile needed him to escape. He had to find a key. Didn’t Roman say Patton handed him those blankets? He could definitely help.

Remy looked up at Patton as a new dilemma rose to his mind. How was he supposed to get Patton to follow him? He couldn’t speak.

Remy let out the longest meow of his life. Patton’s face went from shocked to amused as Remy used all the air in his lungs.

“What was that about?” Patton asked and knelt down. Remy leaped into his arms and nuzzled his
head into the crook of Patton’s neck. Patton stroked Remy’s back, and the cat could've fallen asleep right then and there.

“Patton?” a voice called as Patton’s door opened. Remy turned his head as Not Roman entered Patton’s room. Huh, they had the same colored eyes. Maybe they were brothers?

“Good afternoon, Thomas,” Patton chirped.

Oh, so this was the new king. Remy imagined him much older than he was. He looked like he was the same age as Roman.

“Where did you find that cat?” Thomas asked.

“He just kinda wandered in on his own,” Patton responded and scratched the top of Remy’s head. Remy raised his head to let Patton hit his favorite spot. No wonder Virgil liked when Patton rubbed him.

“Just don’t hold him too long,” Thomas replied and sent a smile.

“Oh, I know. No sneezing yet,” Patton said with a light laugh. Remy heard Patton sniffle and let out a light mew with a tilt of his head.

Thomas walked over and held out his hands, “Here, let me take it-”

Remy hissed and swung a paw at Thomas. The king jumped back and blinked at the annoyed cat. Patton clicked his tongue and picked up Remy under the shoulders to turn and face him.

“Now you be nice. This is no time to be catty.”

Oh, ha-ha. Of course Patton would find a way to make puns in a situation like this. Gee, who did that remind him of? Remy did the cat equivalent of rolling his eyes and flicked his tail back and forth with an annoyed mew.

Patton set Remy down again, and the cat wove around his legs.

“He seems fond of you,” Thomas chuckled.

“Yeah,” Patton watched Remy dance in and out between his legs.

Remy let out another long yell. Come on, you human emotion vending machine, shut up and follow already!

“I think it's trying to tell you something.”

“Hmm, maybe it's my familiar and I don't know it yet.”

Remy froze and would've scoffed if he could. He was very happy with Logan, thank you very much!

Remy let out another loud meow, and Patton picked him back up in his arms. Remy started purring and rubbed his head under Patton’s chin.

“Noisy boy,” Thomas laughed.

“He reminds me a bit of Roman.” The warm emotion radiating from Patton’s chest disappeared, and Remy felt like someone broke his favorite toy mouse. He tilted his head to the side and booped
Patton’s nose with his own. Patton let out a light laugh and rubbed his palm over his eye.

Thomas’s smile fell as well. “We had no choice, Patton.”

“I know, but it still feels wrong. He should be here beside us, not down there.”

Remy’s interest piqued as he pieced the conversation together.

“Roman chose this.”

“You didn't see him down there, Thomas. He was so angry and scared.” Patton paused. “I've never seen him like this before. Even my influence didn't comfort him.”

“That's because seeing him like that upsets you.” Thomas smiled lightly. Patton nodded his head, and Thomas walked over to squeeze Patton’s shoulder, hoping to give him some of his confidence. “This is my choice, and if he won't stand beside me, I will take measures against him.”

Is it really your choice though, Remy wondered.

“I know, but for some reason, I can't shake this bad feeling. What if she's not what she says she is?” Remy watched Patton’s eyes flash yellow, and he held his breath. “Nevermind, I'm just being silly.”

No, Patton! You're absolutely right. Oh, how could he be so stupid? That yellow ring around their eyes was her influence.

Remy mewed and licked Patton’s chin. Patton let a laugh escape him and stroked the underside of Remy’s chin. He sniffled again.

“He'll come around, I'm sure of it,” Thomas spoke and let his hand slide off of Patton. “If it would help, perhaps Calypso would let you take his meal down to him. Maybe he changed his mind.”

Patton looked uncomfortable. “She warned me to stay away from him in case he tried something.”

“Patton, it’s Roman,” Thomas replied with a roll of his eyes. “He wouldn't hurt you. Besides, I’m still your king, and I say you can go see him. Now go.”

Patton nodded. He set Remy down on the floor and picked up the book he was reading earlier. Remy meowed again and stared up at him. He sent Thomas one last glance before following Patton out of the room.

He forgot Roman mentioned that witch cursed that stupid cloak. Why didn't he bite the string off while he had the chance?

Patton walked down the corridor, an unreadable expression on his face. Remy kept up with him and meowed lightly. Patton glanced down at him out of the corner of his eye and smiled. He went back to his walk, his mind obviously elsewhere. Remy tried to read the title of the book in his hand, but he couldn't make out the weird alphabet.

Remy watched Patton walk into the kitchen, and the smell of food nearly took all of Remy’s attention again. He saw a tiny human, well tiny compared to Patton, pacing the room. Oh hey, he remembered this one! They came into the kitchen while Remy had that cookie. Oh, speaking of cookie, Remy’s stomach lurched, and he moaned. His stomach felt like it was on fire. He definitely shouldn't have eaten it.
Patton winced, but Remy was too busy trying not to vomit to notice why. He approached with an outstretched hand, “Something bothering you, Calypso?”

Calypso jumped as Patton spoke. She took a deep breath and folded her arms.

“How can you not feel like something is wrong? You're an Empath. What do you feel about all of this?”

“How about what?”

“Her. Dragana. How could Thomas give up his kingdom to some Magi who, for all we know, could be a dangerous trickster?”

Patton seemed unfazed by the harsh tone. “Honestly, I don't know.”

Remy perked, and he watched Patton rub the back of his neck. Calypso watched him and let out a long sigh.

“Can you feel anything off about Thomas? Anything that seems suspicious or out of his control?”

Patton shook his head. Remy rolled his eyes.

Calypso sighed and turned back to the table. “I don't know if I can follow her lead. I'm sure this will be the last day I serve here.”

“Calypso-”

“I took an oath to serve Thomas and Roman, not some great aunt named Dragana. Come tomorrow, I'm packing my bags and traveling north, and I know I'm not the only one. Leo and Terrence have already said they're coming with, and I know Kyle and Valerie aren't far behind.”

“Please,” Patton swallowed hard. He reached out to hold onto her hand and rubbed small circles over her knuckles. “Think about this first. Everything is going to be okay.”

A calming aura settled over the room. Remy shook his fur, and his stomach suddenly felt better. Huh, that was such a weird form of magic. The effect reached Calypso as well, and she took in a deep breath.

“Okay. Maybe I am being a little too overdramatic,” Calypso muttered. She sent a smile. “You always know what to say to make me feel better.”

Remy’s fur bristled. So that was the witch’s plan. She was going to use Patton to make people trust her. It was one thing for Roman to say it, but to see it in action-

“May I take Roman's food down to him? I need to talk to him about last night.”

Calypso looked ready to say something but nodded. She handed Patton a plate, and Patton gave her a word of thanks.

Remy followed Patton once again down the hall. Oh, crap, that stomach ache was coming back. He resisted the urge to curl in on himself and let out a light mew.

Patton turned and furrowed his brow. “What's wrong, kitto? You don't feel well?”

Remy laid down on the floor and flattened his ears. Oh man, he was gonna yeet his cookies.
A hand stroked his back, and Remy tensed. Patton’s soothing touch calmed his stomach once again. Remy leaned into Patton’s palms.

Without warning, Patton scooped Remy up into his free hand. Remy clung onto the red material and rested his chin against Patton. Man, Patton was like a really addictive painkiller drug.

“Hang in there,” Patton whispered. Good thing that was the only thing on Remy’s mind.

Patton stopped in front of a door and grabbed a key ring. Remy watched him with curiosity, but he lacked the willpower to grab it now. Perhaps when Patton wasn't looking.

The door opened, and Remy flinched at the high pitched squeak. He buried his face into the fabric of Patton’s cloak and groaned.

“Good evening,” Patton chirped as he stepped inside. How could he be so cheerful at a time like this? Remy turned his head and caught Logan’s gaze. Remy wasn't sure if he looked relieved, shocked, or a bit of both. However, the real interesting reaction was the range of emotions that passed over Virgil's face. Man, he had it bad.

Virgil called out Patton name, but Patton kept his eyes trained on Roman. Remy felt Patton’s shoulders stiffen, and that sick feeling came back.

“Roman, your wrists-”

“Oh, now you care about my safety?” Roman scoffed. Even Remy flinched at the sharp tone.

“I'm sorry,” Patton replied, his voice audibly hurt. He set the food, the key ring, and Remy down on the floor.

Remy groaned. He tried to take a step forward and fell over. Yeah, if the room could stop spinning, that'd be great.

“If you were really sorry, you wouldn't have put me here.”

“That wasn't my call. Thomas-”

“Is he unhurt?”

“He’s fine, but-”

“Then I would like to speak with him.”

Patton sighed and shook his head. “He doesn't want to talk to you right now.”

“Well maybe I don't want to talk to you either, but it's not stopping me.”

As Patton ran a hand through his hair, he pulled out the book from under his arm. He flipped through the pages and stopped in the middle somewhere.

“I... am starting to wonder if you're right.” Both Roman and Remy perked up at his words, and Patton glanced behind him before speaking again. “It doesn't make sense. According to his majesty, King Damian, the journal speaks of a sorcerer named Logos defeating a woman sorcerer that fits the description of Lady Dragana, not the other way around.”

The mention of Logan’s true name dropped the temperature in the room ten degrees. Remy glanced over at Logan, who had his jaw fully extended. Roman seemed just as shocked, and he swallowed
hard. If Patton mentioned Logan’s true name to that dragon witch, it was all over.

“That's because she's been lying to you.” Roman stood and walked until the chains around his wrists stopped him. Patton watched Roman's hands and rubbed his own to ease some of the pain. “Patton, please, you have to believe me. If not my words, remember the things that you were taught. Damian’s journal is proof.”

“I,” Patton rubbed his arms, “I'm so confused. I don't know what the truth is anymore.”

Roman's expression softened. “I know. I can feel how torn up you are, but Patton, I have never lied to you before, and I don't intend to start now. You know this.”

“I know,” Patton replied with a sigh. “I just don’t want anyone to get hurt.”

“And hopefully no one will.” The corner of Roman’s mouth flickered into a half grin, and he sighed through his nose. “Why don’t you go put on your own cloak and leave mine behind? Maybe you’ll feel better after you get into familiar clothing.”

Patton grabbed the red cloth around his shoulders. His eyebrows furrowed in concentration, and he swallowed hard.

“No,” he replied, his voice unusually monotone. He looked up at Roman, the once brown eyes a bright yellow color, and set his jaw.

Virgil rose to his feet and walked to the edge of his cell. Logan's eyes followed him, and Emile’s head perked up.

“Patton, please, listen to him,” Virgil’s voice trembled.

Patton stiffened. Remy could barely make out the way Patton’s lips moved, unspoken words willing themselves out into the open, but it looked like he was trying to say Virgil’s name.

“I know that voice,” Patton turned his head and looked straight into Virgil’s eyes. For a moment, the room held its breath. “Who are you?”

Virgil’s heart broke along with whatever confidence he had. He swallowed hard and tried to remember Patton never saw him like this before.

Before he could open his mouth again, a woman’s voice called Patton’s name. Patton turned, and he swallowed hard.

“I have to go,” he spoke. “I shouldn’t even be down here. She said not to leave my room—”

“Patton, please wait,” Virgil called out, but Patton sent him one last glance before apologizing and hurrying out. With the slam of a door, Patton disappeared from their grasp once again.

Remy heaved. Welp, that cookie definitely tasted better the first time.

“Goodness, Remy, what did you eat,” Logan sighed as he came to the side of the bars. Remy rolled over onto his side and let out a weak meow.

Emile’s ear twitched. “He said nothing... except for a chocolate cookie in the kitchen.”

Logan ran a hand over his face and sighed. “Remy, you cannot eat chocolate. It’s toxic to cats, you voracious loaf.”
Yeah, thanks for telling him that now.

Remy crawled over to the keys on the floor. Just a little farther. His whole body trembled, and he laid down on the floor with a weak meow.

Logan cursed at the edge of the cell bars. Neither Remy or the keys were in his reach. Virgil stood at his side and crouched down.

“I could try-”

“Don’t injure yourself.”

“But if I don’t start using them, how am I going to fry her to a pulp.”

Logan sighed and stepped out of Virgil’s way. Virgil took a calming breath in and out. He raised his hand and furrowed his brow.

For a moment, nothing happened.

Virgil growled, and a few purple sparks flew from his fingers. They fizzled out, and he retracted his hand with a light cry of pain.

Emile rose to his paws and came to Virgil’s side. He rubbed his cheek up against Virgil’s and spoke, “Deep breaths. You got this.”

Virgil nodded and closed his eyes. Emile’s eyes glowed a soft violet color, and Virgil tried again. The purple sparks danced around his fingers. They jolted out and attached to the key ring. The keys flew into Virgil’s palms, and he let out a triumphant “ha” before drawing them back in.

“I knew you could do it!” Emile barked and licked the side of Virgil’s face. Virgil laughed lightly and examined the lock.

“I did, but I still can’t touch the bars to unlock the gate.”

“You can’t,” Logan replied and stood up, “but maybe I can.”

“It’s enchanted so we can’t touch it. There’s no way-” Virgil’s eyes watched Logan tap the black collar around his neck, and he hummed. Logan stood and took the keys from Virgil’s hand. He touched the bars twice with his fingertip to make sure his theory was correct then fiddled with each key until he found the right one.

The heavy lock clicked open, and Logan ran out to wrap his familiar into his arms. Remy let out a satisfied meow and nuzzled into Logan’s chest.

“That’s the last time I’m leaving you out of my sight,” Logan whispered into Remy’s fur. Remy weakly opened his jaw to lick the tip of Logan’s nose.

“Let’s just hope he doesn’t die before you get your magic back,” Virgil mumbled as he and Emile walked out to freedom as well. Virgil pulled the keys from the lock and winced as his fingers brushed the metal.

Logan passed Remy over to Virgil, both victims looking rather displeased at the turn of events, and took the keys from Virgil’s hands. He walked to Roman’s cell and tried every key he could find.

“Why is it, whenever we meet, I have to pull you out of some form of imprisonment?” Logan asked.
Roman laughed through his nose. “Just lucky I guess.”

The lock clicked open, and Logan stepped inside. He carefully pulled Roman’s wrists up and searched for the keyhole. Logan tried his best to ignore the deep cuts and dried blood surrounding the metal. Hopefully, the key for Roman’s bonds would be on this key ring as well. He stuck in at least three keys before he heard a click.

The metal fell from Roman’s wrists, and he swallowed hard. He didn’t realize how much damage he actually did. Logan studied the wounds, his mind obviously elsewhere.

“My hero,” Roman spoke, drawing Logan’s attention back up to his face.

Logan pulled Roman into a hug, shocking everyone in the room, and whispered, “That’s the last time I’m leaving you out of my sight as well.”

Roman smiled and returned the hug. He glanced over Logan’s shoulder and noticed Virgil staring at the prison door, his expression as tense as his shoulders.

“We’ll get him back,” he spoke over Logan’s shoulder.

“You’re damn right,” Virgil replied and squeezed his hands into fists, “and when I see that sorcerer, I’m going to make her regret everything.”
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Things are heating up as our trio tries to bring back those stolen from them. Tempers rise, swords are drawn, and this is definitely not the way any of them thought the story would go.
--
Chapter warnings: Manipulation, blood, crying... and I think that's it
Word count: 5450

Roman pressed his back against the wall and peered around the edge. He sighed through his nose and shook his head.

“No one again. I’m starting to get worried,” Roman mumbled under his breath.

“Maybe they’re preparing for the ceremony?” Emile offered as his ears perked.

Roman shook his head and answered, “It’s not for another three hours, and I know JayisJo usually has patrol of this hall in the afternoon.”

“Either that witch is really confident or they’re really not trusting her,” Virgil replied. “I mean, I wouldn’t blame them. Some complete stranger comes in and starts trying to call all the shots? No thanks.”

Roman slipped out from behind the wall and walked down the long corridor. The whole castle had been silent, save for their footsteps. Roman took the lead, with Logan behind him, Virgil taking the back, and Emile at Virgil’s side. Remy had curled up into a ball in Logan’s hood, and every once and awhile Virgil would catch Logan glancing back to check and make sure his familiar was still alive.

Roman stopped at a fork at the end of the hall. He pointed down one end and spoke, “That way leads to Patton’s room, but I’m not sure if he’d be there.”

“Patton mentioned she said not to come out of his room,” Virgil informed. “If he’s not there, I’ll be surprised.”

Emile put his nose to the floor and sniffed. “Oh yeah, he’s definitely that way. His scent is fresh.”

Roman took a step in Patton’s direction, but Virgil put a hand on Roman’s shoulder to stop him. “You go save your brother. I’ll handle Patton.”

“He doesn’t know who you are,” Roman objected.

“But he knows me,” Emile said and rose his head, “I think. Besides, it’s Patton. He'll talk to anyone.”

Roman looked ready to argue, but sighed and nodded his head.

Logan met Virgil’s eyes and spoke, “You two be careful.”
“You too.”

The group split apart, and Virgil kept up with Emile’s quick pace down the hall. Instead of the royal red ribbons that hung over most of the castle, this one was lined with portraits and drawings.

Virgil stopped and looked at one of the pictures. It looked like fingerpaint, honestly. Wait, maybe that was berry juice? Or maybe it was just a stain? Anyway, it was three people standing together, the names “Roman, Me, Thomas” written at the top with a heart in the middle. A smile slipped onto Virgil’s lips as he realized this was probably Patton’s picture. More lined the walls, like Patton’s room couldn’t contain them all.

Emile tugged on the corner of Virgil’s jacket, snapping his attention back.

“You okay there?” Emile asked.

“Yeah,” Virgil said with a nod.

Emile looked around at the pictures and hummed. “I’m sure he’d draw one for you if you asked him.”

The smile faded from Virgil’s lips. They had to get him back first.

Virgil’s nerves heightened as he walked closer to Patton’s door. Would he remember him? Could the get that stupid cloak off him? That witch didn’t hurt him, did she? He balled his hands into fists. She better not have.

Emile stopped at a door and smelled the crack beneath it.

“He’s in here, but it’s awful quiet,” Emile said as he rose his head, “and he’s scared.”

Virgil swallowed the heat rising from his gut and knocked on the door. He heard a light gasp on the other side, followed by an unsettling amount of silence. For some reason, Virgil lost his voice as well.

“Patton, it’s Emile,” he spoke through the door. A sigh of relief followed on the other side. “Can I come in?”

“No,” Patton replied, his voice awful quiet.

“Do you wanna build a snowman?” Emile said with a laugh.

“You can’t.”

The smile faded from Emile’s lips. “Why?”

“The door’s locked.”

“Well then open it, silly.”

“I can’t.”

“Patton, it’s your door. You can unlock it any time you want.”

“I don’t have the key.”

Virgil’s whole body tensed. Emile looked up at Virgil, and he nosed his partner’s hand. Virgil
jumped as the cold nose pressed into his palm, and he let out a long breath through his mouth.

“Where… is it then?” Virgil asked and swallowed the lump rising in his throat. He knew the answer.

The other side of the door grew quiet, and Virgil’s heart pounded in his chest. Emile’s tail lowered as the fear from Patton leaked through the door.

“Who’s with you?” Patton asked, his voice trembling.

Emile let out a low whine. He glanced up at Virgil again. Virgil’s lips moved up and down as his eyebrows creased. Emile pressed his shoulder into Virgil’s side, and Virgil cleared his throat.

“Patton, it’s Virgil,” he spoke.

Another long pause answered. Virgil’s hand went on the door handle, and he gave it a test turn, just to make sure. It stayed put.

“Patton?” Emile called through the door. Still, he wouldn’t answer.

“I’m sorry,” Patton’s voice came at last. “I feel like I should know who you are, but I don’t.”

Virgil’s knees shook, and Emile helped keep his balance upright. The hurt on his face was enough to bring tears to Emile’s eyes. He blinked them away and rubbed his nose into Virgil’s stomach.

Virgil found his voice again and mumbled, “Try Anx.” Patton drew in a sharp breath, and Virgil pressed his hand to the door. “Pat, are you okay?”


“Yes, like in the book.” Virgil’s lips pulled into a sad smile.

“You’re one of her demons, aren’t you?”

Virgil sighed heavily through his nose. “I was- don’t worry. I’m not here to hurt you- but I got out of it thanks to Logan…” Virgil paused. He didn’t want to say Logan’s true name, but he knew Patton wouldn’t recognize Logan if he didn’t recognize Virgil.

“You mean Logos?”

“Yeah. You know him too, but you don’t know it.”

After a long pause, Patton responded, “He was the other man in the cell with you, wasn’t he? The one with the suppressor.”

Virgil nodded and remembered Patton couldn’t see him. “The book you read is telling you the truth. She lied to you about everything.”

“I know.”

“You… do?”

“Yeah,” Patton took a deep breath. “When… after I came back, I told her I’ve been getting these weird feelings from people. They don’t trust her, so I started to not trust her.”

“That can’t be good,” Emile muttered, but Virgil shushed him.
Patton continued, “She told me everything about what happened long ago. How she was supposed to be the queen until her parents found out she was a Magi and put her into eternal servitude. How horribly her brothers treated her. How all she wanted to do was to give people like us a place they could feel safe and loved. She… she still wants all of that. She said she doesn’t want anyone hurt. She just wants her chance back.”

Virgil sighed and pressed his head against the door. “I know, but Patton, she can’t take that away from Thomas.”

“She’s not. He’s giving it to her.”

A frustrated groan slipped through Virgil’s nose. He looked down at Emile, who looked just as annoyed.

“Pat, she’s using you both to do it. It’s that cloak. She’s controlling you with it, and I don’t know what she did to Thomas, but I know he’s under the same spell.” He had to be.

No reply came from the other side, and Virgil bit onto his thumbnail. He heard cloth shuffling, and footsteps drew closer to the door. They stopped right at the end of the wooden door, and for once, Virgil couldn’t feel any emotion coming from Patton.

“Pat?”

“I need you to leave.” His voice held the same eerie monotone pitch it did in the cells. Virgil’s mouth hung open, and he took a step back.

“Patton-”

“I said go!” Patton yelled. Virgil jerked as if he’d been slapped. Emile let out a soft whine, and he came to Virgil’s side. The spell broke, and a wave of sorrow washed over Virgil’s heart. He heard a soft sob from Patton on the other side as cloth slid down the door.

“I’m sorry,” Patton whispered, and the sound came out muffled. “I didn’t mean to yell. I… I can’t help you. I don’t know what to do. I know something’s wrong, but I can’t… I’m sorry.”

Virgil’s eyes narrowed, and he lowered his head.

“I’m going to help you, Pat. I’m going to get you back, and I swear to you, everything’s going to be okay.” Virgil turned hard on his heel and marched down the hallway. Emile practically ran to keep up with him. Virgil was going to find the key to Patton’s room and rip that cursed cloak off him if it was the last thing he did.

But first, she was going to pay for this.

-“Roman, this does not look like the throne room,” Logan mumbled as he looked around. Roman chose to ignore him and stepped in front of a rather large blade. They appeared to walk into some sort of weaponry room, and Logan marveled as he recognized a few blades.

Suits of armor lined the walls, and Logan examined each one. Above each was a nameplate telling what years they were worn to and to which king or prince they belonged to.

Logan stopped at a familiar golden plated piece of armor. The red cape draped over the left shoulder, made from a stiff steel-like material, and even managed through all these years to look
brand new. His eyes rested upon the belt, and he took in a deep breath. He still had it. Logan picked up the medallion around the belt and examined it.

Roman looked over his shoulder and walked to Logan’s side. He eyed the piece of metal in Logan’s hand and hummed.

“That mean anything to you?” he asked, even if he knew the answer.

Logan nodded in confirmation. His fingers drifted over the name inscribed on the back. Logos de Fides, followed by several runes drawn around the outside of the medallion.

“I gave it to him the day… it happened,” Logan responded. “It’s a protection spell I conjured when I received secret training to control my abilities.”

Roman rose his brows, and Logan glanced over at him. He continued, “You really didn’t think I became the way I am by not using my magic, did you?”

“Well, no, but,” Roman swallowed. “If you were able to use your magic before the curse, that means there’s a way to get that off.”

“Of course there’s a way to get it off,” Logan said with a roll of his eyes. “You just need the key to do so.”

“So where is it?”

Logan sighed. “I’m unsure. The last person who had it is not exactly around anymore.” Logan eyed the armor before him and slipped the medallion back on the belt. Roman stopped him, and Logan glanced up.

“I’m sure he’d want you to have it.”

Logan sighed through his nose and nodded. “He would.” Logan opened the pouch on his left hip and slipped the medal inside.

“He’d also be proud of you, you know.”

“Proud of someone who only delayed the inevitable.”

“Now you listen to me,” Roman said as he turned Logan by the shoulders to look at him, “and you listen good. Her actions are her choice, and hers alone. You had nothing to do with any of this. Okay, yeah, sure, you unleashed an ancient evil upon the palace again, but what matters is what you do now. You made a mistake, now what are you willing to do to fix it?”

Logan’s smile flickered before he nodded and sighed. “That was rather inspirational.”

“Learned it from Thomas,” Roman said with a smile. “You don’t know how many times I had to hear that.”

“The confident Prince Roman needed a pep talk?” Logan half laughed. “Preposterous.”

Roman rolled his eyes, and his gaze caught the sword lying in the case beside the suit of armor. He drew it from its sheath and examined it.

“You know, this blade is pretty lightweight. I’m sure you could-”

“Absolutely not.”
“Oh come on! Don’t give me this speech about how it was Damian’s and it’s not right.”

“It’s not that. It’s…” Logan’s voice trailed off. He rubbed the back of his neck and looked away with a sheepish smile. “I am not as well versed with a sword as I should be.”

“Well here, let’s have a quick crash course.” Roman drew the sword from his wrist, his face scrunching as he did so. Oh, right, he kinda cut his wrists open. That hurt more than he anticipated.

“Roman, we don’t have time.”

“Nonsense. This shall only take a moment. You learn quick, right?”

Logan sighed and nodded his head. Roman held out the other sword in Logan’s direction, and Logan stared into his eyes as he took the blade.

The sword was rather light, almost too light to be a real blade, and Logan studied every detail carved into the sword’s gold hilt. Three jewels rested in the hilt with a rune printed above them. The sapphire to the left had a protection rune, the ruby to the right had strength, and the stone in the middle reflected both colors, with the rune for courage above it. The silver blade had runes carved down the whole inside, completing a spell for luck.

It had been a long time since he held this sword, but the memory of forging it was still fresh in his mind.

“Come at me, my good sir,” Roman called out as he got in a defensive crouch.

Logan snickered and turned the blade in his wrist. Even with his suppressor, the magic from the weapon tingled in his hand.

“I doubt this will be a fair fight,” Logan said with a light laugh.

“I’ll go easy on you.”

Logan mirrored the movements he watched all those years ago. He tested a swing, surprised at how easy it was and how quickly Roman blocked it. Both looked rather shocked at the motion. Roman beamed as Logan twisted for another strike.

“I thought you said you couldn't fight?”

“I may have remembered something from my past.”

Or maybe, Logan imagined Roman as someone else who taught him self defense when dealing with limited magic.

“I think you’ve got the hang of it.”

“Well, it helps that the sword is enchanted.”

“You mean you’re cheating?”

“You’re the one who handed me the blade.”

The sword slipped, and Roman swerved out of the way before it could cut his cheek. Logan paused just long enough for Roman to point his sword at Logan’s throat. Logan swallowed hard and took a step back.
“I think that’s enough,” Roman spoke with no malice. Logan let out a long sigh. Roman walked over to Damian’s old armor, untied the belt from around its waist, and held the leather band out to Logan. “A knight needs to have the proper materials if he’s about to go into battle.”

Logan took the leather from Roman’s hand and wrapped it around his waist. It pulled on his right side, the extra weight foreign to his hip, and he slid the sword back into its home.

“We should move before something ill befalls Thomas,” Logan mumbled. Roman nodded his head, and the two of them strode back down the halls. They long ago agreed no one was coming, so sneaking around was pointless.

The throne room doors were thrown open, and soft voices conversed inside. Roman paused just out of earshot, and Logan had to stop on a dime to avoid running into his back. Remy let out a low grunt as he jostled inside Logan’s hood.

“-were to move this tower here, we could protect ourselves better.”

“I don’t know. That kingdom has been dormant for years.”

“Oh trust me, their leader is alive, and he’s not the kind to let go of grudges.”

Roman furrowed his brow. Thomas was talking to the sorcerer, but about what? He turned to Logan, who looked just as confused.

A low sigh, and Thomas spoke again, “Are you sure he would come after us, even after all these years?”

“I’m certain, and you’ll never see him coming.”

“Then tomorrow after the coronation, I’ll begin… er, you can begin moving our forces to the outer tower. I’ll join them when I can.”

A long pause, and she spoke, “Something is troubling you?”

“I don’t feel like I deserve to be the captain of your knights. Leo is way more qualified-”

“Thomas, you’re a more capable leader than you give yourself credit for. There’s no other person I’d rather have defending my kingdom.”

Roman shuddered at the thought, and Logan stopped him from taking a step forward. When Roman turned to ask what was wrong, Logan held a finger to his lips.

“I’m honored,” Thomas mumbled, and then continued in a more confident voice, “Hopefully I won’t have to do it alone.”

“Perhaps one day he’ll come around. I know my choice hurt you but, Thomas, if he’s a danger to this kingdom-”

“He’s my brother.”

The sharp tone made a reflexive smile pull onto Roman’s lips, but it disappeared soon after.

“Thomas,” her voice was low in a warning tone, “don’t make me question your loyalty as well.”

There was a soft gasp. “I-I’m sorry. I didn’t mean-”
“I understand. Talking about the ones we love can upset us and make us think irrationally. Your brother, I’m sure, will come around eventually. Give him time.”

The hairs on Roman’s neck bristled, and his blood boiled. This time, Logan didn’t grab onto his shoulder in time to stop him. He whispered Roman’s name and told him to stop, but Roman was in no mood to listen.

“That’s a lie and you know it,” Roman growled.

Both heads snapped up in his direction. Roman caught the fading yellow glow in Thomas’s eyes, the same one Patton had when he last spoke to them. The sorcerer’s eyes held curiosity, and she tilted her head to the side.

“Roman,” she purred, “have you come to your senses yet?” The sickening sweet voice insulated Roman’s anger and caused his hand to grip his sword tighter. He kept his eyes locked on Thomas, more specifically the golden band around his head, and swallowed his nerves.

“I’ve come to get my brother’s kingdom back,” he replied.

Thomas’s teeth bit into his bottom lip, and he eyed the sorcerer out of the corner of his eye. The sorcerer seemed unfazed, but Roman caught the glimmer of annoyance that flashed through her eyes.

“You certainly don’t give up easily, do you?” she asked.

“I was taught to be a royal pain,” he shot back.

“Very well,” she replied. “Thomas, if you really are loyal to me, now’s the time to prove yourself.”

Roman sucked in a breath. Don’t-

“Do what you must to get rid of him.”

The irises of Thomas’s eyes flashed yellow. He drew his sword from his side and stood at the ready. Roman took a step back.

“Thomas, please, don’t-”

With alarming speed, Thomas leaped forward. Roman had no choice but to defend. Thomas may not be as skilled as he was, but he was definitely faster. Block after block, the two pushed out into the hall. Roman caught her devilish grin over Thomas’s shoulder.

She couldn’t hurt him, but Thomas could, and she knew he wouldn’t fight back.

Roman could’ve sworn someone called his name. The doors to the throne room slammed shut, and Thomas pressed Roman hard up against the wall. His yellow eyes glowed on Roman’s cheeks.

“Thomas, you have to stop,” Roman grunted as he pushed his brother back. Thomas stumbled but came flying back forward. Roman jumped out of the way, and Thomas’s sword lodged into the stone behind them.

“Logan, I could use some help!” Roman called over his shoulder. He turned back in time to see Thomas leap at him. Roman caught Thomas’s blade but lost his balance in the process. He tumbled backward onto the cold floor. “Logan!”

He couldn’t do this. He couldn’t fight Thomas. Where the heck did Logan get to? Fear weaseled its
way into Roman’s mind. What if someone found him? What if he was hurt somewhere? What if-

A low growl, followed by a bark, echoed down the hall. The weight pushed off Roman’s shoulders, and brown paws rested at his side. Roman glanced up at Emile, who towered over him like a mighty guardian. His head was lowered, his teeth were bared, and his fur rose on its end.

Thomas looked shaken but not stirred at the events. He kept his eyes trained on Roman. The latter pushed himself up with his hands.

“Where are the others?” Roman asked.

“Logan followed Virgil into the throne room,” Emile spoke. As if on cue, a loud pop erupted from behind the doors, and Roman flinched.

“What, why-”

“He’s pissed, and he’s not really in the mood to listen to reason for once,” Emile mumbled. “I’ll distract the king while you try to get that crown off his head.”

“Easier said than done. He’s out to kill me.”

“Et tu, Brute?” Emile mumbled and flicked his tail.

Thomas eyed him warily, his eyes almost looking sunken in from the sick yellow colored glow. His sword shook in his hand.

Emile barked and he leaped forward. Thomas swung his sword, but Emile easily dodged it. He landed on Thomas’s chest, pinning him on his back. His sword skidded across the floor.

“Now, Roman!”

Roman was on his feet and rushing forward in seconds. He caught Thomas’s eyes before wrapping his fingers around the crown. Sparks flew from the metal as he pulled, and Thomas let out a loud cry of pain. Roman withdrew his hands. The tips ached, fresh with burns, and he glanced up at Emile.

“You can do this,” Emile said as his eyes communicated his sympathy.

Roman nodded and tried again. The crown sparked, another wave of pain, and Roman pulled. There was a loud pop before Roman tumbled backward. His hands burned, both from pulling on the crown and sliding across the stone floor. Emile whined, and Roman could hear Thomas’s sharp intakes of breath.

Roman looked at the ring in his hands before throwing it as far away as he could.

“Thomas?” he called out. Roman turned his attention to Emile, who got off Thomas’s chest and nosed his cheek with a light lick. Thomas sputtered and let out a light laugh.

“What happened?” he asked as he sat up and rubbed his head. He winced and pulled his hand back.

“It’s a really long story,” Roman spoke and held his hand out. Thomas took it, and Roman pulled him into a tight hug. “Glad to have you back.”

“Where did I go?” Thomas asked with a laugh.

The doors in the throne room splintered after a loud bang. Both brothers’ heads sailed up in its
direction. The stone above the wood cracked and crumbled.

“Roman, what’s going on?”

“How much do you remember?”

“I remember you coming back, this woman, and Patton- Patton! Where is he?”

Roman looked to Emile for an answer. Emile, however, was more interested in getting in the throne room. Roman walked over to its doors and gave a pull. They opened with little effort, and Roman stepped inside.

The windows were all blasted open, a few pillars were cracked in half, and the table was long split down the middle. Smoke billowed from burning cloth.

A loud cough came to Roman’s right, and he saw Logan pushing himself up in the corner. Roman rushed to his side and brushed debris off of his shoulders.

“Logan, are you alright?”

“I’m fine,” Logan said, though his bleeding temple and slight wince when he stood said otherwise. “Where is Virgil?”

“Don’t ask me. It was Emile’s turn to watch him,” Roman shot back, but it appeared his joke was not well received.

“What was he thinking?” Logan growled.

“He wasn’t,” Emile mumbled.

Logan caught Thomas standing rather awkwardly behind Roman and Emile, and he noted the lack of gold ring around his head and eyes.

“Glad to see you are well, your highness,” Logan mumbled.

Thomas let out a nervous laugh and replied, “I’ll be better once I figure out what’s going on.”

“All will be explained, but for right now, I need to find Virgil before he gets himself killed.”

“You think they went through that?” Emile asked and pointed his nose. A gaping hole sat at the back of the throne room.

“That’s a good possibility,” Logan replied. Logan’s eyes widened, and he reached into the back of his hood. Remy let out a low meow of disapproval after being moved, but save for his rather upset stomach, he appeared to be okay. “Emile, I need a favor of you.”

“You want me to watch Remy I’m guessing.” Logan’s eyes pleaded, and Emile sighed. “You keep Virgil safe, and I’ll make sure Remy doesn’t die.”

Logan let out a heavy sigh of relief and stroked his hand between Emile’s ears. The wolf took Remy by the scruff of the neck and carried him out of the crumbling throne room. Logan turned his attention back to the hole and sighed.

Hopefully, they weren’t too late already.
Virgil’s magic sparked off target and hit the outer walls of the palace. He jumped backward, dodging a piece of building that broke away from the attack. A bead of sweat fell down his forehead, and he heard a growl behind him.

The sorcerer rested on the back of her dragon. Its head lowered to Virgil’s level, and it let out a bone-chilling growl. Smoke billowed from its jaw, and it took several steps forward.

“You’re rather foolish if you think you have a chance against me,” she taunted. “I’ve had my magic for centuries, but you’ve had them for maybe a few decades. Besides, we all know that shadow magic is more powerful than energy magic.”

Virgil ducked behind a building and gathered his thoughts. She had a point. His magic had a limit, and hers fed off of the shadows inside the earth itself. Still, if he was smart about this… who was he kidding? He lost the moment he charged in without a plan.

She continued, “As fun as this was, I don’t have all day. I’d like to get back to ruling my kingdom.”

The dragon rose its head high and took flight into the air. Virgil watched as it aimed for the hole in the wall it created in the throne room. He mustered all his strength and aimed. Purple sparks flashed into the air and turned into a giant purple beam of light. It hit the dragon’s stomach. Virgil smirked as the dragon shrieked and crumbled in on itself. It crashed down into the ground with a satisfying crack.

Virgil’s body tingled from such a strong attack. He didn’t have his full strength back, and he already exhausted too much energy. If this didn’t work, he was toast.

The witch pulled herself out from under her dragon and ran a hand over its neck. When it came away with blood, she screamed and turned her attention back to where Virgil hid.

Virgil swallowed a dry throat and changed his position. He snuck through pieces of debris as she used her shadow teleportation to show up in different areas.

As he rounded a corner, he came face to face with her. Virgil readied a spell. She rose her hand up and closed her fist, and Virgil’s whole body froze.

“How dare you?” she growled. “I’ll make you regret ever touching my Ruby.”

Virgil tried to get anything to move, but with her fist closed, he knew he wouldn’t be going anywhere. She rose a hand up, and his rose along with hers. Virgil strained his muscles to try and break her hold, but her shadow magic proved too powerful. His hand rested on his throat, and he could feel his magic starting to spark at his fingertips.

He heard Logan call out his name behind him, along with the scraping of metal. Her eyes flickered over Virgil’s shoulder, and a smile lit on her face.

“Take one step closer, and I’ll make him tear his own throat out,” the sorcerer ordered. Roman and Logan both froze in their spots, taking in the scene before them.

“Let him go,” Logan growled.

“Or what? You’ll bore me to death with your huge vocabulary? I’m quaking in my boots.”

Roman gripped his sword tighter and took a step forward. Virgil’s fingernails dug into his skin, and he clenched his teeth. Logan grabbed onto Roman’s shoulder and held him steady.
“I’m sure we can work this out.”

“He hurt my dragon. We’re far past the negotiation line.”

“Dragana please,” Thomas called out from Roman’s side. He put a hand to his chest, and she rose a brow, “I know you were hurt, and I’m sorry. You didn’t deserve anything they did to you, but all this is wrong. What do you have to gain from it?”

“Peace of mind,” she snapped. “Can you honestly blame me? I told you how they tortured me for years.”

“Two wrongs don’t make a right. If you do this, you’re no better than they are,” Thomas answered. He took a careful step forward, much to the dismay of Roman, and his pace turned into a slow walk forward. “You said you didn’t want anyone to get hurt. You saved Joan. You were planning on protecting our kingdom. Don’t let your pride get in the way.”

Dragana snuffed and shook her head. “You honestly believe you can give me some sort of pep talk, and I’m going to forget years of suffering? You have no idea what it’s like. You’ve had the lap of luxury since you were born while I begged on the floor for table scraps. It’s not fair! I shouldn't have had to-”

“You’re right. Your anger is valid, but the way you’re going about it… it’s not going to solve anything.”

“No, but it’ll make me feel better.”

“Maybe now, but what about years from now?”

She laughed through her nose. “You honestly don’t know me well enough.”

Thomas was a few steps away from her now. She straightened her posture and swallowed hard.

“I could kill you right now,” she warned.

“You could’ve killed me hours ago,” Thomas reminded, “but you didn’t.”

“Please, I needed you. If I got rid of you, they’d never trust me.”

Thomas furrowed his brow and sighed. He put a hand on hers, the one holding Virgil’s hand to his throat, and looked deep into her eyes.

“Please, let him go. You don’t have to do any of this.”

Dragana’s eyes shifted, and she sighed through her nose. She lowered her hand, making Virgil’s lower as well, and released the fist holding onto his shadow. Virgil’s legs trembled, and Logan grabbed onto his arm to steady him.

The sorcerer spoke, “You’re very mature for your age. I wouldn’t expect someone so young to speak with the diplomatic wisdom of an ancient king.” Thomas’s lips relaxed into a smile. She rose her hand up to run her thumb over his cheek. “I’m sure your forefathers would be proud of you. Perhaps I went about this all wrong. I don’t need to be the queen to get what I want.”

Thomas opened his mouth to speak but instead closed his jaw tight as she grabbed onto his wrist. Roman called out his name and ran forward.

Dragana continued, “You’ll rule by my side just fine on your own and do my work for me.”
Dragana turned to look at them one last time before darkness rose from the ground and swallowed both her and Thomas. Roman slid to a stop and put his hands on the ground. With a cry of anger, he pounded his fist into the earth.

“Why did I let him do that?” Roman yelled. “I should’ve known it was a trap!”

Logan came to his side and put a hand on his shoulder. “They couldn’t have gone far. If we make it inside, we may be able to find them and put a stop to all this.”

Roman stood and turned his attention back to the throne room. He swore that would be the last time she ever touched Thomas again.
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

The last stand. Someone’s not walking away alive from this fight, and Virgil is determined to make sure it’s not Patton. Question is, can he succeed, and what is he willing to sacrifice to do it?

--

Chapter warnings: Death, implied character death, talks of death (morbid eh?), blood, manipulation, knives, oh my goodness the angst, you’re gonna have a bad time, slight nsfw joke but if you blink you’ll miss it

Word count: 5484

Chapter Notes

Blame Tumblr. They all wanted this tonight, so enjoy your extra suffering >:3

The last thing Patton expected to show up in his room was a dark mass. He jumped onto his bed and pressed his back against the wall. The darkness disappeared, revealing Thomas and Dragana standing in front of him.

Thomas’s eyes darted around the room until they landed on Patton. The Empath felt Thomas’s fear rise, and he swallowed his heart back into his throat.

“I should’ve known this would happen,” Dragana spoke, and all attention turned to her. Her lips drew into a tight line, and she huffed, “There was no way I could keep my rule on this place. Not with them still alive. I didn’t expect Virgil to have the courage to come after me, yet here we are.”

Thomas tried to pull his grip from her hand, but she held firm.

Patton’s voice shook as he half mumbled, “What’s going on?”

“Your ragtag team of misfits keep breaking my spells, that’s what’s going on,” she snapped. “I had Thomas perfectly under my control until your little knight in shining armor came and took my crown off his head. And you, little Empath, you seem to break the curse all on your own whenever you feel strong enough emotions from anyone.”

Thomas successfully pulled his hand from her grip and backed up. He reached for his sword, but he was surprised to find it missing. Patton came to his side, and he brushed his shoulder up against Thomas to try and gather some confidence between the two of them.

Dragana continued, “I wanted to keep your personalities intact to divert suspicion, but it seems I may have to take total control, which is a shame, because then you would become totally useless, Patton.”

“There has to be a better way,” Thomas spoke up.
“This is not something you can fix,” Dragana replied, “I gave you both a chance at freedom because I was too soft, but it seems I made the wrong choice. I don’t have the time or energy to produce a powerful spell right now, so we’re just going to have to put a pause to this conversation until I kill them all off.”

“You can’t-” Patton cried, but Dragana held her hand up and stopped his words.

Her eyes stared straight into Patton’s, and she hummed. “Maybe there’s a use for you after all, Patton. It worked with Logan, and I’m certain it will work for Anx.”

Patton’s brows creased together, and she strode over to him. Thomas stood in front of his friend, but Dragana easily moved him away with a push of his shadow.

“Leave him alone!” Thomas yelled out.

The dark mass swallowed both Patton and Dragana, leaving Thomas by himself.

“No!” Thomas ran to the door. He tried to open it but discovered it was locked. He pounded his fist on the door. “Don't hurt him! I swear, I'll-”

He'll what? What chance did he stand against someone that powerful? He was only human after all. If he was going to get Patton and control of his kingdom back, he was going to need backup.

“Can anyone hear me? Hello? Anyone!”

Thomas must’ve yelled for at least ten minutes, but it felt like hours. He slid down the door, his voice sore and eyes ready to spill. Every moment that passed made it harder for him to be optimistic, that everything would be okay.

He rested his head against the door. What would Patton say if he were here? He’d probably tell him someone would find them because Roman was still out there. Besides, Roman had those other two people with him, so that increased their odds of winning… right? Thomas let his eyes close.

“Please,” he whispered, “just let them all be okay.”

--

Roman slid to a halt in the throne room and looked around. Dragana and Thomas were nowhere in sight. He clenched his hands and let out a low growl.

“Where did they get to?” He turned around and glanced at Logan and Virgil, who slid to a halt behind him. “They’re both not here.”

Logan rose a brow. “Perhaps they are readying their forces to kill us off?”

Roman shook his head. “I’m certain most of the guards are either being held captive or have already left the castle with how empty it’s been here.”

Virgil’s eyes widened, and he took off down the hall without a word. The two of them called after him, but only one thing rested on his mind. Virgil retraced his steps from before and slammed his body into a wooden door.

“Patton!” he called through. He pressed his ear to the door.

Someone moved just on the other side of the wood. He felt it move slightly under his touch. Please, please, please-
“Who’s there?”

Virgil furrowed his brow. That didn’t sound like Patton. “Wait, who are you?”

“It’s Thomas,” he replied. Virgil’s heart sped up until it froze.

“Where’s Patton. What did she do to him?”

Logan and Roman’s footsteps echoed down the hall.

“I don’t know. She came in here, dropped me off, and took him.” A long sigh. “I’m afraid she’s going to do something. She said he was useless without his empathetic powers.”

Roman didn’t catch the conversation, but he did catch Thomas’s voice. He took a few steps backward. “Move.”

Virgil caught on and called through the door, “Thomas, step back.” He stepped out of Roman’s way, and Roman rammed his right foot into the door above the lock. It chipped, and Roman tried again. The wood split, and the door crashed open.

Thomas flinched as the door smacked against the wall beside it. Roman walked through and pulled his brother into a hug.

“She didn’t hurt you, did she?”

“I’m fine,” Thomas replied, “but I’m afraid Patton’s not.”

Roman ran both hands through his hair. “Where did they go?”

“I don’t know—”

“Why Patton?” Virgil growled. “He never did anything to her.”

Logan’s eyebrows popped up. “Because she knows you are emotionally compromised by him.”

Virgil opened his mouth to speak but closed it soon after. A million thoughts raced through his head.

“I suggest we find him before something does happen,” Roman piped up and pushed past the two of them. Thomas took a hesitant step forward before following his brother out.

Logan watched them leave before turning his attention to Virgil, who stared down at the floor. He put a hand on his shoulder and gave a gentle squeeze.

“It’s my fault,” Virgil mumbled. “Patton would be fine if it wasn’t for me.”

“You can’t blame yourself for this,” Logan replied. “We haven’t the time. Patton is counting on you.”

Virgil’s head snapped up, and he gave a gentle nod. The two sorcerers ran out of the room to follow Roman and Thomas.

After searching the cells, throne room again, and a few other places they suspected the two of them to be, coming up empty-handed was not how any of them expected this to go. Roman was getting more frustrated, his shoulders tight and anger flaring at every dead end. He seemed to steal it from Virgil, who got more pessimistic as they went on. The only one who seemed hopeful to find Patton
was Thomas himself.

“There has to be some other place they would be,” Logan sighed. “It has to be a place where she could make a statement, as I’m sure she’s going to use this opportunity to strike fear in the citizen’s hearts.”

“So much for ruling peacefully,” Roman grumbled.

Virgil ran a hand through his hair and sighed. “She’d do it in the village then, wouldn’t she? That’s the place everyone would be, and I’m sure Patton would draw a crowd.”

“Would he ever,” Roman replied and crossed his arms. “No doubt she’s waiting for our arrival.”

“Of course. We’re the prize.”

“Then we’re going to have to be smart about this,” Logan replied. He rubbed his chin. “How are we going to divert attention and return Patton safely?”

“I could distract her while you two figure out how to put an end to her once and for all—” Virgil turned his attention to Logan—“just like we should’ve done years ago.”

“With how easily she gained control of you, Virgil, I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

“Think about it! The only reason she’d touch Patton is to bargain with me. If I can distract her through a ‘deal,’ there’s no way you three shouldn’t be able to come up with some sort of plan.”

“And if it goes wrong?” Roman asked.

Virgil sent a sad smile, “Then I guess I wish you two luck and die a hero.”

Roman seemed offended by the idea, but Logan sighed and nodded his head. “That won’t happen, Virgil. We’re going to get the both of you out of there.”

“Yeah,” Virgil replied with a snuff. He wanted to say he believed him, but the better part of him knew this would be his final stand.

--

“They're late,” Dragana sighed and shut her pocket watch. Her eyes scanned the whispering crowd around her, and she sent a coy smile. Her voice rose, “Come now, boys. I've been waiting for years for this. It's rude to keep a queen waiting.”

Again, one of Thomas's soldiers tried to make it through the dark barrier around her, but their sword splintered on contact. A few members of the crowd screamed and murmured as the black walls sparked and spat at them.

Dragana turned her attention to Patton, who laid on his side. She clicked her tongue and knelt beside him.

“Come now, you can't help me out and make them come faster?” she coaxed.

Patton pulled his cloak closer to him and mumbled a response.

The sorcerer narrowed her eyes and closed her hand into a fist. Patton grimaced as the two of them both stood. He glared into her eyes and held his breath.
“I'm sorry, what did you say dear? I didn't hear you.”

Patton struggled to speak, “I'm not going to help you hurt them.”

“You don't have a choice,” she replied with a light laugh. “Otherwise you'd be dead by now.”

Patton closed his eyes and let out a heavy sigh through his nose. He heard her dragon shift behind them. It's heavy footsteps approached, and Dragana turned her attention to it as it came closer. From his angle, Patton could see a deep gash running through its neck, and it had a slight limp in its front right leg.

“Oh my dear pet,” the sorcerer cooed, “don't worry. Soon enough you'll have your revenge.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Don't you know? Your dear Virgil- oh that's right. You don't remember him.” A Cheshire cat grin slid onto her face. “Let's just say that someone who thinks very highly of you hurt my Ruby, and she's ready to pay him back.”

Patton furrowed his brow. He knew that name; he was sure of it. A face flashed through his memory, but as soon as it came it disappeared. Patton sighed in frustration.

“Don't bother. You'll hurt yourself,” she continued. “I'm blocking him from your mind for a very specific reason.”

Patton opened his mouth to speak when the dragon let out an angry growl. It turned its head as a man in a long black patched jacket approached. His eyes were shadowed through thick hair, and Patton’s heart jumped looking at him. He looked so familiar… yet not.

“Speak of the demon,” she purred.

The man stood at the outer edge of the circle, and the anger coming from him choked Patton. His eyes locked onto Dragana as if there wasn't a threatening two story dragon smoking in front of him.

“Ah, Virgil, you're late. And here I thought he didn't mean as much to you as I thought,” the sorcerer hummed.

Virgil’s eyes flickered to Patton for a moment. Was that regret or relief he felt? Patton couldn’t tell through the intense rage Virgil held.

Virgil’s attention turned back to her, and he growled, “Leave him alone. He didn't do anything to you.”

“I'm not stupid enough to throw away a bargaining chip.”

Virgil half laughed. “What could I have that you'd want?”

“You're the only one who is really a threat to me right now. I mean, with Logan incapacitated and the others mere mortals, when you're out of the way I could easily take this kingdom by storm.”

“Well you have me,” he said and gave a bow with his arms wide open.

The sorcerer eyes him over and looked around. “Where are the little pests anyway?”
“It's just me,” Virgil replied coolly. Patton could sense the unease of a lie, but Virgil somehow kept a straight face.

“I find that hard to believe.” She turned her attention to the dragon. “Snuff them out, my pet.”

“Hey, your focus is on me, remember?” Virgil’s fingers danced to life with purple sparks. The dragon glanced down at him with annoyance flickering in its eyes.

“That eager to turn yourself into a barbecue?” the sorcerer cackled. “Very well. Ruby, take care of him first, then go after the others.”

Virgil barely rolled out of the way before fire blazed in his direction. The dragon roared and gnashed its teeth low. It's footsteps shook the ground as it walked.

Fear screamed in Patton’s mind along with the scattering crowd. He would've caved in on himself if she didn't still have a hold of him. Patton strained his neck to try and make sure this stranger was still alive. Why he didn't know, but he had to make sure he was alive and safe.

Virgil ducked down behind a building as the dragon released another blast. Buildings caught fire as Virgil dodged from place to place. This thing was making it impossible to think on his feet. At this rate, the whole town would be ablaze before he could do anything.

A few of Thomas's knights tried to rush to Virgil’s aid, but the dragon encompassed the two of them in a ring of fire, stopping Virgil from gaining any shelter.

Virgil cursed under his breath. He was trapped. The dragon lowered its head, it's lips curled back as if it were smiling. It's low snarl vibrated Virgil’s chest and quickened his heart. Sweat lined his brow as he took an instinctive step back.

This was it.

He knew he wouldn't make it out of here alive, but he'd hoped the others would be able to help Patton in the meantime. From the looks of it, they couldn't break through the protection spell she cast. Either that or they were more focused on helping their citizens get to safety, which Virgil couldn't blame them for. There were a few citizens nearby putting out fires and helping those who were trapped, and no doubt they would draft their royal family for protection. Overall the situation was a giant mess.

Through the fire, he caught Patton’s worried eyes following his every move. His breath caught in his throat. Patton was still counting on him. A pulse of self-preservation quickened his wit.

That thing had one weakness, and he had one shot.

As the dragon snapped its jaw in his direction, Virgil slid under its stomach. He put both hands against its chest, right where its heart would've been. Virgil’s whole body burned as he let out all the energy he had. Purple sparks flew in every direction. The dragon cried out and rose its head into the air.

Virgil collapsed onto his back. The dragon's legs shook, and it lost its balance. Virgil rolled out from under it just in time. The beast collapsed and shook the earth. He stood on shaky feet and tried to catch his breath.

Did he do it? Was it-

The sorcerer shrieked and sobbed as the dragon’s eyes closed. A blast of dark energy shot out in
every direction, smothering the fire surrounding them, collapsing close buildings, and knocking Virgil off his feet. He struggled to raise his head against her power.

“You heartless little demon,” she shrieked. “You killed her!”

Virgil struggled to his feet. He caught her raising a hand- no, raising Patton’s hand- as a blade glistened in the firelight. Virgil whole world froze.

No. NO.

“Leave him alone!” he yelled. Purple sparks danced in his hands as he sprung forward, but he slid to a stop as the dagger touched Patton’s neck.

“And why should I?” she yelled through her tears. “You took my familiar from me, the only thing in this world I ever loved. Surely Patton is a fair trade.”

“Look, I'll do whatever you want. Heck, kill me for all I care but don't hurt him,” Virgil’s voice cracked. Tears blurred his vision and escaped down his cheek.

The witch's smile grew. “Well, I'll tell you what. You remember what happened in the woods between you and him, right? You break the curse, and he's yours. Deal?”

Virgil caught Patton’s confused eyes. He didn't even know who Virgil was. There was no way he could break it like Patton did.

Patton would have to love him back for it to work.

Virgil let the purple sparks fizzle out and took slow steps forward. The protection spell stopped him a few paces from Patton, and he could feel the anxiety through Patton’s brave face. If only he could send comfort to him as well, but he was just as scared.

“Patton,” Virgil’s voice shook as he spoke, “I know you don't remember who I am, but I know you can fight her off. I've seen you do it. You're stronger than her-”

“You're wasting time,” she mocked and clicked her tongue.

Patton sent Virgil a confident smile, and suddenly Virgil didn't feel as afraid. He felt at peace, which was a very worrying emotional response at a time like this.

“You seem really nice,” Patton spoke in a calm voice, but Virgil could detect the slight pitch of fear in it. “I'm sorry I caused you so much trouble.”

“No, don't you apologize for anything,” Virgil spoke a little harsher than he meant to. He cursed under his breath and continued, “None of this is your fault.”

“I know,” Patton let out a light laugh, “It's sorta out of my control.”

Virgil cracked a half smile and caught Dragana’s impatient eyes. She moved the blade into Patton’s throat, drawing blood through the nicked skin.

“No, stop!” Virgil yelped.

Patton's hand shook as he took in deep breaths. He cracked a smile, and Virgil could've cried.

“It's going to be okay,” Patton half whispered.
Virgil pressed his hands up against the force field of the protection spell. His hands ached, but he ignored it.

“I’m sorry.”

“I forgive you.” Patton’s sad smile burned into his brain as unspoken words remained locked behind his lips.

Patton's hands trembled as he tried to pull the knife away. Virgil glanced up at the sorcerer, who reveled in his misery. He could sense she was losing patience, Patton was losing time, and he was losing Patton.

“Patton, I love you,” Virgil blurted out. He didn't care if Patton felt the same. He didn't care if Patton even liked him, but he needed him to know. He had to say something before he didn't have the chance.

‘You do?” Patton asked, the shock evident on his face.

“I do.” Virgil sent him the best smile he could muster. “I… I have for a while. I didn’t realize it at first, but watching you… just be you, so carefree and loving being alive. It’s something I’m kind of envious of. I’m sorry I waited so long to tell you. I… I wish I had the courage to tell you sooner.”

Patton’s smile could've lit up every shadow around him. Virgil watched the dagger start to move, and his heart stopped.

The dagger slipped between the tie of Patton’s cloak. There was a loud crack as the blade cut through the material, and the cloak dropped onto the ground. Patton twisted his body and threw the dagger in the sorcerer's direction. She let out a shriek and disappeared in a shadow.

The blade clattered to the ground, well out of striking distance to where she stood. Even if he wanted to, he wouldn’t throw it to harm her.

Patton’s legs shook, and he fell to his knees. He rubbed a hand over the cut on his neck. Thankfully it wasn't deep, but it was a closer call than Patton ever wanted to experience again.

He heard Virgil calling his name behind him. He glanced over his shoulder. Virgil looked ready to collapse himself, and Patton flashed him a quick smile. It disappeared as he caught a growing shadow at Virgil’s back.

“Virgil, watch out!”

Virgil’s mouth hung open as a hand grabbed his shoulder. There was a blast of black light, right over the back of his heart, and his whole body locked up. Patton screamed as Virgil fell onto his stomach.

“That was for Ruby,” she spat.

Patton escaped the protection spell and collapsed at Virgil's side. He rolled Virgil into his arms. Please be okay!

Virgil's eyes stared at nothing, his jaw hung open in shock. Patton gave Virgil a gentle shake.

“Come on, kiddo,” he whispered. His eyes stung as his vision blurred. He put his head to Virgil’s heart, and his eyes spilled over.
Both their hearts were broken.

“No,” Patton cried into Virgil’s chest. His whole body ached, and he let out a long and loud scream.

The world stilled. Patton cradled Virgil against his chest as he cried into his jacket.

“I-I’m so sorry, Virgil,” Patton cried. He turned his attention to the sorcerer. She rubbed at her own eyes, also struck with tears she couldn’t control.

The sorcerer took a step back and swallowed hard. Why did she do that? She couldn’t remember, but she regretted ever casting the spell. It must’ve been Patton’s magic doing this. She had to get away. She had to clear her head.

With clenched teeth, the sorcerer disappeared in a black shadow and vanished from the scene.

--

Roman was assisting citizens put out a fire when a wave of sorrow slammed into his chest. He staggered as involuntary tears rose to his eyes, and judging by the reaction of the people around him, he wasn’t the only one.

“What was that?” Logan asked as he took off his glasses to rub his eyes.

Thomas sucked in a breath as he and Roman came to the same conclusion at the same time. “Patton!”

The two brothers took off where they last saw him. Logan gave a quick word of apology to the people they were helping and chased after them.

All three froze as they came across Patton crumbled into Virgil and sobbing into his chest.

Thomas covered his mouth at the sight, drawing a conclusion on his own. Logan passed both brothers and knelt beside Patton. He put a hand to the Empath’s back. Patton snapped his head up. His eyes widened as he realized all three of his companions were also crying and wiped his eyes with his sleeve.

“Virgil, he- he-” Patton covered his mouth as more tears rushed to his eyes.

A loud whine called through the air, and Emile ran through the destroyed town to their side. He nosed Virgil on the cheek and gave it a gentle lick.

“I’m so sorry, Patton,” Thomas spoke behind him. “We should’ve never let him go after her on his own.”

“It was his choice,” Logan replied. “He knew the consequences and accepted them without qualms.”

“It still doesn’t make it right,” Roman hissed and palmed his eye.

Emile’s head rose up to meet Patton’s eyes, and Patton would have cried at how similar they were to Virgil’s own beautiful vibrant purple.

“He’s going to be okay, right?” Emile asked. Patton swallowed and wished he could answer with a yes.

Logan’s eyes widened. “You can still communicate with us.”
Come to think of it, Emile should be dead as well if-

Logan examined Virgil’s pulse, waited a few seconds, rose his brows, and continued, “He's still alive. She must've put a curse upon him, judging by the low heart rate and rigid body.”

“What do we do?” Thomas asked.

“If I had my magic, I could easily disenchant him, but that’s impossible at the moment.”

“We need that key,” Roman mumbled.

“But the only one who would know its whereabouts would be Damian himself,” Logan reminded him.

Patton's eyes widened. “King Damian’s journal. If he wrote about the key-”

“We could find out where he hid it,” Thomas finished.

Roman pulled Virgil out of Patton's grip and carried him in his arms. The group followed Patton through the castle and into his room.

Remy lay on the book, his tail curled around himself. He peeked at the group as they entered and left out a light meow.

Patton sat down on his bed, and Roman rested Virgil down on the blankets. Patton pulled Virgil onto his lap and ran his hands through Virgil's hair. It was just as thick as his fur. Emile jumped on the bed and rested at Virgil's feet, and Remy curled up on Virgil's chest.

Logan picked up Damian’s journal in his hands. He stared at the cover before handing it to Thomas.

“Even if he is gone, it still feels wrong to pry into his personal thoughts,” Logan mumbled.

Thomas nodded in understanding. He flipped through the pages and skimmed through its contents. As Thomas made it to the end of the book, a silver piece of metal fell from the back. Roman reached down to pick it up at the same time Logan did. Their fingers brushed, and they looked up into each other's eyes.

Logan drew his hand back, looked away, and cleared his throat.Roman wrapped his fingers around the key and felt his palm tingle with magic. They both stood at the same time.

“That's the key,” Logan informed. His eyes flickered back into Roman's direction, and old memories brought nostalgic and relief filled tears to his eyes.

Roman smiled and asked, “May I?”

Logan nodded his head and allowed Roman to stand at his back. His heart pounded with anticipation. Roman searched around for some sort of hole to stick the key into, but all he saw was solid metal.

“Tap it against the back,” Logan informed.

“Impatient, are we?” Roman teased. Logan turned his head and narrowed his eyes.

Thomas snuffed out a laugh. “Ro, you can have fun later. Virgil kinda needs him.”
“Fine,” Roman replied and cleared his throat. He touched the metal to the back of the collar. There was a spark and a mechanical click, and the metal collar fell to the floor with a heavy thud.

For the first time in a day, Logan took a long and deep breath in. The strength in his limbs returned, and he held himself proud and tall once again. He rubbed the ghost pain away from his neck and turned to meet Roman’s eyes.

“I guess I should thank you.”

“Don't trade your magic for my protection again and we'll call it even,” Roman replied with a smile.

Logan walked over to Patton and Virgil. He wrapped his hands around the cat’s ribs and picked Remy up off Virgil's chest.

“Oww, Lo, be careful. I'm fragile,” Remy whined.

“I'll deal with you next,” Logan spoke with a fond smile. Remy seemed indifferent to Logan understanding him as Logan laid him down at the edge of the bed.

Logan rolled his wrists before drawing a rune in the air. The room held its breath as Logan lowered it to Virgil’s chest.

For an uncomfortable amount of time, nothing happened. Patton chewed his lip and kept his eyes trained on Virgil’s face.

Virgil’s body tensed, and a black mist started to slither out over his heart. It fizzled in the air above them before drying up and vanishing without a trace.

Virgil let out a light cough, and his eyes blinked twice. Patton sucked in a deep breath as their eyes connected, and Virgil closed his jaw into a light smile.

“Sup?” Virgil greeted. Patton let out a triumphant laugh and blinked fresh tears away.

“You scared me to death, kiddo,” Patton said with a light laugh and ran a hand repeatedly through Virgil’s hair.

“Sorry,” Virgil mumbled and closed his eyes. He took in a deep breath and swallowed hard.

“I love you too.”

Virgil’s eyes snapped open. What? He met Patton’s eyes again, his lips parting in a silent gasp.

Patton blinked, and his eyes leaked over onto his cheeks. Virgil lifted a thumb up and brushed the tear away, and Patton leaned into his touch.

‘You do?’ Virgil asked, mirroring Patton’s own response to him just a few minutes ago.

Patton chuckled and lowered his face until their eyes were inches apart. “I do.”

Virgil tipped his head back, and he hesitated before pecking a light kiss on Patton’s lips. He was even more surprised when Patton kissed back. It was short, sweet, and everything he hoped it would be.

“Well it’s about time,” Remy grumbled at the edge of the bed and turned his attention to Logan. “Now if you could get over your emotional constipation and hit it off with Roman already, that’d
Logan shook his head and picked the cat up in his arms. “I believe these two should have some time alone to sort out their feelings, wouldn’t you all agree?”

Emile jumped off the bed, sent a nod in Virgil’s direction, and followed the other humans out of the room. They shut the door behind them and left the two in silence.

Virgil struggled to push himself up onto his elbows. Patton moved and helped Virgil rest against the wall behind them. They sat side by side, their shoulders touching.

“What happened?” Virgil asked.

“She appeared behind you and put some sort of curse on you, Logan said, but he figured he could disenchant it. Oh, and Thomas found the key for that thing on Logan’s neck and freed him- well no, Roman freed him- but still, everything’s okay now.” Patton drew his knees up to his chest.

Virgil hummed as he soaked in the information. “I felt… trapped in my own mind. And all I could see was her-” His voice cut off.

Patton tilted his head to the side and furrowed his brows. “You don’t have to tell me what you saw if you don’t want to.”

Virgil shook his head and snuffed. He rested it against the wall and stared at the ceiling. For a moment, the two of them sat in silence, their shared body heat the only reminder the other was there.

“So, you’re human now?” Patton asked at last.

“Still a Magi, but yeah,” Virgil replied. “I always was.”

“How-”

“Logan didn’t just trade his magic for Roman’s safety.”

Patton hummed and rested his head against Virgil’s shoulders. “I’ll have to thank him later.”

Virgil glanced down at Patton and sighed through his nose. Hesitantly, he placed his own head against Patton’s hair. He swallowed a dry throat and took in a deep breath.

“So how long?” Virgil asked.

“Hmm?”

“How long did you love me?”

Patton thought for a moment. “Well, I always cared for you, kiddo, but I guess I didn’t realize it until you said something.”

“What, not into furries?”

“What’s a furry?”

“Nevermind.” Virgil cleared his throat. “I’m just surprised I guess.”

“Why?”
“Well… I never thought someone like you could love someone like me-”

Patton’s head rose, pushing Virgil off of his hair. Virgil stopped breathing as Patton stared intensely into his eyes. What did he say wrong? What did he do to get that look?

“I will fight you,” Patton whispered.

“What?”

“No one talks about my boyfriend like that.”

Virgil scrunched up his face before laughing quite hard. Patton’s annoyance melted away, and a smile lit up his eyes.

“You have a cute laugh.”

Virgil hid his mouth behind a hand and looked away. Patton put a hand on his wrist, his concern flowing through his fingertips.

“You should do it more,” Patton continued.

“I’ll think about it,” Virgil responded.

Patton pressed up against his side, and Virgil hesitantly wrapped his arms around him. He felt Patton release a deep, content sigh and curl tighter into his chest. Virgil couldn’t help the warm emotion spreading throughout his whole body. He planted a light kiss on Patton’s hair, earning a giggle from the other, and let his eyes slip closed.

For the first time in his life, Virgil wasn’t afraid of closing his eyes to sleep.

For the first time in his life, Virgil felt home.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

One down, one to go. Problem is, it’s been nearly 400 years since Logan last confessed his love, and he’s rather unsure of how to do it.

Chapter warnings: I have no idea how to write fluff so this may be painful

Word count: 3449

Chapter Notes

Welp, here goes nothing. YEET.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Logan finished patching up the hole in the castle wall and wiped the sweat from his brow. Thomas walked to his side and gave a nod of approval, and Logan sent him a light smile. The king strode over to his window and looked out.

“The town still needs a lot of work, but I’m sure if we work together, we can get it fixed up in no time,” he commented. Thomas turned his attention back to Logan, who joined his side soon after.

“I’m sure I could make quick work of it,” Logan mentioned.

“I don’t want you to exhaust yourself. Besides, I want to help return my people back to peace. It’s the least I could do.”

Logan hummed and nodded his head. “You are a good king indeed.”

Thomas smiled out of the corner of his lips. He thought for a moment before asking, “You think she’ll be back?”

“I’m unsure,” Logan answered. “I have no idea where she went, nor do I know her whereabouts. I’m assuming that wasn’t the last we will see of her, but I cannot draw a concise conclusion.”

Thomas’s grimace proved that was not the answer he wanted, but he accepted it.

Someone cleared their throat loudly in the doorway, and both Thomas and Logan turned their heads.

Roman strode into the room, dressed in a loose white tunic with rolled up sleeves and black pants that clung to his black boots. It took a moment for Logan to realize he was staring.

“Morning, Ro,” Thomas greeted. Roman came to his side and crossed his arms as he stared out the window.

“Noble Joan is awake and asking to see you,” Roman informed. “I notified them you will be there
to speak to them and Noble Talyn as soon as possible.”

“Thank you,” Thomas replied and sighed in relief. He turned back to the window and looked out. “Are the knights out?”

“All that are available. Leo wanted to speak with you as well. He was rather concerned we didn’t locate the witch after the battle.”

“As am I, but all we can do is be ready if she does decide to come back.”

Roman nodded his head in agreement. “I plan on joining the other knights soon to repair the town if you wish to stand by my side.”

“Wouldn’t dream of doing otherwise,” Thomas sent back.

“Good. I’ll meet you down at the palace gates in a few minutes. Don’t be late.” Roman looked over Thomas’s shoulder and caught Logan’s expression. He sent a coy smile before winking and walking out of the room.

Logan watched him exit. It should be against the law to look that flawless this early in the morning.

“So when are you going to tell him?”

Logan snapped his attention back to Thomas, who sent a knowing smile. His body stiffened, and he took in a deep breath.

“I’m unsure I know what you’re-”

“He’d probably say yes, you know.” Thomas took a step back and added, “Just do me a favor and treat him right, okay? He’s got a pretty fragile heart.”

Logan, for once, was at a complete loss for words. Thomas followed Roman out of the room and left Logan to his thoughts in the throne room.

Tell Roman?

Talk about his feelings?

What would he even say?

How would he even do it?

Logan ran a hand through his hair. If anyone could help him with this dilemma, it had to be Virgil. His friend was a walking ball of nerves, but he still managed to open up to Patton. Maybe there was a trick?

Logan strode out of the throne room doors and toward the guest room he and Virgil were currently occupying together. He knocked three times on their door and heard a moan on the other side.

“I’m coming in,” Logan announced. He opened the door, not caring if he got an answer.

Virgil sat up in his bed on his elbows, his eyes half open and an annoyed curl in his lips. Emile stretched at the foot of his bed.

“Morning already?” Emile asked with a yawn.
“Virgil, I realize it is within your normal resting hours, but I have an infinitesimal problem.”

“Oh, then why do you need me?”

“I need your advice.”

“Sounds like a big problem if you’re coming to me.”

Logan paused. Yes, that’s what he said, wasn’t it? Nevermind-

“Virgil, how did you confess your feelings to Patton?”

Virgil blinked at him twice before letting out a light laugh and rolling over to go back to sleep. Logan stiffened.

“Virgil, please, I need-”

“I’m not gonna be your wingman,” Virgil mumbled and yawned. Emile shook his head and stretched. He laid down on top of Virgil, earning a long grunt from the sorcerer.

“Come on, Virge. You owe him.”

“Guess again.”

“Well, you know, if it wasn’t for Logan, you’d still be a wolf and Patton wouldn’t be-”

“Ugh, fine,” Virgil grumbled and attempted to push Emile off of his side. Emile rolled over and allowed Virgil to sit up. Virgil rubbed a hand over his face and glared at Logan through his fingertips.

“Well first off,” Virgil continued, “he was gonna die, so it didn’t really matter if he rejected me.”

“I’m not putting Roman in harm’s way to confess to him.”

“No, I’m not-” Virgil groaned. “I wasn’t trying to say-”

“Then what were you insinuating?”

“I didn’t really think about it, you know? I’m not good at talking about feelings.”

“So the trick is to not think and just speak?”

“I guess.”

“What do I even say?”

“Well, I don’t know! What do you like about him?”

Logan thought for a while. “Even if he is loud and obnoxious, I still enjoy his company.”

Virgil couldn’t contain the snort that escaped through his nose.

“Man, listening to you two talk about love is like listening to two birds squawking at three in the morning,” Remy moaned from Logan’s bed. He stretched and shook his fur. “It’s painful.”

“Well, I don’t see you helping,” Logan mumbled.
“I’ve only been shipping you two since he came to the house,” Remy purred. He chose to ignore the question that formed on Logan’s lips. “Just be upfront and honest with him.”

“Yes, but you remember how well that worked in my favor the last time.”

“You scared Damian half to death. I’d be scared if you asked me to copulate with you too.”

Virgil rose a brow. “What?”

“A minor setback. Apparently, that’s not how humans work.”

“No one works like that, Logan.” Remy jumped off the bed and walked toward him. Logan picked Remy up in his arms and ran his hand across Remy’s back. Stroking his soft silver fur always calmed his nerves.

“Okay, well, how about something romantic?” Emile offered. “I mean, Roman seems the type to like poetry and whatnot.”

“Nothing like getting all tongue tied while you’re trying to be romantic,” Virgil mumbled.

Logan sighed heavily through his nose. “If Roman so obviously has these feelings for me, why hasn’t he said so yet?”

“Chances are,” Emile informed, “he has and you missed it.”

Logan rubbed a hand over his face. Remy crawled out of his arms and curled up into his hood.

“Don’t worry, Lo. I’ll be your wingcat,” Remy mused. “I’m pretty good at this romance stuff.”

“And when have you had practice?”

The back of his hood settled into silence, and Logan let out an exasperated sigh.

Now realizing he wasn’t going back to sleep- and somewhat curious to see just how badly Logan messed this all up- Virgil got dressed before following Logan out into the hallway. Emile followed at Virgil’s heels. The two walked out toward the courtyard, and they noticed a lack of Roman or Thomas.

“They already left,” Logan mumbled. Great, there went the idea of a private confession.

Virgil hummed and crossed his arms. “So where did they go?”

“Probably out to help people rebuild their homes.” Logan started forward again and exited the palace gates.

The sound of hammers conversed with the tweets of early birds. People chattered as they assisted their neighbors. The morning dew still sat in the air and blew a cool breeze over the smoldering town. The scent of burnt wood still floated in the air, but they were sure the smell would never truly leave.

“Virgil, Logan!” a voice called off in the distance.

Patton approached and waved his arm into the air. Around his neck sat a light gray cloak, and if one looked close enough, cat ears popped out of the top of the hood.

“Good morning!” Patton chirped as he came to a stop in front of them.

“Yeah, he and Thomas are fixing some roofs a few streets over, I think.”

“You’re wearing gray today,” Virgil noted, for once very pleased to not see a red cloak around Patton’s neck.

Patton looked down and smiled. “Oh, yeah, this is my favorite. I didn’t want to rip it in the woods, so Roman gave me his, and now that I’m home I can wear this one.” He spun in a circle, and the cloak flared out around him. “You like it?”

“You’re beautiful,” Virgil spoke through reflex. He only realized it when Patton stopped spinning, and he turned away with a flush of his cheeks.

Patton scooped up Virgil’s right arm in his own and responded, “Aww, thanks. I think you’re beautiful too.”

If Virgil wasn’t red before, he was really red now. Patton pulled Virgil off through the town, chattering away about something. Virgil looked over at Logan for help, but all Logan did was smile and wave his friend farewell.

“See, that’s how you do it,” Remy purred, but Logan shushed him. He scanned through all the working people for any sign of Roman or Thomas. Surely where one was, the other wasn’t that far behind, right?

Logan ducked under a log carried between two women when he spied Roman hammering away on a roof. Obviously, he didn’t care about modesty, because at some point, he lost the white shirt he was wearing. Logan didn’t miss the way Roman’s muscles rippled with every hit of his hammer, or how the sweat resting on his skin made him shimmer like a thousand gold coins. Logan swallowed the bile rising through his throat.

“Nice,” Remy purred, and Logan shoved the cat’s head back in his hood. Logan cleared his throat.

“Roman,” he called out, “may I have a word with you?”

Roman didn’t hear him at first over the hammering, so Logan tried again. The second time, Roman wiped the sweat from his brow and looked over the side of the roof.

“Oh, good morning!” Roman called down. “It’s about time you showed up. I was afraid you were skipping out.”

Logan hummed and looked around. He was overthinking this. Roman was obviously already interested, so he had no logical reason to be this nervous. Besides, it wasn’t like this was his first relationship.

Roman seemed to forget about Logan and started conversing with another person on the roof. Logan groaned and ran a hand through his hair. Apparently, the most difficult part of this was going to be keeping Roman’s attention.

Thomas stopped at Logan’s side, carrying a few stones in a large metal bucket, and cleared his throat.

“Well, how’s it going?” Thomas asked and raised a brow.

“I’m working on it,” Logan snapped.
Thomas let out a light laugh. “Okay, sorry to rush you.” He nodded up to Roman, who turned to send a greeting to his brother, and started back down the road.

Logan watched Thomas leave. He heard Roman yelp. Logan turned and glanced up. Roman fell backward. Logan’s hand shot up. A rune flashed in his hand, and he barely finished the spell in time to catch Roman mid-air. He let out all the air in his lungs at once.

That was way too close.

A few people murmured as Logan lowered Roman carefully into his arms. Roman’s eyes melted from panic to adoration.

“Guess I’ve fallen for you once again,” Roman purred. Logan resisted the urge to roll his eyes. Oh, wait, this is what they meant when they said Roman had told him already. He was using badly worded romantic lines. “We have to stop meeting like this.”

“Like what?” Logan asked.

“Oh you know, me falling from high places. You having to rescue me before I die. It seems to be a reoccurring theme.”

Logan cleared his throat and set Roman back down on the ground. However, as Roman’s right foot touched the dirt below, he sucked in a breath and fell back into Logan. Surprised but catching him in time, Logan assessed the situation.

“You’ve hurt your ankle.”

“I’m sure I merely turned it wrong,” Roman tried to stand on it again, but if he was trying to hide his pain, he failed miserably. Logan put one of Roman’s arms over his shoulders.

“Relax. You’ll hurt yourself worse,” Logan grumbled.

“But I can’t just let them alone,” Roman whined. “They’re counting on me.”

“They can’t count on you if you cannot stand.” Logan led Roman over to a vacant area and sat him down in the dirt. He positioned Roman’s leg out in front of him, and Roman sucked in a breath through his teeth as Logan jostled his ankle. “My apologies.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Roman replied. He leaned back on his hands and watched Logan’s fingers move to produce a spell. The concentration that settled over Logan’s brow moved every organ in Roman’s body in different directions. He shifted to sit up closer but moved his ankle and winced.

“Patience. I’ll have you back on your feet in no time,” Logan murmured.

“Oh, you have no idea how much restraint I’m using,” Roman responded.

Logan’s eyes jumped up to Roman, and he wondered if Roman was talking about his ankle or himself.

The silver ring around Logan’s rune wrapped around Roman’s leg, and his ankle felt like he stuck it in fresh snow. Roman shuddered and swallowed a breath. The icy feeling disappeared as quickly as it came.

“There,” Logan mumbled. “That should fix your ailment.”
Roman tested Logan’s theory by rolling his ankle. There was a slight bite of pain, but it was nothing Roman couldn’t tolerate.

Logan stood and offered his hand. Roman took it, and Logan helped pull Roman onto his feet. For a moment, Roman stood as close as he could and soaked in Logan’s overheating body.

“You know, I thought you said you weren’t leaving me out of your sight?” Roman teased.

Logan opened his mouth to speak, but the only thing that escaped was static. Roman laughed and shook his head. He patted Logan’s shoulder and started back toward the roof he was working on.

“Roman, wait.” Logan called out. He grabbed onto Roman’s wrist. Roman slowed to a halt and turned around to look at him. His eyes met Roman’s, and his whole body went as cold as Roman’s ankle.

Oh, there went all the words Logan planned on saying.

Logan cleared his throat. “I don’t think you should go on any more roofs for the rest of the day.”

“What, afraid you won’t be there to catch me next time?”

Logan pursed his lips, and he took in a deep breath. The serious tone melted away the coy smile on Roman’s lips, and Logan feared his silence gave the wrong impression.

“Roman, I merely care about your safety,” Logan responded. “I don’t want any more unfortunate accidents to befall you.”

“I’ll try to be more careful,” Roman replied. His fingertips lingered as he slid out of Logan’s grip. He sighed before disappearing behind a group of people leading a cart of lumber.

Remy poked his head out of Logan’s hood. “What are you doing? You practically had him right there!”

Logan picked Remy out of his hood and set him roughly in the dirt. Remy let out a gasp of shock, and Logan chased after Roman.

The prince had started giving directions to a group of knights when Logan approached. Logan cleared his throat, and he had more eyes upon him than he wanted. He pushed past them and stood directly in front of Roman.

“Yes, what is it?” Roman asked. The air around him was much colder than before, but the warm gaze in his eyes told Logan it was all a front. He did remember someone mentioning Roman disliked showing weakness in front of others.

“I need to speak with you,” Logan replied. Roman quirked an eyebrow. “In private, if I may.”

Roman shrugged and excused himself. Logan led him to a secluded alley, coincidentally the one Virgil and Emile reunited in, and turned to face him.

Roman put his hand on the wall and stood awfully close to Logan. Logan panicked at the close proximity, but he noticed Roman made sure there was space for Logan to move away if he felt uncomfortable.

“What is so important that it can’t wait?” Roman asked, a wide smile pulling on his lips.

“I-” Logan started, but found himself at a strange lack for words once again. He swallowed his
nerves and took a deep breath. “I need to confess something to you.”

Roman’s eyebrow popped up in curiosity, and Logan swallowed his stomach back into his gut.

Logan continued, “I seem to have developed romantic feelings for you along our journey together, and I was wondering if you have felt the same.”

The smile from Roman’s face slipped away, and Logan froze. Did he examine Roman’s body posture wrong? Was he not feeling the same way? Were those words just banter and nothing to be taken seriously?

Logan opened his mouth to speak again, and Roman put a finger to Logan’s lips.

“I’m hurt you had to ask,” Roman responded. “I thought I was making it clear enough- is this why you were avoiding me?”

Logan guided Roman’s finger away from his mouth “I was not avoiding you.”

“Not physically, but you haven’t spoken to me much in the past day.”

“Roman, we were asleep, and before I could contact you this morning, you already set off to work.”

“Still-” Roman ran a hand through his hair- “I would’ve assumed you’d be better at confessing your feelings than that. You don’t seem to be the nervous type.”

“It’s been a while since I’ve allowed myself to be vulnerable.”

The words brought both of their eyes together, and Logan concluded the feeling was mutual.

“Roman, if I may, I’d like to offer you a kiss.”

Roman let out a breathy laugh, and Logan wondered why what he said was amusing.

“I thought you’d never ask.”

Roman put his finger under Logan’s chin, tipping his head up slightly to meet his. Roman’s breath heated up Logan’s cheeks, and his lips were surprisingly soft. The kiss was light, but it hit Logan’s heart hard and caused his gut to explode into a sizzling fireworks display.

Roman pulled back, and Logan allowed his body to rest against the wall. He didn’t trust his legs to stand on their own.

“I have to return now. A prince’s duty is never done. However, I’m not opposed to continuing this conversation in my room later tonight.”

Logan gave a weak nod. Roman winked and turned on his heel. Logan watched him go before allowing his body to slide down the wall.

Remy whistled at the end of the alley, and Logan turned his attention to the cat. Remy’s tail twitched as he strode forward.

“So, did he taste good?” Remy asked.

Logan rolled his eyes and snuffed. Remy curled up in Logan’s arms and rubbed up against his face.
“Better than I imagined.”

“Ooooh, girl I need details... like now!”

Logan sighed and shook his head. He picked up the cat and allowed Remy to crawl over his shoulders and into his hood.

The rest of the day was spent fixing the town. The dragon witch- as the sorcerer was now dubbed- may have broken half the town, but she inadvertently managed to fix two very lonely people in the meantime. Whether she’d be back to break what she had formed, they didn’t know nor did they care at the moment.

However, they did know, if she decided to show her face again, they’d be ready to take her on. It was going to take a lot more than dark magic to separate the bonds that were formed.

They had more than just a kingdom to fight for now.

Chapter End Notes

Isn’t it amazing how one song sparked a whole AU over 57,000 words? I wasn’t even planning on it getting this long, and it went in a totally different direction than I expected!

And as always, thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for reading this far in! I’m always floored when people take this much interest in my work, and it’s humbling to know so many adore and read every word.

That said, there will be a sequel, and I plan on Deceit being a chaotic neutral antagonist in it, so I’m eager to write it. I love writing fleshed out antagonists, and his character is gonna be a trick to treat you. I understand if that’s not your cup of tea, however, and I thank you for finishing at least this journey with me if this is our last meeting in this AU.

And again, thank you so much for all your support. I really couldn’t have done any of this without you <3

-Cat

End Notes

Find me on Tumblr @altruistic-skittles

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!