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<td>Additional Warnings Apply, Alternate Universe - Royalty, royal family, royal guard, queen wynonna, Princess Waverly Earp, Betrayal, Scandal, Family Secrets, Bodyguard, Childhood Friends, Tragedy, Family Member Death, Non-Graphic Violence, Violence, Domestic Violence, Aftermath of Violence, subtle mention of sexual misconduct, Explosions, Death Threats, Guns, Major Character Injury, Injury Recovery, Blood, Coma, Hospitals, Military, Modern Royalty, Fake/Pretend Relationship, Awkward Crush, Awkwardness, Awkward Kissing, Coming out kind of, Angst, Family Drama, Sibling Bonding, Friendship, Best Friends, Friends to Lovers, friendly teasing, Sarcasm, Swearing, lots of fucking swearing, Plot Twists, lots of fucking plot twists, Rumors, Paparazzi, Arranged Marriage, assault charges, Fighting, Broken Bones, like shit gets really fucked up guys, also, secret pining, Feelings Realization, Denial of Feelings, confused feelings, Crying, just a lot of FUCKED UP SHIT, Sharing a Bed, Late Night Conversations, Sister-Sister Relationship, Sleepovers, i honestly started out writing angsty wayhaught, but it ended up something else completely, enjoy the ride, Slow Burn, Interrupting Wynonna Earp, Humor, lots and lots of humor obviously, Fade to Black, Post-Coital Cuddling, Sorry y'all i just can't write smut anymore, Interrupting waverly earp</td>
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**In Her Own Wynonna Kind Of Way**

by [tumblruserpailylove](http://archiveofourown.org/users/tumblruserpailylove)

**Summary**

Obviously completely AU-
The Earp Family has been in power over the Ghost River Triangle for over 400 years. Wynonna had never wanted to be Queen, but when she is thrust into the position unexpectedly she very quickly starts to make changes to all the rules. With her sister, Princess Waverly, and her best friend and bodyguard, Nicole Haught, by her side she is determined to avoid the supposed Earp Curse and change the face of the Monarchy forever. With threats coming from unexpected places, the only thing this trio knows for sure is that it's them against the World.

A/N: So this story totally started as one thing and ended in a completely different place. That being said, I am really proud and excited to share this with you all. It takes a lot of unexpected twists and turns so going into this without any expectations might be best, haha. I hope you all enjoy it but, hey, if not you always have the option to stop reading. For those of you who make it through this entire journey with me, I thank you kindly. You are the reason I share stories on this site.

-----------------------------------------------------------------
If you bang my sister I'll be pissed

This was the strangest day in Nicole Haught’s young life. Not that the looming event itself was a weird thing to conceive, quite the contrary, but how it all came about was strange. Tragic, honestly. But that was a thought for another day because Nicole had to focus on the immediate future. It was a future she had seen for herself since a very young age. She wasn’t really nervous about what was about to happen. She was, however, just a little unnerved about the circumstances surrounding what was about to happen. The timing of it all. It was a future she had seen for herself, sure. But she had seen it in the far off future. She never anticipated her future would come so soon.

She drew in a deep breath and looked herself over in the full length body mirror that she stood in front of at the moment. It was weird. She had pictured herself in this uniform countless times but always with a more aged face in place of the young one that was staring back at her now. Not that twenty-five was extraordinary young but she had thought she would be in her 40’s when this day came.

She sighed at the thought as her white gloved hands slid over the neatly pressed red uniform that adorned her body. It was odd seeing herself in a color other than Army tan. She shook her head at herself in the mirror. She couldn’t believe this day had come.

“You nervous, kid?” A sudden voice broke through the silent room like a freight train. It was a soft voice but without another sound to compete with it sounded like a clap of thunder.

Nicole whirled around from the mirror with wide eyes and an obvious look of surprise on her face. Her hand reached to cover her heart and she let out a labored breath of a laugh when her eyes fell on the source of the voice standing in the doorway of the dressing room she had been standing alone in just a moment before.

“Your Majesty” Nicole moved one arm in front of her torso, bent her knees slightly, and bowed in half toward the person that had interrupted her internal freak out about the looming event. She righted herself quickly from the bow and smirked at her company “I didn’t hear you come in.”

“If you ever fucking do that to me again when we are alone I will literally have you beheaded” Wynonna’s annoyance was mixed with slight amusement as she glared at the actions Nicole had just taken to greet her. “I can do that now, you know? I am Queen afterall.”

Nicole let out a soft chuckle and nodded her head just once before the two friends closed the small gap between themselves and wrapped each other up in a tight embrace. She drew in a deep breath as the feeling of her oldest and dearest friend against herself brought a sudden calmness to her. She
gave a tight squeeze and spoke softly now into Wynonna’s ear “I’ve missed you.”

“You too” Wynonna nodded against Nicole’s cheek then pulled back from the hug. She gave her friend a wide smile as she stepped back then motioned the full length of Nicole’s form in front of her “Well let me see. Give me a twirl. I want to see how the pants look in the back.”

Nicole rolled her eyes and put her hands firmly on her hips as an act of defiance. She stared at Wynonna with an indignant look on her face “Are you kidding me?”

“Hell no” Wynonna used her first finger on her right hand to draw a few circles in the air and smirked. “I can’t have the head of my Guard having a flat ass in the uniform. I need to know if I need to change it.”

“Oh my god” Nicole let out a huff and shook her head. She stared at Wynonna in disbelief. She could not fathom why Wynonna was being so obnoxious right now. The two of them stood in a silent stand down for a few moments and when Wynonna once more motioned with her hand for Nicole to turn around she finally gave in and did so. She sighed out heavily and pivoted a few steps until her back was facing Wynonna “I seriously do not care how my ass looks in these pants. It has nothing to do with my job!”

“Well I care. If I have to stare at your ass all the time I want to be able to see it” Wynonna smirked and stepped closer. She reached out and started to run her fingers along seams and folds in the uniform that was outdated. It was the same style as the original Royal Guard from the 1600’s. The only thing that had been modified was the change to a better fabric and the fact that they are more tailored to the wearer. Other than that they were awful. She hated the uniforms.

She finally stepped back and gave a nod “It looks alright. Although you don’t look very comfortable.”

Nicole, realizing Wynonna was done assessing her uniform, turned back around to face her friend. She shrugged and looked over herself once more “They’re heavy. They’re hot.” She slid her hands over the buttons of the red coat she wore and nodded “But it’s tradition.”

“Screw tradition” Wynonna rolled her eyes and waved her hand in the air a few times as if trying to swat away Nicole’s argument. “You’ll only have to wear the uniform on official outings. The rest of the time you can hang out in normal clothes.”
Nicole perked an eyebrow at that. She knew Wynonna hated everything about being in the Royal family but she couldn’t have expected she would go around making such dramatic changes to tradition so soon. “Are you sure? I mean I don’t mind wea-”

Wynonna lifted her hand quickly to cut Nicole off. Her face was serious and her head gave a nod “Does a uniform really matter in the grand scheme of things?” She paused but before Nicole could answer she continued “A lot of the stupid traditions that have been carried throughout the Royal line don’t really matter in the grand scheme of things. I mean it’s all so…” She let out a puff of air and rolled her eyes as the word she wanted came to her “…extra.”

“It’s-”

“If you say tradition one more time” Wynonna cut Nicole off again. She eyed her friend firmly then slowly smiled at her. She shook off her annoyance at her friend’s insistence to uphold tradition then motioned to the door “We will talk about this later. I have to go get changed because as you can see…” She motioned to the dress she was currently wearing and though it was more elegant than most it was not elegant enough for the event “…I need to get my Queen on. So I will see you later, alright?”

Nicole didn’t argue. She just gave her friend a nod and a smile. “I sure hope to see you later. You’re the only one that can make it official.”

Wynonna let out a laugh as she reached for the door. She pulled it open then glanced back to Nicole. She held a soft smile of fondness for her friend but her voice was serious as she spoke “Don’t be nervous, Nicole. I’ll be right there by your side just like always.”

Before Nicole could agree or even thank her, Wynonna was gone. Nicole let out a soft sigh then turned back around to the mirror she had been staring at before Wynonna had walked in. She shook her head as she looked over the uniform once more. It really was a terrible uniform. But the honor and history of those who had worn it before her was what she saw when she looked at it now. This uniform carried a lot of weight and now it had been passed on to her.

Nicole had not been born into a royal family of any type. In fact her place in the world of royalty had all been brought about by chance. Her grandfather had been out shopping in town one day when she was just three. He was just finishing putting groceries in the back of his car when he heard a scream. Someone was yelling about their child in a car and that was all he really remembered. Bystanders said he caught up to the car that was rolling out of control, pried open the door, climbed inside, and brought the vehicle to a safe stop. He had no idea the child inside would one day be Queen.
Because of his heroics her grandfather had been paraded around the town by the King at the time as a gesture of gratitude for him saving the Princess. After that, in a grand affair for all to see, her grandfather had been sworn in as the Head of the Royal Guard. From that moment on Nicole’s life had never been the same.

She was moved into one of the buildings within the Palace grounds with the rest of her family. That was where she had grown up. Her grandfather served as the King’s personal bodyguard until the day he died. Her father was next in line and served the new King just like his father before him. It was always just assumed that Nicole would follow in the footsteps of the two men.

She had grown up alongside the Princesses. Wynonna was two years older than her and they became very close very quickly. If an outsider with no knowledge of the family were to see the two together they would assume they were sisters. The biggest giveaway that they weren’t was Nicole’s bright red hair. But that was merely a detail of appearance. She had always been treated like family. Of course she was not required to act like the Princesses were. She didn’t have to make appearances or be ushered around for photoshoots and stuff of that sort. But when there was no public eye it was like any other family. Wynonna and Nicole were inseparable.

Waverly, the youngest of the House of Earp, had always been around as well. Though Nicole and herself had not been as close. Not for lack of trying but it always seems to go that the youngest sibling is always left out. Because she was not the Heir Apparent she kind of got pushed to the background. Nicole had felt bad about it when they were younger because Waverly was an incredibly sweet kid. Nice and much more regal than Wynonna was. She never got in trouble. She was interested in the goings on around the Palace. She loved the politics of it all. In fact, if anyone in the House of Earp should be Queen, it was Waverly. But, alas, that is not how the cards fell for the youngest child.

Wynonna had always hated who she was. Not as a person, because she thought she was awesome and hilarious, but as a Royal. She hated that her family was a Monarchy. She hated that all of the responsibility would be one day passed down to her. She didn’t want to rule anybody. She wanted to live her life like a normal person. She envied Nicole. Nicole didn’t have a single ounce of royal blood in her so she could walk away from it all in a heartbeat if she wanted.

That’s where their bond had been strongest. The two of them grew up together as sisters and though one was meant to rule a kingdom one day and one was free to do whatever she pleased in life it never mattered to the two of them. They treated each other like equals. They went to school together, celebrated every little holiday together, and even went on their first dates together. Nicole had always been by Wynonna’s side. Why would that ever change?

It made sense, really, that Nicole was about to be sworn in as Wynonna’s Head of the Royal Guard. Except she had never expected to take on the title so soon. In all honesty she thought she would be part of the Royal Guard under the rule of Wynonna’s father, King Ward, and serve in whatever
capacity he chose until the day she was assigned to look after the next generation of Princes and Princesses. She always thought she would be protecting Wynonna’s children, not Wynonna herself. But you can’t really control the way life unfolds.

When the youngest Earp graduated college it was a big deal. Partly because Wynonna had chosen not to attend and partly because everyone in the world loved Waverly. She was not only the sweetheart of The Ghost River Triangle but the entirety of humanity. Her charm and vibrant personality enraptured people from all over the globe. She was likable. She was caring. She loved the people and the people loved her. She was the opposite of Wynonna. Not that the people didn’t like Wynonna they just preferred Waverly.

There was to be a huge gala the night of Waverly’s graduation. The school had been overrun by people on the Royal staff who were running about to set up the event. Most people at the school had not known Waverly was a student there. She had managed to keep a low profile. She had chosen a prestigious school to attend and wanted nothing more than to be left alone while she finished her education. So to throw off all media attention the Royal family had hired a decoy to attend another college with just as much pretension and merit to it. The decoy attended classes and was captured on her daily routine by the media every day for four years. Meanwhile Waverly quietly got her degree at another college.

With her graduation, though, all attention had shifted to the real school. The Royal Family was to make a grand entrance, give interviews to the press, attend the ceremony, and then host a huge celebration gala for all graduates and their families. It was an unprecedented event. Never had so many of the general public been invited to a Royal event.

Refusing to arrive to a sea of flash bulbs and microphones, Wynonna had insisted on arriving the night before the graduation. She would take her own car, two of the Royal Guards assigned to her, and drive the eight hours to the school alone. Well as alone as you could get with two guards. But for her that was considered alone. She hated being surrounded by people all the time. So any chance to escape was a chance she willingly took.

The morning of the graduation was not filled with excited fanfare as had been expected by everyone. It was filled, rather, with tearshed. The private plane that had been bringing the King and the rest of the Royal Family and Guard to the school never made it to its destination. Only an hour outside the airport where it was to land the plane went down. Bystanders say it exploded on impact. The carnage was horrific. The ground burned for hours after rescue crews had left the scene. No one on that plane survived.

Nicole hadn’t been immediately privy to what had happened. At the age of eighteen she had joined the Army, left behind her best friend and family, and went to serve her country. It was in her blood, after all. Her grandfather and father both served in the military. It was a requirement of being part of the Royal Guard. Only servicemen were allowed to serve the Royal family.
When the plane that held nearly every important person in the Royal family and Guard, save for Wynonna and Waverly, went down she was in the middle of nowhere. As far as she knew it was just another ordinary day in the desert. She was in the middle of her second deployment on active duty and had been stationed somewhere removed from all real civilization. She didn’t mind, though. She liked how quiet it was. Growing up on Palace grounds, around Princesses, had made for a very loud childhood. There was always something going on. So she liked the peace and quiet her new assigned base offered her.

That quiet was shattered, though, when she received news of the crash. Her heart sank. Her world stopped. A million thoughts had swirled around her head but the one that came to a screeching halt in the forefront of her mind was Wynonna and Waverly. She could not imagine how they were taking the news. Their mother had died when Waverly was ten. Their grandparents had died when they were rather young as well. Now their father was dead. They had no more family left.

Nicole shook the memory of what had happened just a few weeks ago from her mind. She drew in another deep breath, took one more look over herself in the mirror, and turned away for the last time. She couldn’t dwell on the events that had brought her to where she was at the moment. She had to focus on what was to come. In just a short time she was being sworn in as the Head of the Royal Guard. She was promising to protect Wynonna from all harm. She was promising to protect Waverly as well. She would be in charge of all the men and women assigned to keep the last two members of the House of Earp safe. If she failed, if the men and women under her failed, the House of Earp would cease to exist. The Monarchy would be in ruins. That is what she had to focus on now.

“They are ready for you, Lady Haught” One of the younger members of the Royal staff, in charge of all Royal clothing, opened the door now to retrieve Nicole. She offered a soft smile to the girl standing rigidly in her Guard uniform and nodded “You look fantastic, ma’am.”

Nicole let out a soft smile at the kind words. She knew the girl fairly well. She had been brought onto the Royal Staff before Nicole had left for the Army. They had been friendly toward one another. They had engaged in normal conversations. Never had the girl addressed Nicole so formally before. As she stepped out of the room and looked down to the shorter girl she gave her a soft nod “I know it’s tradition and all but you do not have to call me Lady or Ma’am or anything like that. It’s weird.”

The girl laughed out and nodded in agreement “Forgive me. I am still adjusting to what’s acceptable now.”

“Trust me” Nicole said with a smirk as she started to walk toward the Hall of Grandeur where her ceremony was being held “If Wynonna has her way everyone will be required to swear at least once in every sentence they speak.”
"The Queen does love her curse words" The girl said with a soft laugh as she escorted Nicole to the hall.

"The Queen" Nicole mumbled to herself in a soft laugh. It still sounded weird. It was weird. All of it was too bizarre for her to wrap her head around. The weeks since the plane crash had all been a whirlwind and now as things were finally starting to slow down she was beginning to realize it was all real. Wynonna was Queen. She was walking into a ceremony where she would be knighted and sworn in as Head of the Royal Guard. This was no longer a someday. It was a right now.

"Good luck" The girl paused outside the doors of the hall as she was not permitted inside.

"Thanks" Nicole looked at the girl and offered her one last grateful smile before she rushed away.

With a shake of her head Nicole looked at the huge doors that separated herself from the next crazy step in her life. She drew in a deep breath and slowly let it slide from her lips. Her heartbeat calmed. Her body warmed. She felt good. She felt ready. This was, after all, what she was born to do. At least that is what she had always been told. She was about to find out if what everyone had believed would ring true. There was no going back. She nodded confidently at that last thought then motioned to the two guards standing outside the doors to pull them open. It was time to get the ceremony started.

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Everything that happened in the Hall of Grandeur was just that; grand. So it was no surprise when Nicole walked into the hall and it was filled to the brim with decorations, people, music, and of course photographers. It made it hard to really focus on anything that was happening. The only thing that got Nicole through the spectacle of her ceremony was Wynonna. Since childhood they had a habit of making weird faces at one another when they could tell the other was nervous. So as soon as Nicole had been close enough to see it, Wynonna had pulled a face to make Nicole smile. After that everything came much easier.

The ceremony, though attended by hundreds of people, was mainly just Wynonna, Nicole, and a priest standing in front of everyone. All other attendees were in the balconies that surrounded the main ballroom area of the hall. It was weird how intimate it felt even though the entire world was watching.

After reciting some prayers and verses from the bible about what it meant to be loyal and how important sacrifices were the priest then gave Wynonna the floor to make the usual old speech that accompanied the knighting ceremony.
The speech was made and attention shifted to Nicole as she was asked a series of questions. They were mostly for show, again out of tradition more than anything, but they served to show the world Nicole’s loyalty. She was asked to swear her life to the Crown and anyone who wore it or may wear it. She was asked if she knew what it meant to protect at all costs. She promised to never betray whoever sat on the throne and to train all those under her to do the same. It was very outdated and Nicole admittedly felt ridiculous. It was weird to be saying this while looking into the eyes of her oldest friend in the world. She had never made a speech to Wynonna as a child and yet they both already knew how loyal Nicole was to her.

Once the questions were asked, and answered, Wynonna pinned the traditional badge to Nicole’s chest that symbolized her title. It was only ceremonial and as soon as the night was over the badge would go into a protected case until Nicole’s next ceremonial appearance. Once the badge was pinned in place the crowd applauded and Nicole escorted Wynonna out of the hall in her first official act of duty.

Though it didn’t seem like a lot it had been exhausting. Nicole was ready to call it a night but, in true royal fashion, she unfortunately had to attend the party that came after her ceremony. She had to greet every important member of the Royal Court, introduce herself to the men and women now under her command, and of course accompany her Queen around the party. Luckily Nicole got to change out of her stuffy uniform and into a more dressed down version. The lighter fabric and absence of gloves helped keep Nicole from sweating so much so that was nice.

Nicole had finally gotten a chance to step away from handshakes and congratulations. She had asked for some water and once it was delivered to her she made her way over to where Wynonna was sitting on her Royal chair. She smirked before sipping at her water as her eyes landed on a very bored looking Wynonna. Once she swallowed she motioned to the party behind them “I thought you loved parties.”

Wynonna rolled her eyes and gave a dismissive wave of her hand to the side “Parties suck now. I have to be all regal and shit. I can’t sneak away with the cutest Duke in the room for a forbidden makeout session…” She curled her lip up on one side in disgust as her gaze slowly moved from the room full of people to focus on Nicole. She eyed her up and down and gave her a smile “Are you at least having fun?”

“Yeah right” Nicole huffed out and moved now to stand right next to Wynonna’s chair that was on a slightly raised platform. Her left hip came to rest on the right arm rest on the chair and she let out a sigh as her eyes fell to look over the crowd of people “I don’t even know most of these people. Where did they all come from?”

“Most of them are the people who were next in line” Wynonna said with a shrug. She reached her
right hand over toward Nicole in anticipation of being handed whatever it was Nicole was drinking. When the glass was given to her without hesitation she smiled slightly. That was not a queen thing that was a best friend thing. They shared everything. There was no one in the world she was more comfortable with than Nicole.

Nicole frowned at the meaning behind Wynonna’s words as she handed over her water. It meant that most of the people that were now important in that room had all lost someone close to them in the plane crash. It had been tragic. A huge chunk of very powerful decision makers had been wiped out. Though some of the people in the room had been training to take over their new positions for years others were still very new to the Royal Court. It was almost like someone had pushed reset on the Monarchy and Wynonna was in charge of making sure it didn’t crumble in on itself.

As that thought crossed her mind she looked over to Wynonna with a perked eyebrow “I haven’t seen Waverly yet.”

Wynonna shrugged and handed Nicole’s water back to her “She’s here. She just wanted to stay in the shadows tonight, you know?” She sat up a little more straight in her chair now and sighed “She’s kind of been a shut in since the accident. There were rumors that she didn’t even go to the funeral. But she’s just been really good at staying out of the limelight lately.”

Nicole gave a single nod. It wasn’t that she could blame Waverly at all. In a time of great loss and tragedy the last thing anyone should want is to have their every move observed. Hell, she had barely wanted to have a knighting ceremony but she hadn’t had a say in that. It was part of her duty now. She sighed at the thought. Duty should be put on hold when tragedy hits. Unfortunately the Royal Family didn’t have the luxury of putting it on hold to mourn. So they did so for the world to see.

“How is she doing?” Nicole finally asked as her eyes moved back to look at Wynonna now.

Wynonna shrugged. Her eyes scanned the room and she gave a few waves to people who caught her attention. It was weird to see her acting like a queen. It was also weird how well she had already settled into the role considering how uninterested in the role she had been. But when duty rang you had to answer.

“I’m worried about her” She finally spoke after a moment of waves and smiles to the crowd. “She’s been hiding out in her room a lot. She stays out late. I’ve heard she’s been keeping bad company.”

“So she’s you” Nicole mumbled through a soft laugh.
Wynonna smiled at that and gave a nod “Quite the role reversal if I say so myself. I’m smiling and waving and she’s drinking whiskey and making out with bad boys.”

“She’s grieving in her own way” Nicole said very softly as her own eyes scanned the room now. It was part of her job to always be on the lookout for threats.

“She’s not the only one who lost a father in that plane crash” Wynonna blinked slowly and looked away from the room now. Her eyes focused on Nicole and she spoke gently to her friend “How are you doing?”

Nicole shrugged. She didn’t look down to her friend. She kept her eyes flickering about the room. She was quiet for a moment because she didn’t know how to answer. Truthfully she was sad but she didn’t feel like she had the right to be sad. She had always known somewhere deep down that her dad could die suddenly. It was his job to put his life on the line to protect the Earp family so she had always been prepared to hear the news that he had died. So although she was sad she was also at peace about it. She wished he would have died saving the King’s life. That would have made her loss worth it at least.

“Thank you, by the way” She finally said softly.

Wynonna arched an eyebrow at the words because it wasn’t an answer to what she had asked and she also had no idea what it was referring to. She looked up at her friend and let out a huffed laugh “For what?”

“Letting me miss your coronation” Nicole said as her eyes left the room to focus on Wynonna sitting next to her.

Wynonna reached her right hand out and gently grabbed hold of Nicole’s left hand. She gave a squeeze and that was all either of them needed. She had planned her coronation for the same day as Nicole’s father’s funeral. Usually the Head of the Royal Guard would have their own huge funeral but Wynonna knew Nicole did not want that. She deserved to say goodbye to her father in a normal, quiet way. She had done everything in her power throughout their lives to make sure Nicole did not have to suffer the tediousness of Royal life and this was just one more thing. She was not at all mad that Nicole had missed her being crowned Queen. If she could have she would have missed the ceremony herself.

“Waverly was kind of mad about it” Wynonna broke the soft silence that had fallen between them as her hand slid out of Nicole’s. “She wanted to say goodbye to your father. She wanted to be there for you. But once I explained I had done it so that you could have the funeral out of the public eye she
understood.”

“I got her fruit basket and card” Nicole said with a soft laugh. She glanced at her friend again before looking back over the room. “She poured her heart into it and apologized several times about missing it. I wrote her back and told her I wasn’t mad. I hope she got the letter.”

“I am sure she did” Wynonna said with a nod. Just then she straightened up in her chair and motioned across the room. “Speaking of the Princess…”

Nicole followed Wynonna’s gesture until her eyes found Waverly across the room. It was then in that very moment that she realized that she had not seen the young Princess in seven years. She had left for the Army at the age of eighteen, when Waverly had been just thirteen, and with both their busy schedules they had not crossed paths since.

Nicole’s jaw dropped slightly and her mouth went instantly dry. Waverly had always been able to hold the attention of the room. She was bubbly and charming and her smile could light a dark cave. It was just who she was as a person. But now? Well she had grown up in the best way possible. She was breathtakingly beautiful. Her hair was long and done up neatly so her small crown could balance perfectly on her head. Her gown was stunning, barely floor length, strapless, and adorned with gems on every inch. She shimmered with each step she took.

“Wow” Nicole breathed out the single word as Waverly approached her. She felt her heart racing in her chest so hard she felt she might crack a rib. Her entire body warmed and she felt the unmistakable heat of a blush rise in her cheeks. She was having a hard time wrapping her mind around how well Waverly had grown up.

“Nicole!” Waverly’s bubbly voice broke through Nicole’s whirling mind. She smiled widely at the sight of her oldest friend and without hesitation she greeted her friend with a tight, excited hug. She lifted up on her toes and pulled back from the hug with a bounce. Her smile was spread from ear to ear as she looked up to the taller girl “It is so great to finally see you again! Look at you!” She held her hands on each of Nicole’s forearms and eyed her up and down slowly “You are officially one of us!”

“What?” Nicole looked down over her dress uniform and quickly shook her head “No, no I’m still just little old me.”

“I’m teasing” Waverly said with a playful wink. She then moved away from Nicole completely and over to her sister. She leaned into her and kissed her cheek gently before pivoting to her left and taking her place in the chair next to Wynonna’s left hand side. She took her sister’s hand and smiled
at her softly “For someone who wanted nothing to do with the Crown you sure do have the whole waving and smiling thing down.”

“Oh shut up” Wynonna rolled her eyes and ripped her hand away from her sister who was giggling in delight at the joke she had made. Wynonna shook her head and looked up at Nicole beside her again “Should I have her beheaded for treason?”

“I...uh…” Nicole’s eyes fluttered as she stared at Waverly. She hadn’t taken her eyes off the Princess since she had entered the room.

Wynonna saw the look on Nicole’s face and her smile dropped. She arched an eyebrow high on her forehead and slowly looked from her friend to her sister and back again. She smirked in amusement then reached up to poke Nicole firmly in the ribs “Do not ignore your Queen.”

“Ouch” Nicole groaned and grabbed the spot Wynonna had stabbed with her finger. This caused her to finally break her gaze away from Waverly in favor of throwing a scowl at Wynonna. Her brows knitted together and she rubbed gently at her ribs “What was that for?”

Wynonna laughed to herself and just shook her head. She was going to have to tease her friend about it later. For now she had royal duties to fulfill. So in one fluid motion she rose from her chair and lifted both hands in the air as a gesture for all in the room to pay attention. The room fell quiet almost instantly and she smirked slightly. She had to admit she liked the power she had over people now. But she knew that would grow old quickly.

She brushed the thought away and cleared her throat. She had to give another speech. She hated speeches. If there was one thing out of all her duties as Queen that she hated most it was public speaking. Thankfully tonight the subject matter was something she actually cared about. It made it easier. She glanced at Nicole and her head nodded just slightly before turning her attention back to the room to deliver yet another lecture about how honored she was to have knighted the most worthy person in the world to the position of Head of the Royal Guard.

As Wynonna spoke Nicole’s eyes drifted over to Waverly. She couldn't believe the little girl she had left behind had grown into such a stunning young woman. It was like she was looking at Waverly for the first time and if she was being honest she liked what she saw more than she probably should.

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“Nicole come hrrrrreee!” Wynonna let out a whine from her bathroom that connected to her bedroom. The night was finally over and she could finally get out of her stuffy Queen dress and into some regular old pajamas.

Nicole let out a groan from where she had already made herself comfortable on the bed. As soon as the ceremony had ended she had hurried to her new quarters to change out of her uniform. No sooner had she changed than had someone come to her door telling her that the Queen requested her presence. So she had sulked the short way down the hall to the Queen’s Royal bedroom.

Now she sulked over to the bathroom and let out a sigh as she reached the doorway. She leaned there just inside the bathroom that was the size of her own bedroom and watched Wynonna struggling with her dress. She smirked slightly in amusement and folded her arms across her chest as she watched “Don't you have Royal undresser people to help you with stuff like this?”

“Just shut your damn mouth and help me out” Wynonna grumbled and turned her back toward Nicole.

Nicole couldn't help but laugh as she reached for the zipper on the dress. She focused on what she was doing so as not to rip it. Heaven forbid she rip the Queen's dress. That would be a travesty.

Silence fell between them as Nicole worked at undoing the dress. It was a comfortable silence. The type of silence you would expect between two people who had known each other long enough that they did not feel the need to constantly be talking.

Once finished, Nicole stepped back from her friend but stayed in the room. She watched like she had hundreds of times before as Wynonna changed into her pajamas then readied herself for bed. There wasn't anything weird about it. They had grown up together and changed in front of one another more times than either could count. Besides Wynonna still had her underwear on.

After a few minutes the silence was too much for Wynonna. She glanced into the huge wall length mirror that adorned her bathroom wall and saw Nicole standing there looking deep in thought. She spit out the toothpaste she had been working around her mouth and cleared her throat to break the silence that had settled in “what are you thinking about over there?”

Nicole, who hadn't been thinking about anything in particular, just shrugged and focused her eyes on her friend. She waited for her to finish brushing her teeth before she spoke “I was thinking about how weird tonight was.”
Wynonna gave a soft laugh in a sound that said Nicole had just stated the obvious. She turned now and left her bathroom, flipping off the light as she passed by Nicole, and moved toward her bed.

“I just mean” Nicole continued her thought as she followed her friend out of the bathroom now “You as Queen, knighting me and naming me Head of the Royal Guard…” She paused now and watched Wynonna climb into her overly large Royal bed then pat the spot next to her to indicate that Nicole should join. She did so without hesitation and continued on her thought as she made herself comfortable. “We used to play that scenario out when we played pretend. I never thought it would actually happen.”

Wynonna gave a nod as she thought it over. Neither of then had ever really thought this day would come. She was certain she would die from alcohol poisoning before her dad ever died. Queen was not something she had ever really believed she would become.

Nicole let out a sigh as she settled her back against the pillows behind her. She was sitting up slightly and as soon as she settled she lifted her arm because she knew what was coming.

Wynonna moved right up against Nicole and laid her head against her friend’s chest. She smiled when Nicole had lifted her arm in anticipation of the move. They had grown up close, shared a bed countless times, but it had been years since they had done so. It was nice to see old habits died hard. Actually she liked that about Nicole. She liked how she could count on her to do what she always did. Maybe she was predictable in her ways but that was the very trait that gave Wynonna the certainty that she had made the right choice in knighting Nicole. She didn’t trust anyone to protect herself and Waverly the way she trusted Nicole.

As Waverly came to mind so did a thought from earlier. Wynonna sat up a little now and looked at her friend “You know what was weird? How you kept staring at Waves all night. What was that about?”

Nicole felt herself immediately flush. Honestly she had no idea what that had been about other than the fact that Waverly had grown into a breathtaking beauty. But she wouldn't admit that. So she let out an annoyed huff and shook her head in denial “I was just shocked I guess. I mean the last time I saw her she was barely a teenager. I guess I still had this picture of her as a kid in my mind so seeing her all grown up just took me by surprise.”

“Mhm” Wynonna hummed the sound that carried a teasing tone of disbelief. She settled back down against her friend and a yawn ripped through her. She let it pass then gave a shake of her own head as she felt her eyes close “If you bang my sister I’ll be pissed.”
“What?” Nicole felt her cheeks flaming with a hot blush now. She was glad Wynonna was already nodding off and hadn’t seen it. She had never thought about banging Waverly before. She knew that Wynonna was kidding but for some reason the idea was now causing her to panic. She didn’t want to bang Waverly. She had just been surprised at how grown up she looked. Yes that was all. She wondered if she said that to herself enough that she would eventually start to believe it.

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I am barely holding together a 400 year old legacy, babygirl.

The next day Nicole was introduced to life as the Queen’s personal bodyguard very quickly. Though there had not been a threat on Wynonna’s life that did not mean Nicole could just sit around and wait. No she had to accompany Wynonna everywhere she went. This started with breakfast and moved very quickly into meetings and other appointments that the Queen had to attend. Nicole was right there beside her best friend and realizing rather quickly just what a task being the head of a Monarchy actually was. Her respect for Wynonna grew with every moment she watched her work.

By mid-morning they had already sat in on three different meetings about various things. She had no idea how Wynonna had adjusted to the job so fast because she was already exhausted. Luckily the next stop was in the main meeting room and included everyone else in Wynonna’s Royal Court that she had yet to speak with that day so Nicole held out hope that meant there was no more business to discuss after that.

The room was huge and the table in the center of it was long. It looked like a conference room that had been moved into a 16th Century decorated ballroom. It was ridiculous how ornately the entire Palace was decorated. You’d think after a few hundred years someone would have wanted to make the style a little more modern.

The thought left her mind as people started to enter the room. She scanned each one of them with her eyes to make sure she recognized them. If she didn’t she looked for an access badge that all official members of the Court had to wear to get into certain parts of the Palace. Once she saw a badge on each person she relaxed a bit.

“Sit down” Wynonna said softly with a laugh to Nicole and motioned to the chair that was on her immediate right. “You have guards posted outside the door so you can relax in here.”

Nicole rolled her eyes at herself and sat in the chair that had been offered. The room was filled with a soft mumble as people started conversing with one another. Wynonna was quiet as she looked over a few folders of paperwork she had been given upon entering the room. It was bizarre to see her being so serious about work.

After the last of the expected people had filed in Wynonna cleared her throat and stood from her chair. Everyone else turned their attention to her and stood as well. She let out a breath of a laugh and shook her head “Okay first order of business is please stop being so formal around me. I mean, I get it, I am the Queen and I rule the country and what I say goes but that’s a little outdated for my liking. It also feels like an abuse of power to have everyone bowing and shit around me so let’s spread the word that unless it is an official engagement out in the world you can act like a normal person around me. Everyone clear?”

There was a round of “Yes, Your Majesty” and “As you wish, Queen Wynonna” from around the table as people awkwardly sat down. This made Wynonna roll her eyes. Old habits die hard. Once everyone had settled back in their chairs, leaving Wynonna as the only one standing, she gave a smile to everyone around the table.

“I am sure you all heard about last night…” She motioned to where Nicole was sitting beside her and nodded. “So I am going to give her some quick introductions of the people she probably doesn’t know.” She looked around the table and when she spotted the few newer people that had not been around when Nicole had previously been in the Palace she motioned to them and smiled “The gentleman across from me is my advisor. It’s his job to be in the know about what is going on all over the world and the public opinion of it all so I can make the right decisions about shit. Doc, say
The man didn’t look much older than Wynonna at all. He had a bushy moustache that curled down at the ends and longer but well kempt hair. He gave a nod to Nicole and offered a soft smile “Nice to meet your acquaintance, Lady Haught.”

“Nicole, please” Nicole corrected him softly before offering him a smile. “Nice to meet you as well. Did you say it was Doc?”

“John Henry but the Queen calls me Doc” The man smiled fondly at Wynonna.

Wynonna just nodded before motioning to a guy right next to him “Agent Xavier Dolls is the head of all military activity. Basically he assess any threats and let’s me know what he thinks we should do.”

Nicole sat up a little straighter and smiled at Dolls across from her “It’s an honor, Sir. Having served in our Army I am very much aware of who you are.”

The man gave a warm laugh and shook his head “You can call me Dolls. I am not knighted so Sir does not apply to me.”

Wynonna rolled her eyes and looked at Dolls with a playful glare “Do you want me to knight you? I swear you complain that you aren’t knighted every day.”

Dolls chuckled softly and gave Wynonna a soft smirk “You know I like giving you shit, Your Highness.”

“Don’t” Wynonna stopped herself from continuing the sharp lecture about addressing her by one of her titles and instead drew in a slow breath. She let it out and moved on with a shake of her head “That one there is Jeremy Chetri. Head of…” She motioned to the young man a few more chairs down and after a moment let out a laugh “Something scientific. He’s in charge of royal medicine and cures for the common cold and…” She shrugged and gave him an almost pleading look for him to help her out.

“Science” Jeremy said with a happy grin. “Let’s just leave it at that. Just know if you need anything to do with technology or medicine or science you can come to me.”

“Thanks” Nicole offered him a soft smile and an appreciative nod.

“I think you know everyone else” Wynonna, who was obviously trying to hurry the meeting along, said with a nod as she motioned around the table. It was then that she noticed the chair to her left was empty and she let out a frustrated sigh. She looked around at everyone and shrugged “Where is Waverly?”

“The Princess was still asleep. She had a late night” One of the older people near the end of the table spoke up now.

Wynonna clenched her jaw. It was easy to see that she was already fed up with the way Waverly had been behaving over the past two weeks. She breathed out heavily through her nose and tried to smile through gritted teeth “Will someone go drag her ass down here? She might not be Queen but she still has responsibilities.”

“Let me” Nicole stood up quickly from her seat. When Wynonna looked surprised at the actions Nicole just smiled and put a calming hand on her friend’s shoulder. “I’ve known her for her entire life and I have a feeling that she will not respond to an aggressive demand for her presence. So let me just go wake her up.” She gave a nod then added quickly before Wynonna could argue “Gently.”
Wynonna rolled her eyes then gave a dismissive flick of her hand in the direction of the door before plopping down into her chair “Fine but hurry up.”

Nicole nodded quickly then hurried from the room. Once she was out in the corridors of the Palace she looked every which way and realized she had never been in this part by herself. She wondered down to the left in hopes of finding something she recognized so she could orient herself. When that failed she let out a deflated sigh and walked up to the first staff member she could find. Staff member, that sounded so gross. They were just people who worked in the Royal Palace and helped make it run smoothly.

“Excuse me. Which way are the living quarters?” She felt so silly asking. She had grown up in the Palace. But this had definitely been a wing that she was not allowed in being as she was not a royal.

“Just keep on down this corridor. Pass the statues and stuff there will be a door on the right. Through there is the living quarters, Lady Haught.” A meek girl, who looked honored that Nicole had even spoken to her, answered softly.

“Nicole, please” She said with a soft sigh. Then she smiled at the small girl “Thank you so much. Hopefully I’ll get the hang of this wing soon.”

The girl seemed thrilled at how nice Nicole had been and giggled very gently at her joke. She watched the tall red head hurry off then turned to run into a nearby door to tell the other members of the staff she worked with that she had just gotten to speak to the Head of the Royal Guard!

Nicole made quick work of finding the living quarters wing and once she found it she knew right away where she was. It was crazy how an entire part of a place she grew up in was so foreign to her. But she shook the thought off as she approached Waverly’s door. She gave the guard standing watch outside the door a nod and motioned toward it “She hasn’t gone anywhere all morning?”

“No, ma’am” The guard replied quickly.

This didn’t bother Nicole. The guard was one of the officers serving below her. They were supposed to address her as ma’am. It was their job. “Thanks. I’m just going to see if she is awake.”

The guard saluted her and stepped aside and pulled the door open for her.

Nicole gave him a nod of thanks and entered the room. It was nearly as large as Wynonna’s room. It was ornate and elaborately decorated just like the rest of the Palace was. Someone really needed to come update the decor because it was honestly hideous. But that didn’t matter. What mattered was Waverly. So Nicole slowly made her way to the huge bed in the middle of four overly large posts that stretched from floor to ceiling and were hand carved with a design of flowers and woodland creatures. It was too much.

“Waves” She said softly once she was standing right at the side of the bed near the lump of person under the mound of blankets and sheets. When she got no reply she reached out and gave the lump a gentle shake “Waverly. You need to get up.”

Waverly’s head shot up. She was laying on her stomach, face down, so when her head lifted all of her long hair dangled over her features. She looked around a bit confused until she saw some sunlight peeking through an opening in the strands of her hair over her face. She groaned and dropped her face back against the pillow “Turn off the lights it’s too bright.”

Nicole blinked in confusion. She looked around her to confirm that it was only sunlight coming into the dim room and nothing else. She shook her head and looked back to the mess of a girl that laid on
the bed “Waves it’s just the sun. It’s nearly noon. I think it’s time you get up.”

“Nooooo” Waverly rolled onto her back now and pulled the pillow over her face. She let out a heavy sigh and lifted the end of the pillow just enough to see who was standing next to her bed. She was surprised to see Nicole. She was pleased to see Nicole. Usually it was a beefy guard member who was physically lifting her out of bed at the demand of the Queen. When she realized that wasn’t the case this morning she smiled slightly “Wynonna usually sends the apes in for me. Today must be my lucky day.”

Nicole let out a soft laugh. That was the Waverly she knew. A smart mouthed but funny girl who always had a smile on her face. It was good to see that the new, unfavorable attitude that Waverly had did not seem to be surfacing for Nicole. “I can be an ape if you want me to.”

“Please no” Waverly groaned out before pushing the pillow off her head. She yawned loudly then pushed herself up off the mattress enough to sit up against the headboard of the bed. She used a hand to push her messy hair off her face and to the back of her head where it belonged. She gave Nicole a sleepy smile once she was sitting up and shrugged “So what am I late for now?”

Nicole’s heart fluttered at the sleepy mess of a girl that smiled at her from the bed. Even now, devoid of any grace or fancy outfits, Nicole was aware of how beautiful Waverly had grown to be. It was absolutely astonishing. That joy faded quickly, though, when Waverly’s uncaring attitude toward her duties came tumbling out of her mouth with her questioning what she was late for. Nicole frowned and motioned toward the door she had come into the room through “Um, I don’t know which meeting it is but like the big one with everyone involved.”

Waverly’s lip curled up at the corner in disliking before shrugging it away “I went to that one last week. It’s mind numbingly boring. It’s basically Wynonna being told everything that’s wrong in the kingdom and her having to make a decision on what to do. She doesn’t need me there.”

“I think she does actually” Nicole let out a huff and shifted now to sit on the side of the bed near Waverly’s legs. She looked up at the girl she had known for most of her life and a frown came to her lips “Why are you suddenly so disinterested in all of this, Waves?”

Waverly just shrugged before her eyes fell to her lap. She pulled gently at the top of the sheets she still sat under as she thought about the question. After a moment she lifted her eyes back to find Nicole looking at her gently, awaiting an answer, and she sighed “Do you know you are the very first person to ask me that instead of asking why I’m acting like a brat?”

“You’re not a brat” Nicole breathed out the words as if she couldn’t believe someone would say such a thing about Waverly. Her hand gently came to rest against the girl’s right shin and she gave the leg a soft squeeze “I know you’re not a brat. You are kind and caring and can command a room with your smile and charm. So when I see you like this…” Her hand lifted from Waverly’s leg now and motioned to her general state of being in the bed before she let out a sigh “I know something is wrong.”

Waverly couldn’t look at Nicole anymore. The way the girl was looking at her with such a delicate sense of concern for her was unnerving. So her eyes fell to her lap again and she gave her head a shake. “You don’t know who I am anymore, Nicole. You think you know me but it’s been seven years. I’ve changed. I’ve grown up.”

“I can see that” Nicole said with a huff of a breath as her eyes scanned over the very adult form that had taken place of the prepubescent girl she had left behind. Realizing she was staring she quickly shook her head and turned her eyes away for a moment. “But just because you’ve aged doesn’t mean you’ve grown up, Waverly.” Slowly her eyes returned to the girl and when they did they held a more
serious look behind them. “But I would say now more than ever is the time you should start growing up because your sister needs you.”

“She’s fine” Waverly brushed the idea away with a flick of her wrist to toss her hand to the side. “She loves being Queen. She struts around here making demands and acting all power hungry. It’s like she was waiting for this day to come and now that it has she is taking advantage of it all.”

“That is ridiculous” Nicole said with a frown. “Waverly, you and I both know she didn’t want this, especially not under these circumstances. But shit happens and you have to deal with it.” She stood now from the bed and gave a firm nod “Now get your ass out of bed, get dressed, and get to that meeting.”

Waverly scowled defiantly at Nicole. She folded her arms across her chest and gave a single shake of her head. “Or what?”

“Or…” Nicole pointed firmly at the girl. She looked like an authority figure about to lay down the law. Then she realized she had no idea what her scope of power was or if she even had any authority over Waverly at all. She deflated and her point dropped out of the air. She shrugged and decided not to be aggressive. Instead she let out a soft sigh “Waverly, you and I both know you didn’t want this, especially not under these circumstances. But shit happens and you have to deal with it. You are an adult and are completely capable of making whatever decision you want about your actions. I am asking you, as a friend, to just be you. Do what you know you should do.” She shrugged once more then turned to head for the door. She paused on the other side of the bed and turned to look back at Waverly. She sighed and motioned behind her toward the door that opened to the rest of the Palace “We’re all on the same team, though. Just remember that.”

Waverly was downright shocked that Nicole had not just argued with her. Every time Wynonna sent someone to get her in the morning it had turned into a screaming match. Nicole had instead decided to walk away. For some reason this resonated the importance of what Nicole had been saying and she quickly scrambled to her feet “Nicole, wait!”

Nicole stopped right as she reached the door. A small smile flickered on her lips because she had known that tactic would work. Well she had hoped it would. It was good to see some things never changed. She shook the smile from her face quickly and turned now with a serious look on her face. She eyed Waverly over just once then shrugged “What can I do for you, my Princess?”

“Gross” Waverly huffed at the sarcasm from Nicole. She fought off a smile though because it really was funny before she rolled her eyes then got a more serious look on her face. She shrugged a single shoulder then nodded “You’re right we are on the same team. So…” She clicked her tongue against her teeth a few times and gave as casual as a shrug as she could “…I promise to try to make it to all the meetings in the Palace that I’m supposed to go to.”

“Try?” Nicole folded her arms across her chest firmly and arched a challenging eyebrow.

“Fine!” Waverly threw her hands into the air in a sign of defeat and let out a huff “I will go to all my stupid Royal meetings. Are you happy?”

Nicole let out the softest laugh as her arms dropped away from her chest. She gave Waverly one look over then nodded once “For now.” She pointed lazily in Waverly’s direction, motioning up and down her form once, then turned to the door. “Hurry up. I’ll wait for you in the hallway.”

“Privacy?” Waverly gasped playfully and faked surprise. “I didn’t know that still existed in this place.”
Nicole just rolled her eyes at Waverly’s dramatics. She had always had a flare for playing up a situation. As a kid she would command a room with her exuberance over every little thing. A soft smile came to her lips and she motioned at the girl again “Okay drama queen just-” She stopped mid-sentence when her eyes fell to a half naked Waverly. There was no shyness with the Earp girls it seemed. Then again when you grew up with someone literally watching over your every move it was hard to be shy. She quickly turned her back and shielded her eyes “You could have at least waited for me to leave the room.”

Waverly laughed in a way that sounded like she thought Nicole was joking. She was standing in front of her closet in just a pair of underwear and her bra now as she eyed her clothing options. As much as she had loved dressing up as a kid she was starting to resent it now. “It’s not like you’ve never seen me change clothes before.”

“We were kids, Waves” Nicole grumbled softly.

“So? You’re like a sister to me. Besides if strangers can be hired to be my official garment remover or whatever I can handle changing in front of someone I actually know…” Waverly’s words trailed off as she concentrated on what she had just taken from her closet. She turned around and held the gown up to her body before turning toward Nicole for her opinion “What about this?”

Nicole slowly turned around when Waverly asked about her clothing choice. She was glad to see the garment was blocking the fact that Waverly barely had any clothing on. She still blushed though. She had no idea why she was blushing. She had never acted like this in front of another girl. She had grown up with both Wynonna and Waverly. They had all changed and played dress up together a hundred times. Even in the Army she was surrounded by women changing clothes in her general area every day. So the fact that Waverly was causing this reaction was very confusing.

“It’s nice” She finally commented. Truthfully she had no idea what Waverly was supposed to wear to her official Royal Court meetings.

“Nice?” Waverly looked down at the dress she had pulled out then shook her head and tossed it away. In doing so she uncovered her underwear clad body then turned back to her closet “I need something more than nice.”

When Waverly so quickly dismissed the dress, Nicole quickly looked away again. Why was Waverly so casual about the fact that she barely had clothing on. Even if she was standing in just her bikini Nicole would be blushing. There was far too much skin being exposed for her liking. Perhaps she liked it too much, actually. Maybe she just liked the person the skin was attached to.

No! She had to stop thinking these things. She turned her back on Waverly again and cleared her throat so she could speak firmly. “I’m going to be in the hallway.” Before the Princess could object Nicole stormed out of the room.

Once she was back in the large corridor of the Palace she drew in a deep breath and closed her eyes. The image of a barely dressed Waverly was burned in her mind. She shook her head pretty roughly as if trying to dislodge it from her brain completely. She had to focus. Her job was to protect these girls not fawn over them. What in the world was going on with her? It was just Waverly. Little annoying Waverly who never shut up and always wanted to be included in whatever Nicole and Wynonna were doing. She was practically her little sister.

She let out the breath she had pulled in and her eyes came open. She gave a nod of her head as if silently reassuring herself she had complete control over herself. She was sure that once she adjusted to the fact that Waverly was now an adult she would be able to think clearly around the girl. Woman. She was a woman now. A stunningly gorgeous woman with curves and-
“Okay I’m ready” Waverly appeared seemingly out of nowhere although in reality she had just come out of her bedroom. “What do you think?”

Nicole was a little flushed. Her heart was racing. But she tried to act casual and offered Waverly barely a glance before nodding at her inquiry “Lovely. Let’s go.”

Waverly frowned at Nicole’s short answer. She wondered if she had done something to offend her friend. She would have to ask later because right now she had to focus on going to this dumb meeting and acting regal. So the two of them used a quick but quiet pace to move through the Palace to the overly large meeting room where everyone was talking official royal business.

When they walked into the room together all conversation stopped. Once the people around the table realized the Princess had entered the room they all stood as a traditional gesture of respect.

Wynonna rolled her eyes at this “Guys remember what we talked about at the start of the meeting? Keep it casual.”

“Sorry I’m late” Waverly said softly but put on a smile as she walked passed the people who were returning to their seats. With the smile on her lips it was as if every single person she greeted forgave her instantly. That was just the power she seemed to have.

Nicole followed a few steps behind Waverly and once they reached her chair, Nicole reached down to pull it out for Waverly. No one thought the gesture was weird because she was the Princess. Everyone just accepted it. Everyone except for Wynonna.

Wynonna kept quiet until Waverly was tucked in her chair up against the table and Nicole had returned to the other empty chair on the other side of her. She then turned her eyes toward the person who had last been talking and motioned to them with a nod “As you were saying…”

One of the older members of the court picked up where they had left off. Wynonna was not interested in what they had to say. Instead she leaned to her right and whispered to Nicole “We need to talk after this.”

Nicole glanced over at Wynonna and immediately knew it was not going to be a pleasant talk. The look on her friend’s face was far too stern and serious. So she just nodded in acknowledgement then turned her attention to the speaker.

Wynonna then turned and leaned to her left where Waverly was sitting. She eyed her sister up and down just once before whispering to her harshly “I swear to God Waverly I have had it with your shit lately.”

The whisper had not been as quiet as intended and everyone fell silent. They all looked over to the Queen failing to scold the Princess under her breath. Someone cleared their throat. Wynonna straightened herself in her seat and put on an apologetic smile “I am being rude. Please, continue.”

“I think that will do for the day” Doc spoke up now before the person who had been talking was interrupted again. He looked at the person with a nod before speaking directly to them “You can finish up with me and I will relay it to the Queen. It is a beautiful day and I think we have all been sitting in this room for far too long this morning.”

Wynonna nodded quickly and flashed Doc a grateful smile before she stood from her chair. She looked around the table then motioned toward the doors at both ends of the huge room “I thank you all for coming and I apologize again for the interruptions. As you can see the new regime is still working out a few kinks. We will get there, though.”
There was a soft laughter from the group before they all stood and started to clear out. Some lingered behind and made light discussions about the topics that had been covered in the meetings. Doc moved toward the person who he had promised to speak with in order to allow them to finish what they had been saying.

Wynonna turned her head quickly toward her sister and her calm demeanor she had been holding for the room of people turned into a sharp scowl “I am so done with you, Waverly Earp. What is your deal?”

Waverly, who had not stood when Wynonna had excused everyone, just shrugged and rolled her eyes at her sister. “I am so sick of you telling me what to do. I am not a child.”

“That’s hysterical because you’ve been acting more like a child now than you did when you were eight!” Wynonna’s voice rose an octave and echoed slightly off the large open space above them that the high ceilings lent to the room.

“Hey” Nicole said softly and grabbed Wynonna’s arm gently from behind. She leaned into her best friend and whispered against her ear “Maybe not here. We don’t want word to get out that the Royal Family is fighting.”

Though most of the people still in the room were very serious and very loyal about serving the Crown that did not mean some of the staff lingering just outside the room were. Any of them could overhear the commotion and sell the story to a tabloid for a lot of money. So even though Wynonna was fuming she gave a nod because she knew Nicole was right. She drew in a deep breath to calm herself down and focused her eyes a bit more softly on her sister “Meet me in my chambers in ten minutes, please.”

Waverly gave an annoyed huff and stood from her chair. She was going to argue but then she caught sight of Nicole’s pleading gaze behind her sister and she stopped herself. She rolled her eyes again and used her hand to make a dismissing motion toward Wynonna “Whatever you say, Your Highness.”

Wynonna lunged at Waverly. Nicole had anticipated this and quickly looped her arm around Wynonna’s waist to prevent the motion from being effective. She held tightly until Waverly made her way out of the room. Once she felt it was safe she slowly let her arm slide off of Wynonna’s waist. She gave her head a shake and looked down at her friend with a bit of disappointment in her eyes “Come on, Wynonna. You and I both know this is exactly what she wants. She wants to cause a scene and make it look like you’re a loose canon. You need to keep your head around her.”

“Or I could just have her’s removed” Wynonna snarled. She really did love a good beheading joke. She huffed out in frustration then turned to face Nicole. When she saw the stern yet calm look in her friend’s eyes she nodded and sighed softly “I know you’re right. She’s just driving me crazy! I don’t know what to do about it. I just want to…” Her hands lifted to mimic the motion of strangling someone and she gritted her teeth. She was bubbling over with frustration.

“I get it” Nicole nodded and put her hands over Wynonna’s. She gently pushed them down so it did not look like she was trying to strangle anyone any longer. Then she wrapped her fingers around her friend’s and gave a calming squeeze to both hands. “We will figure it out together, alright? Maybe just start by letting her talk. No judgement. Let her say whatever it is she needs to say and really listen to it.”

“You…” Wynonna’s hands slid out of Nicole’s and lifted instead to her face. She cupped her friend’s face in her hands and squished her cheeks together playfully. She smiled brightly then let out a heavy sigh and dropped her hands away completely “I am so glad you are here. I am not sure I
could go on like this much longer.”

“You’re doing fine. It has only been a couple weeks. Like you said we will get the hang of it” Nicole gave her friend a smile and a nod. She was glad she seemed to have talked Wynonna off the edge. “Now what did you want to talk about with me?”

Thanks to Waverly’s attitude Wynonna had completely forgotten that she had wanted to have a word with Nicole. She let out a soft laugh at that “You know you could have just walked away and gotten off the hook.”

“Yeah but it would have come up later and you would have blamed me for not reminding you” Nicole teased her friend. The two of them moved together now around the long table and toward the doorway that took them back out into the large corridors. Their pace was slow as they took their time walking and talking.

“Anyway” Wynonna waved off Nicole’s teasing and looked at her friend a little more seriously. “Real quick, no big deal, I just had two things to say.”

“I’m all ears” Nicole nodded seriously. They were walking slowly but she also knew they didn’t have much time. Waverly was waiting for Wynonna in her chambers, wherever those were, then she was sure after that Wynonna would be needed elsewhere so they had to make the most out of their time.

“Firstly, thank you so much for getting Waverly to show up. She has been refusing to appear anywhere before mid-afternoon” Wynonna sounded annoyed at that but she pushed passed it in order to stay on subject. “I really appreciate it.”

“Not a problem. She was actually really glad it was me and not, as she called it, one of your apes” Nicole let out a soft laugh at that.

Wynonna drew in a sharp breath through her nose and let it out slowly. Why did Waverly have to be so obnoxious about everything. Again she pushed passed the subject with a wave of her hand “Secondly…” She stopped now outside a large, elaborately carved and decorated door that Nicole had never seen before and turned to look at her friend “What in the Hell was that whole thing with the chair back there?”

“Wh-what?” Nicole tried to give a casual laugh but it ended up sounding like a breath of denial from someone who had been caught doing something they shouldn’t be doing. “I don’t know it was just…”

Wynonna watched Nicole stammer over her words and an eyebrow slowly rose on her forehead. She wasn’t sure if she was amused or suspicious.

The look on Wynonna’s face flustered Nicole more. Her cheeks flushed and she let out a heavy sigh “Habit, I guess. My father always told me to pull the chair out for any member of the Royal Family that I could and not to sit until they were seated. I guess it was like a reflex or something.”

“Mhm” Wynonna hummed out in a way that showed she hardly believed her friend. She held the suspicious look on her face for just a heartbeat before it was fading and she was turning toward the door they stood in front of now. She motioned to the guard standing outside and nodded at them to open it. “Now if you excuse me I have a child to discipline.”

Nicole was relieved the attention was off of her for the moment. She puffed out a laugh and looked at the door. This must be the Queen’s chambers. What the difference between that and her bedroom
was she had no idea but apparently there was a difference. So she gave a nod and pointed to where she stood “I will be right here if you need me. Both for moral support or physical support.” She playfully flexed her right arm and smirked.

“Please. I can totally take on that shrimp. She’s like a twig” Wynonna lifted both hands and mimicked the motion of snapping a stick in half. The two of them shared a laugh that died quickly as Wynonna turned her focus to the room. She was not ready for a shouting match but she was certainly not going to let Waverly continue to act the way she had been lately. So with one deep breath to steel herself up she entered the room.

Surprisingly Waverly was inside. She was standing in front of one of the windows that stretched from floor to overly high ceiling with her eyes focused on the grounds below. She heard Wynonna enter and she let out a sigh. She could not wait to be told what she had done wrong this time.

Wynonna’s first instinct was to come in guns blazing, so to speak, and rip into her sister with a lecture about her attitude. But Nicole’s advice rang in her ears and she stopped herself. Instead she calmly moved over to the small table that was set up in the room and grabbed one of the snacks that the staff had left out for her. She cleared her throat and looked at the back of her sister’s head “Are you hungry?”

Waverly was surprised she was not being immediately scolded. She glanced over her shoulder to where her sister stood and shook her head “No thank you.”

“Yeah the finger sandwiches here are shit anyway” Wynonna dropped the tiny snack sandwich she had picked up and brushed her hand off on her thigh. It left some crumbs on the fabric of the dress she wore but someone would clean it so she didn’t really mind. Instead she focused on her sister and spoke calmly again “So….what’s up?”

Waverly was losing patience with Wynonna. She knew a lecture was coming and she wanted to get it over with. So she turned now to face her sister and rolled her eyes in the process “I know you’re here to yell at me so will you just make it quick. I have things to do today.”

“Yes you do” Wynonna said with a nod. She felt her annoyance rise at the attitude her sister gave her but she bit the inside of her cheek and took a second to breathe. She had to remain calm. “I know what’s on your schedule from day to day is not what you had in mind when you thought about your life after college but it’s the reality we live in now and I would really appreciate it if you-”

“If I what?” Waverly felt herself snap. She had barely had time to breathe since her father had died and it was all too much for her to cope with. “Play pretend with you like our lives weren’t completely flipped on their heads?”

“Hey” Wynonna’s annoyance faded and was replaced by hurt. She could see the way Waverly was seething now and it genuinely worried her. “Look I know that this is not where either of us wanted to be right now. Hell I never thought I would be…” She motioned to her dumb Royal dress that she wore to the dumb Royal meetings and shook her head “…freaking Queen but I am and there is nothing I can do about that.”

“Oh like you aren’t loving it” Waverly hissed the words out. “You get to boss people around and have anything you want at the snap of your fingers. You love the fact that all of the attention is on you now. Our entire lives you’ve had to compete for attention and no matter what you did you weren’t good enough. But now…” She laughed but the sound lacked any amusement. It was filled with disgust “Now you’re the center of attention and you finally get to push me to the background.”

“Are you kidding me with this bullshit?” Wynonna was trying to remain calm but Waverly’s words
were a personal attack and she simply would not stand for it. “I never wanted this! You’re the one who loved to sit on daddy’s lap and hear him call you his little queen. He was preening you for the Crown the entirety of our childhood. If he had gotten his way he would have outlived me and passed the throne onto his precious baby that could do no wrong!”

“Then what are you doing?” Waverly motioned to where Wynonna stood. “Why are you acting like this is what you wanted. Why are you making Royal decrees and pretending like you actually care about the Crown?”

“Because whether I like it or not it is my duty!” Wynonna yelled now. She couldn’t help it. Waverly had pushed all the right buttons. “We lost our father and a shit ton of uncles and aunts and basically every single person who was even remotely like family to us, Waverly. We lost them in the most horrific way I can think of losing loved ones, okay? It fucking sucks and I get that you are upset about that but attacking me for stepping in and filling the role I was born into is not the way to go about grieving your loss.”

She felt herself starting to choke up and she had to draw a sharp breath to steady herself. She tried to stare firmly at her sister but it wavered and she felt her own pain starting to boil up “I am barely holding together a 400 year old legacy, babygirl. I am doing the best I can but I can’t do this without you.” She drew in another shaky breath and let it out slowly. “Trust me when I tell you there hasn’t been a day that’s gone by that I haven’t thought about abdicating and walking away from all of this. Because you…” She let a soft laugh that mixed with a sob slip from her lips before motioning to her sister “You would be a fantastic Queen.”

Waverly was surprised at what she was hearing. She had not expected the emotion she was getting out of her sister. She also did not expect the words she had just heard. Her head gave a shake and she spoke much gentler than she had before “You can’t abdicate. That would leave me all alone. I’d be the last of the Earps.”

“Then cut me some fricken slack, kid” Wynonna cried out softly. She lifted a hand to wipe at the tear that had trickled from her eye before motioning to her sister. “The last thing I want is to be the last generation of Earps. I mean I knew I was a screw up when I was younger but can you imagine how pissed our ancestors would be if they realized I went and ran the line into the ground?”

Waverly let out a soft laugh and wiped a tear away from her own eye. She moved slowly over to her sister and reached out her hands to take hold of one of Wynonna’s gently. She gave a tender squeeze and shook her head “I guess that means you plan on getting married and having kids then?”

“Oh come on give me a break” Wynonna laughed out and wiped another tear from her eye. “I’ve been Queen for like five minutes. Can I at least have a year before you start asking me about producing the next heir? I’m already getting it from everyone else.”

Waverly laughed again and gave a single nod “I think that’s fair.”

“Gee how kind of you, Princess” Wynonna smirked slightly as the tone shifted from serious to a bit more playful.

“If you think I am ever calling you Queen you are crazier than Old King Winston was” Waverly returned her sister’s playful tone and let her hands slide away from where they had been holding one of Wynonna’s.

A laugh at the mention of arguably the craziest King the House of Earp had ever produced came from Wynonna’s lips. There was no way she was that crazy. The man ordered everyone who had unnatural thoughts to tear their ears off in order to be able to hear the word of God more easily. Hey
not all members of the Earp clan were natural born leaders.

“Hey listen I know everything that has happened blows” Wynonna changed the subject and the tone got a little more serious again. “But will you at least try to keep up with your Royal engagements?” She saw Waverly opening her mouth to argue and she quickly added “If I promise to set aside a large amount of free time for you every week where you are free of all Royal duties?” She saw the look in Waverly’s eyes soften but she could tell her sister was not quite sold yet so she continued with one more addition “And let you go completely off the grid for the weekend of your 21th birthday?”

This made Waverly light up with a bright smile. She gave a single nod at the idea “Is that a promise?”

“You are required to make an appearance at your birthday gala” Wynonna reminded her quickly. “That is considered a Royal engagement. But after that you can have three full days where you are left completely alone.”

“Totally alone?” Waverly now eyed her sister suspiciously. It seemed too easy.

“Well obviously you’d have a guard member with you” Wynonna relented with a nod. There was no way the Princess would be able to be left completely unguarded for a weekend. “But it will be Nicole” She blurted out quickly when she saw Waverly starting to prepare a counter argument.

“Nicole?” Waverly’s suspicious look was starting to soften. Nicole was actually the ideal person. She was nice, not aggressive, and she could probably talk her into letting her do whatever she wanted. She liked the sound of this plan a lot.

“She will be the only guard member that goes with you. But you have to do what she says. It is her job to keep you safe” Wynonna narrowed her eyes in suspicion now. It was like she was trying to look inside her sister’s head and figure out what plan she was brewing up.

“Deal” Waverly said quickly. “I promise to be on my best behavior for the next month as long as you hold up your end of the bargain. Ample free time each week and freedom to do whatever I want for my birthday.”

“Deal” Wynonna agreed with a firm nod. She was actually pretty surprised that she got Waverly to agree to this so easily. She was happy about it, though. Hopefully it would make it look like she had her shit together as Queen, finally getting her rebellious sister under control, and she trusted Nicole to make sure Waverly didn’t get into any trouble. It was the perfect situation. At least she thought so.

“Can I go?” Waverly motioned to the door.

Wynonna nodded and motioned her hand lazily in the direction of the exit Waverly so desperately sought. “Send Nicole in on your way out, please.” She moved to sit at her table now then turned toward the door and added quickly “Oh, before you go! You don’t have to wear dresses to the meetings anymore” She motioned to the dress Waverly had put on that morning and let out a laugh “Starting tomorrow I am wearing jeans, or sweats, and no one can say shit about it.”

Waverly let out a laugh. She then playfully curtseyed and bowed her head “As you wish, Your Majesty.”

“Leave!” Wynonna snapped playfully and let out a laugh as Waverly scampered off. God she hated being addressed like that by anyone. Maybe she could abolish it altogether. Her thought was cut short as Nicole entered the room.

“Everything alright? She seemed…” Nicole motioned behind her to the door that was now shut and
shrugged “...happy.”

“It was a bandaid but it works for now. Sit” Wynonna motioned to the chair across from her at the small table that still held the snacks. While she waited for Nicole to settle in her chair she poured herself a drink of what she assumed was tea. How cliche. They didn’t even live in England. She shook the thought off and offered Nicole a cup as well  “We have a lot to discuss but first thing, and most importantly, I want you all over Waverly.”

Nicole nearly choked on the sip she had taken from the tea cup. She coughed a few times then wiped her mouth. Her eyes were wide as she stared in confusion at Wynonna. “What?”

Not realizing how the wording of her phrase had translated to Nicole who was very confused about why Waverly was making her feel the things she was feeling, Wynonna shrugged and reached for a cookie now “I need you to be my eyes and ears. She agreed to play nice for now but I have a feeling she was just placating me. So whenever she has her free time I want you there. Just to be a presence. Take it all in and observe. Let me know if anything of concern is going on.”

“Oh” Nicole wiped at her mouth again and drew in a deep breath now that the tea had left her windpipe. She gave a single nod and offered a soft smile “Yeah sure I can do that.”

“I know” Wynonna smiled fondly at her best friend and lifted her cup in anticipation of Nicole doing the same. Once she did they clinked their glasses together and Wynonna gave a nod “That’s why I gave you the job. I can trust you with anything.”

Nicole nodded again and took a sip from the tea once more. This should be easy, right? Kind of like babysitting like she used to do when Wynonna wanted to sneak out of the Palace late at night in their youth. Only now the baby she was sitting for was a grown adult woman who she couldn’t seem to get out of her head. But it would be fine. Being in close proximity to Waverly would be perfectly fine. She could handle it. What could go wrong?

~.~.~.~.~.~.~.
And now that you have a new daddy to put you in your place you’ve stopped acting out

Within a week of Waverly doing her part to fulfill her duties it seemed as though everything was on the right track. There had been no further arguments between the sisters. Everyone from the members of the Royal Court down to the kitchen staff had noticed the calm that had come over the Palace. There were even whispers that Queen Wynonna had finally embraced her role as head of the Monarchy.

Nicole had adjusted to her new role as well. It was much easier than she had anticipated and she was sure that was because Wynonna was determined to make the Palace a more casual atmosphere. If Nicole would have had to jump into her role and learn how to act like she had been a royal her entire life she was almost certain she would have failed. Thankfully her best friend had always been about bending the rules as far as she could before they would snap.

Nicole was grateful to be by her best friend’s side through all of this. They had always been each other’s strongest source of support and that had not changed years later. If anything their bond was even stronger. They were always together. Their everyday lives were so intertwined already that it was odd to see them not together. That usually only happened when one was doing something private or Nicole left Wynonna to check in on Waverly. Other than that they were a package deal.

So when Nicole had gotten in the habit of just sleeping in Wynonna’s bed every night no one batted an eye. They had shared a bed so many times when they were kids it was like second nature. It just made sense. That way she could be close if anything happened in the middle of the night. That was a perk of it as well. But mostly they were just the kind of best friends who hated to be apart.

It was easy to assume that a morning routine would form once two people started to share a bed together regularly and that rang true in this case. Nicole would wake before Wynonna and do a sweep of her room. She would then shower and dress for the day before waking up the Queen. She would brief her on what was scheduled for that day then chat while Wynonna readied herself. Once they were both dressed they made the short walk down to the Queen’s chambers where breakfast was set out. Why a separate room was needed for that she would never understand but for now it was one of the old traditions Wynonna had yet to abolish.

Today Nicole sat at the table where the breakfast was laid out for the Queen and sipped on her cup of coffee like usual. Her eyes scanned over the headlines of the daily paper like they did every morning. She was looking for any stories about the Royal Family. So far there hadn’t been any new news. Today, though, the news of their upcoming appearance, their first since the King’s funeral, was taking up most of the first five pages.

The room was quiet. Nicole was reading and enjoying her coffee. Wynonna was going over some papers from the last meeting she had attended. Waverly, who had started attending breakfast two days ago, had her eyes fixed on the screen of her cellphone. They probably should have been going over what was expected during their outing together but instead it was quiet. But at least they weren’t yelling.

A knock broke the silence and Nicole stood up. She moved to the door carefully, her hand resting near her gun at her hip, and waited for the door to open. When one of her guards popped in to inform her the tailor had arrived she immediately relaxed. She gave a nod and backed up to allow the door to open fully now “Come on in. They are over there.”
Wynonna looked up from her papers and immediately curled her lip up on one side. She hated fittings. They always stabbed her with the damn pins. But she didn’t argue because, well, as Queen she knew she had to look a certain way. So she stood from the table and greeted the tailor with a smile “Good morning.”

“Your Majesty” The older woman bowed.

Wynonna opened her mouth to insist that wasn’t necessary but decided against it. Some of the older members of the staff were too stuck in their way. Instead she motioned across the room to the little platform that she usually stood on for the tailors “I guess I’ll take my spot.”

The woman nodded quickly then turned to grab her bag that held all of her supplies. She was surprised to see that Nicole had already taken the large bag and moved it over toward the little platform. “Oh thank you, Lady Haught.”

Nicole didn’t correct the woman for the same reason Wynonna hadn’t. Instead she gave a nod to the older woman than moved to sit back at the table. Then just like that the room was quiet again. Well mostly quiet. The older woman was mumbling to herself as she took measurements and placed pins in the dress that Wynonna would wear on her outing. Wynonna hissed every time one of the pins found skin but she did not complain.

It was a few minutes of mostly silence before Waverly sat upright in the chair where she had been slouched. She set down her phone and looked across the room to her sister “Hey Wynonna…”

“She speaks!” Wynonna perked up and turned her eyes toward Waverly. “Here I thought you were in total zombie mode until noon.”

Waverly rolled her eyes at that but Nicole laughed. They had definitely commented on the fact that Waverly showed up for breakfast but never really participated.

“Anyway” Waverly brushed passed Wynonna’s sarcasm and cleared her throat. She put on an overly wide smile and started to bat her eyes as she looked at her sister. It was the face of someone who was about to ask for something big. “Do you think it would be alright to maybe have a tiny little miniscule private party with some of my actual friends after my birthday gala?”

The sound Wynonna made was similar to a laugh but the way she released it vibrated her lips and made a ‘pfft’ sound instead. Her head shook at the idea “Absolutely not.”

“Now wait a minute Wynonna” Nicole quickly sat up straight in her chair. She lifted a hand in Waverly’s direction to stop the tantrum that she could see was waiting to spew out. It had been so peaceful in the Palace and part of that was because Nicole had been keeping the peace. So she jumped in again in hopes of defusing a fight. “Let’s hear her out.”

“Let’s?” Wynonna gasped in surprise and looked at Nicole now. “I’m sorry but when did this become a plural situation?”

“The way I see it…” Nicole continued calmly despite the snotty tone Wynonna had just directed toward her. She smiled at Waverly then slowly looked back to Wynonna “Waverly is an adult. She graduated from one of the best colleges in the entire world. I am more than certain she has thought this idea through and would not bring it up unless she felt that it could be accomplished safely and smartly.”

Waverly nodded very quickly in agreement to what Nicole had just said “Exactly! Just a few people who I actually know and like to help me celebrate my birthday like normal people would.”
“Meaning getting you trashed until you show off the contents of your stomach then blackout half dressed in a bar?” Wynonna did not seem amused at the thought.

“It wouldn't be at a bar. It would be here” Waverly motioned vaguely upward to indicate she wanted to have it in the Palace.

“You want to invite strangers I don’t know onto the Royal Palace Grounds just so you can get shit faced with them?” Wynonna shook her head. She then hissed and looked down at the tailor “I might be Queen but I still have human flesh. Be careful down there.”

“She’s sorry” Nicole said quickly to the older woman. She then shot Wynonna a look that told her to be nice. The look softened and she motioned to Waverly as she spoke “If she had it here it would be much easier to watch over the event and make sure it doesn’t get out of hand. I can assign my best guards to the party. We can set a curfew, do background checks on all her guests, and make sure there are no cellphones or cameras allowed. If anything goes wrong we can shut it down immediately.”

“I don’t like this” Wynonna pointed at Nicole then flicked her finger toward her sister and back again quickly. “I don’t like you two ganging up on me like this.”

“We aren’t” The two girls said at the same time. They looked at each other in surprise then laughed softly. Nicole shook her head and took her eyes slowly off a smiling Waverly to look back at Wynonna “I had no idea she had this in mind, I swear. But the idea isn’t that crazy. I will be there to make sure nothing goes wrong. Besides you know if you say no she’s just gonna sneak out anyway.”

“Hey!” Waverly gasped in betrayal and stared at Nicole with a slightly hurt look on her face.

“I’m sorry, Waves, but you know it’s true” Nicole gave a halfway apologetic shrug then looked back to Wynonna. “At least this way she can have an actual birthday party and you won’t have to worry about her getting into trouble.”

Waverly was surprised that Nicole was sticking up for her. She had come into the room with a well thought out argument about why she should be allowed to have a party but Nicole was doing a much better job advocating for her so she just sat there nodding and smiling.

Wynonna looked at her little sister and the way she was smiling so hopefully at her. Then she looked over to Nicole with a look of hesitation. When Nicole gave her a look that silently suggested everything would be alright she finally sighed and shifted her eyes back to Waverly “How many people do you want to invite?”

“50?” Waverly said timidly but hopefully.

Again Wynonna’s lips made the ‘pfft’ sound and she shook her head “You’re nuts.”

“Fine. How about twenty-five?” Waverly now offered with a little less hopefulness in her tone.

“That is doable” Nicole chimed in quickly and looked from Waverly to Wynonna now. “That is a walk in the park.”

“I thought you were supposed to be on my side” Wynonna growled through her teeth at Nicole.

“I am not taking sides here. I am stating a fact. Twenty-five people is nothing. Easy to watch over” Nicole was not at all taken back by Wynonna’s tone with her. She had been in the middle of enough Earp sister squabbles to not be phased by it.
Wynonna let out another heavy sigh. Her eyes shifted in a roll from Nicole to Waverly and she gave a nod “Twenty-five people. They all have to be over the age of 21 to drink. No social media. No cellphones. Everyone has to be out of the Palace by two in the morning.”

Waverly squealed in excitement. She jumped out of her seat so fast the chair nearly tipped over. “Are you serious? Like, for real?”

“Yes” Wynonna said with a soft tone now that she saw how genuinely happy her sister was. “But you have to listen to what Nicole says and if someone you invite doesn’t pass the background test I don’t want to hear you arguing.”

“Of course” Waverly nodded then looked happily over to Nicole. “Whatever you say.”

Wynonna lifted a hand to motion in a dismissive wave toward her sister now “Okay, go get ready for the day. I want the list of guests turned in by tomorrow so Nicole and her men can start looking into them.”

Waverly gave a happy hop and a clap. She hurried around the table to where Wynonna was standing and being measured. She stepped onto the small platform and planted an excited kiss on her sister’s cheek “Thank you! I love you!” She then hopped off the platform and headed toward Nicole. She quickly leaned down and popped a kiss on her cheek as well “And I love you!” With that she skipped happily out of the room.

Nicole’s cheeks were on fire. The feel of Waverly’s lips on her cheek lingered. She felt her heart racing and she sat there a little stunned looking.

Wynonna saw the whole thing and let out a soft laugh at her best friend. In a higher pitched voice than her own she mimicked her sister “Oh my god Nicole I love you so much. You’re so nice and brave and sexy with your gun on your hip.”

“Shut up” Nicole grumbled and slunk down into her chair. She looked over to Wynonna with a scowl and shook her head “She was just excited and got carried away.”

Another laugh came from Wynonna. At this point she was constantly looking for something to tease Nicole about. Waverly just seemed like the easiest subject matter.

“I have everything I need Your Majesty” The older woman spoke now. “If you would remove the garment I will have it hemmed for you immediately.”

“Thank you” Wynonna said kindly before turning her back to the woman so she could unzip the dress. Once she was free she stepped down off the platform in just her bra and underwear “I don’t get why you’ve got googly eyes over Waverly all of the sudden.”

“I don’t-” Nicole started to argue but when her eyes lifted from where they had gone back to looking at the paper to where Wynonna stood barely clothed she stopped. Her face blushed again and she blinked a few times before looking away. She drew in a deep breath and let it out slowly. That was new. Seeing Wynonna in her underwear had never had that affect before. She cleared her throat and gave her head a shake “She’s a sweet girl, Wynonna. She’s had a rough time and I am trying to be nice to her, that’s it.”

“I don’t.” Nicole started to argue but when her eyes lifted from where they had gone back to looking at the paper to where Wynonna stood barely clothed she stopped. Her face blushed again and she blinked a few times before looking away. She drew in a deep breath and let it out slowly. That was new. Seeing Wynonna in her underwear had never had that affect before. She cleared her throat and gave her head a shake “She’s a sweet girl, Wynonna. She’s had a rough time and I am trying to be nice to her, that’s it.”

Yeah well we’ve all had a rough time lately” Wynonna, who had not noticed Nicole’s reaction to her in her underwear, slid on the silk robe she had taken off for the tailor then moved back to the breakfast table. She was starving. She sat and looked up at Nicole now with a shrug as she reached for some food “I don’t see you coddling anyone else.”
Nicole let out a short sound that was a mix of a grunt and a laugh. She motioned with her hand behind herself in a gesture to something that wasn’t there and stared at Wynonna with bewilderment. “I sleep in your bed every night because you don’t want to be alone.”

“Shhh” Wynonna hissed and looked around quickly as if someone might hear that. Her eyebrows knitted together in a scowl that she fixed back on Nicole “I thought you liked sleeping with me. We did it all the time growing up.”

Nicole could tell she had kind of hurt Wynonna’s feelings. She let out a soft sigh and reached out to put her hand over Wynonna’s arm in a comforting way. “I do, you’re right. It’s been like old times and it really has helped with this whole thing. I guess…” she shrugged and settled back in her seat now as a frown took over her features. She was quiet as she thought about what she wanted to say before finally speaking softly “I guess I am just worried how it looks to everyone else? I mean is it really proper for unmarried members of the Royal Family to share their bed with others?”

“Oh my god” Wynonna rolled her eyes out of complete exasperation. She was so sick of everyone getting on her about her behavior and how she was going against the Royal traditions that had been upheld in the Palace for over 400 years. “You know your commitment to upholding traditions and all that was cute in the beginning but I am so over it, Haught.”

“I’m sorry, I-”

“No” Wynonna cut Nicole off with a fierceness in her tone now. “I thought we were on the same page about this whole outdated Monarchy thing. We used to make fun of all this growing up, remember? We used to talk about how we would change it all if we ever got the chance to do so.”

“I remember. It’s just that-”

“Well I have the chance, Nicole” Wynonna continued without skipping a beat. “I understand duty and loyalty and keeping my family legacy alive. I am going to fight like Hell to make sure the House of Earp lives on for as long as possible. But everything else?” She motioned around her overly decorated room and shook her head “It has to change. It’s too formal. It’s too pristine. Giving people respect just because of their title? Hell no. I want people to earn my respect. I know that is going to upset some people but I don’t really care. I want a democratic Monarchy. I want people to feel like they have a voice.”

Nicole felt bad now. She had not meant to upset her friend.

“So when I make changes and the older people around me get upset and start to talk about overthrowing me or starting an uprising I am going to need people who believe in my vision by my side” Wynonna reached now to take Nicole’s hand. She held it tightly and stared right into her oldest friend’s eyes as if her life depended on it “I’m going to need you by my side. That’s why I picked you, Nicole. Because when it comes down to it, no matter what, I don’t even have to question whether or not you’re on my team. You always have been.”

“I always will be” Nicole nodded quickly and let her hand squeeze tightly against Wynonna’s. Her heart was racing. She had never seen such seriousness in her friend’s eyes before. Her speech had been inspiring and bold and she felt bad now for having ever questioned the way Wynonna had been operating.

Wynonna smiled very softly when she saw the look in Nicole’s eyes. It was a look that she had seen a hundred times in her life. It was her favorite look. It was the one she held that told Wynonna she was free to do whatever she had planned because Nicole had her back. “Good” She finally said softly. She lifted Nicole’s hand to her lips and kissed very lightly at her knuckles. She then gave a pat
to the spot and let her hand go. “That’s the Nicole I know and love.”

She stood now from her table and extended her hand to her friend in a gesture of helping her up even though she knew Nicole needed no help. She smiled as her hand was taken and she flicked her head toward the door as if indicating they were leaving “What do you say? Are you ready to dismantle the Monarchy with me?”

“Born ready” Nicole answered with a smile. She stood now, giving an excited squeeze to Wynonna’s hand, before letting her lead the way. It was that moment that reminded her why she was there. Because there was nothing more important to her than the Earp girls. They always had and always would be her family and in the end that was all that would ever matter.

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The first official appearance of the Queen and Princess since the funeral of their father had gone off without so much as a hiccup. They had carefully chosen when and where they would return to the public eye, thanks in big part to their publicists, and it had been the perfect event. They had gone to visit the sick children at a nearby hospital before celebrating the opening of the new cancer wing. It was a project near and dear to both Wynonna and Waverly and thankfully it seemed to have worked wonders in showing the public that they were capable of filling the roles they now had.

It was the next day and just like every other morning Nicole was sitting at Wynonna’s breakfast table reading the papers. Surprisingly Waverly had showed up early to breakfast and now her and Wynonna were having an actual conversation. It seemed that being reminded that people out in the real world had problems too had helped bring them back down to Earth. They were chatting excitedly about some of the cute children they had met the day before and how they wanted to set up a fund to help with researching childhood illnesses.

Nicole broke her silence with a loud gasp. Her jaw dropped as she stared in horror at the paper she held in her hands.

The gasp got both of the other girls’ attention. They looked at Nicole curiously and Wynonna let out a soft laugh “What is it? Does your horoscope say you’re best to avoid fast moving streams again or something?”

“Worse” Nicole looked from the paper to Wynonna with an annoyed glance. She took her horoscope very seriously. But that wasn’t important. She shook her head and turned the paper she had been reading toward Wynonna now and pointed at the story “Someone inside the Palace is spreading rumors!”

The smile dropped from both Wynonna and Waverly’s face. Wynonna reached out and took the paper from Nicole now and turned it so she could read it. Waverly scooted her chair closer to be able to look over Wynonna’s shoulder as her sister read out loud.

“It seems the unrest between the Earp Sisters has finally been settled. So what was the magic trick to quell their squabbling? Sources inside the Palace say Queen Wynonna has been spending all of her time with her newly knighted Head of the Royal Guard. The two, pictured together below from yesterday’s outing, were childhood best friends. Has something more grown out of friendship in this sudden time of tragedy? One source claims Lady Haught, while sharing breakfast in the Queen’s private chambers, has taken on the role of level-headed partner to the Queen. She is often the voice of reason between the Queen and Princess Waverly. The same source says Lady Haught and the Queen have gotten quite comfortable at playing house together…”

Wynonna stopped reading and looked up with shock on her face. She had no idea how to even
process what she had just read. Her eyelids fluttered in a few quick blinks and she shook her head before finally speaking “Playing house?”

“I know” Nicole shook her own head with a sigh.

“Is that all they said about me?” Waverly asked as she took the paper from her sister to continue reading.

“Really? That’s what you’re concerned about?” Wynonna huffed at her sister then looked at Nicole. “What do we do?”

“Well firstly we find the source” Nicole said with a little nod. “Make sure they go to jail for violating their non-disclosure agreement.”

Wynonna stood now from her chair and started pacing. She was fuming with anger. “Are you kidding me? The source is that little old…” She trailed off and waved her hand about in random patterns while she searched for the word she wanted. Finally she grunted in frustration and yelled out “…clumsy, stabbing little traitor!”

“The tailor?” Nicole motioned toward where Wynonna had stood on the platform for the tailor the day before. “Her?”

“Has to be. She was here during our discussion yesterday. When Waverly asked about her party you jumped in and stopped an argument right away, remember?” Wynonna dropped her arms and started pacing again.

“I’ll check it out. Until then let’s just keep this-”

Waverly gasped loudly and stared at the paper in horror. She pointed at the same story and started to read “Waverly’s new role as Royal Brat was setting this Monarchy on the path of implosion. We should all be thanking the Queen’s rumored new…” She huffed and looked up at her sister and Nicole “Brat? They called me a brat!”

Wynonna stopped pacing and gave a bored shrug to her sister. She had been acting like a brat recently.

“The Queen’s rumored new what?” Nicole scooped up the paper that Waverly had just dropped. She skimmed the article until she found the line. Once she did her cheeks flushed. It was the kind of flush that rose with anger “…play thing.”

“Woah” Wynonna and Waverly stopped making annoying faces at each other and looked as stunned as Nicole.

“That is ridiculous” Wynonna finally stormed over to the table and snatched the paper from Nicole’s hands. She looked at the article and huffed out softly before shaking her head. She suddenly started to rip the paper in her hands “Firstly, you’re not a play thing.” She tossed the shredded paper onto the floor now and stepped on it “Secondly, I think it would be best if we stop reading the tabloids about ourselves until this fizzles out. Let’s leave that to the PR department. That is their job after all.”

“They’re doing a shit job of it so far” Waverly mumbled and folded her arms across her chest before slumping in her seat.

“Look” Wynonna held her hands out in a gesture of trying to keep both the other women calm. She looked between them and gave a single nod “We are still smoothing out the bumps in this transition okay? People always have and always will be fascinated with the royal life and the Royal Family. So
let’s keep our noses clean, let the publicists do their work, and wait for this to go away.”

“Keep our noses clean?” Nicole huffed and motioned down to the shredded paper. “I haven’t done anything to dirty up my nose! People are just starting rumors for the Hell of it.”

“Exactly” Wynonna nodded in agreement. “They’re bored and they are probably getting paid a lot of money to sell their bogus stories to the low life tabloid papers. Reacting or changing our daily lives will only verify the lies. At least in their sleazy minds.”

“So we act like nothing’s wrong while at the same time watching our every step so as not to do something that could be turned against us?” Waverly asked now with a frustrated huff. “That is no way to live our lives.”

“I know it sucks babygirl but look on the bright side” Wynonna sat now and reached out to take her sister’s hand. “At least the worst thing they said about you was that you were a brat.”

Waverly rolled her eyes at her sister but a slight smile came to her lips. She was right it could have been worse.

“And now that you have a new daddy to put you in your place you’ve stopped acting out” Wynonna smirked and glanced at Nicole. She couldn’t help herself. She just did not get upset about silly things like rumors.

Nicole let out an offended huff and got up from the table “That’s it. I’ll keep my distance. No more sleeping with you and-”

“Sleeping with you?” Waverly’s eyes went wide in surprise and she looked at Wynonna in anticipation of an explanation.

Wynonna rolled her eyes “Not like that you big pervert. My bed is like a double king size mattress and you of all people should know how scary these rooms are at night. She’s been filling some space and keeping me company.”

Waverly perked an eyebrow at that. She knew how close Wynonna and Nicole had been as kids so it did not surprise her to hear they had been having sleepovers. But she also couldn’t pass up a chance to tease them “Oh I bet she has been filling some space…”

It should have been physically impossible for Nicole to turn as red as she turned in that moment. She paused in the pacing she had been doing and gave a dumbfounded stare at Waverly. She blinked a few times and tried to defend herself but honestly her whole body was on fire with embarrassment. Not that she had anything to be embarrassed about but for some reason the subject matter of Waverly’s teasing was just too much for her in that moment.

Wynonna felt really bad for Nicole but she couldn’t help the laugh that came from her lips. It was just one small one but it was enough to show she thought Waverly was kind of hilarious. She shook it off quickly though and got to her feet. She moved over to Nicole and put a hand on her shoulder “Relax, Haught. If we can’t joke about it we are going to stress ourselves into an early grave, alright?”

Nicole shrugged Wynonna’s hand off of her shoulder quickly. She stepped away and looked between the two girls with a firm shake of her head. She drew in a soft breath and let it out slowly “It’s not funny to me. I have worked so hard to get to where I’m at in life. Yeah, sure, I got lucky by having a best friend who eventually became Queen but let’s not let that cheapen what I have been through.” She looked at Wynonna with a sadness in her eyes “I couldn’t have been the Head of the
Royal Guard if I hadn’t served in the Army. Do you know how hard I had to work to be taken seriously there?"

Wynonna’s amusement faded and she reached out to try and comfort Nicole again “Hey, I didn’t—”

“I know you didn’t think about it” Nicole said sharply and moved away from Wynonna’s touch again. She looked at Waverly now for a moment then back to Wynonna before shaking her head “No offence, because you know I love the both of you and wouldn’t be where I am without you, but the two of you have always had everything you ever wanted handed right to you. I haven’t had that luxury, okay? I was teased and tormented in the Army because they thought I was using my connection to the Royal Family to get ahead.” She let out a sigh and her shoulders slumped slightly “So when I read even the most outrageous claims saying that I’m basically sleeping my way to the top it’s not a joke. It hurts.”

“Hey” Wynonna stepped closer to Nicole again but kept both her hands held up slightly as a sign that she would not touch her friend again since she did not seem to want that. “I am so sorry. I didn’t know what you had gone through. If I did I would have never made a joke out of it.”

“Me either” Waverly said gently as she got up from the table now and approached Nicole. When the girl didn’t seem to be withdrawing from them any longer both sisters reached out and put a comforting hand on each of Nicole’s shoulders.

“We will get this squashed” Wynonna whispered to Nicole softly now that she was close enough to be heard. She leaned in and kissed the side of her friend’s head right above her ear before letting out a sigh “I will make sure it is abundantly clear that you have earned the right to be where you are right now. I can throw a huge gala to honor all of your achievements if you want?”

Nicole couldn’t help the soft breath of a laugh that came out of her mouth. She looked over at Wynonna and gave her head a shake “Oh like that doesn’t just scream ’stop picking on my girlfriend.’”

Waverly laughed very softly and gave a nod “She’s right it does kind of make it look like you’re denying it so hard that it must be true.”

Wynonna rolled her eyes at the both of them. Her hand reached up now and brushed back some of the loose strands of hair that Nicole always seemed to miss around her face when she braided it. “Well what the Hell should I do for you then?”

“Just leave it” Nicole brushed it off and let out a weak sounding laugh in an attempt to sound like she was fine. “I guess I got upset because I had a flashback of a few years ago when some of the guys I served with were accusing me of sleeping with my commanding officer to get the good assignments. They just couldn’t handle that I was better than them.”

“Damn right you are” Waverly said with a firm nod. She stepped back from her friend and offered a smile. She looked Nicole over once then got a bit of a mischievous look in her eyes “You know what might help?”

“What?” Nicole perked an eyebrow curiously.

“No” Wynonna pointed at her sister seriously. “I know that look and no good can come from—”

“What if I set you up!” Waverly’s voice went up an octave out of excitement. “I know so many cute guys from college. They’re a little younger but some of them are really nice.”

“Nooooo” Nicole and Wynonna groaned out in agony together.
Waverly gasped in offence and put a hand over her heart “Well that’s rude. You don’t even know these guys.”

“I don’t need, or want, a boyfriend” Nicole stepped away from the both of them now and moved around the other side of the breakfast table to put some space between her and the entire situation that was unfolding and making her extremely uncomfortable. She turned to look at the two sisters and shook her head “No, Wynonna is probably right. This whole thing will fade out soon.”

Waverly had opened her mouth to try and push the subject but Wynonna cut her off quickly because she could tell that Nicole was uncomfortable “How about instead of finding Nicole a boyfriend you focus that energy toward a good cause. How about that charity you want to start for the sick kids?”

This seemed to distract Waverly enough to change the subject. She gave a nod as a sign that she was dropping the idea of setting up Nicole and looked over at her sister with a smile “Probably a much better use of my time.”

“Speaking of” Wynonna was a little more serious now as her eyes focused on Waverly “Don’t you have a meeting with the financial advisors about that?”

“Oh shit” Waverly hurried over to the table to look at her phone. When she saw the time she scooped it up quickly “I have to go get changed. Thank you for reminding me.” She rushed over now to give Wynonna a kiss on the cheek then turned and waved toward where Nicole was still standing awkwardly “I’ll see you two at lunch.” With the last of her words she hurried out of Wynonna’s chambers like a shot.

The room grew suddenly quiet. Wynonna slowly and carefully moved her eyes from where they had watched her sister hurry off to where Nicole was still standing. She frowned when she saw Nicole fiddling with her fingers against the top of one of the chairs. She let out a sigh and moved toward the table slowly. She didn’t say anything. She just slipped into one of the other chairs carefully before lifting her gaze to her friend. She waited until Nicole finally lifted her eyes up and offered her a soft smile “Sit, my friend.”

Nicole let out a heavy sigh but did not argue. She moved around the chair she had been fiddling with and dropped into it like a sack of potatoes. She chewed at her bottom lip nervously because she felt like there was some sort of lecture coming her way.

“Nicole…” Wynonna spoke softly but expectantly. Her eyes had not left Nicole since she had sat down. She barely even blinked. She just stared at the woman and waited. When a few moments passed and her friend had not looked up she let out a sigh “Come on, Nicole, look at me.”

Nicole rolled her eyes and though she had been determined to ignore Wynonna and forget the subject that had come up for the rest of her life she knew that her best friend was too stubborn for that. So she gave in and looked up. When she saw the firm stare that her friend was giving her she let out a grunt of a sigh “Don’t look at me like I’m made of glass. You didn’t know it was a sensitive subject so I’m not mad you teased me. But now that you know it’s not.”

“That’s not what’s bothering you” Wynonna said sternly but calmly. Her voice was steady and her eyes still unblinking. Nicole wondered when her friend had gotten so damn good at being serious.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about” Nicole tried to play it off and she looked away from Wynonna again. She shook her head and reached for one of the biscuits that remained on the breakfast tray.

“You have always been a shit liar” Wynonna said firmly. She watched her friend trying to avoid
talking to her and a frown took over her features. She did not like the thought of Nicole keeping something from her.

“I’m not lying to-”

“Please” Wynonna rolled her eyes out of frustration now as her tone rose from steady to a bit more annoyed. “Nicole I’ve known you longer than anyone in this entire world. We’ve had countless nights spent staying up late talking about real shit. I’ve told you things that I’ve never shared with anyone and that includes Waverly. So the fact that you are sitting in front of me right now trying to avoid talking to me about something is actually pretty offensive.”

Nicole’s heart twisted in her chest. Wynonna was absolutely right. There was no possible way they could be closer to one another and that is what made not talking to her in that moment impossible. She looked up at her friend and released a sigh that held a sort of soft anguish to it “I didn’t mean to get all uptight about the teasing it’s just that-”

“Do you remember my 14th birthday party?” Wynonna spoke softly now.

Nicole, having not expected a random trip down memory lane, perked an eyebrow curiously “Uh yeah. Why?”

Wynonna reached out now for Nicole’s hand. She smiled when her friend let her take hold of it. She gave the softest squeeze and continued “Do you remember when we managed to sneak away with those two boys? We told the guards we had to use the bathroom then climbed out the window and ran like Hell to meet them in the gardens?”

Nicole smiled very softly and let out a light laugh at the memory “I am honestly surprised they didn’t figure out we were gone. We had, what, an hour of freedom?”

Wynonna nodded with a soft laugh “Do you remember when we were walking through the roses and decided to stop and sit on those two benches? Within about thirty seconds the boys were making their moves.”

“Oh god” Nicole laughed out now in pure amusement. “What were their names again?”

“Patrick and Richard I think” Wynonna nodded slightly. “They were Dukes of some tiny ass nowhere place but they thought they were hot shit didn’t they?”

“Horrible dancers” Nicole laughed softly. “Bad acne. I remember the shorter one kept trying to rub against you and claimed it was always an accident.”

Wynonna laughed at that again. It was funny how much the two of them had actually been through together. “I almost broke his finger that night.”

“Yeah why did we agree to meet them in the gardens?” Nicole asked with a bit of a bewildered look on her face as the details of the memory came back to her.

“Well I wanted to make out with Patrick” Wynonna said quickly. “You were just my wing man.”

“Oh yeah” Nicole’s lip curled up on one side and she shook her head “You really could talk me into anything.”

Wynonna gave Nicole a playful wink because she had a feeling it would always be that way. She then laughed and brushed that subject to the side before continuing “Remember we were sitting on the benches and Patrick and I just started going for it. Making out like our lives depended on it.”
“Yeah it was awkward” Nicole mumbled. “You always did that. You ditched me for the cute guy.”

“Do you remember what happened when Richard tried to kiss you?” Wynonna’s tone was a little more serious now.

Nicole thought about it for a moment. As the details came back to her she let out a soft laugh “I panicked and punched him in the nose.”

Wynonna nodded slightly but did not smile. She gave Nicole’s hand that she still held another soft squeeze “Do you remember what happened later that night? After the party?”

Nicole perked an eyebrow at Wynonna again. She wasn’t really sure what she was talking about.

“We were getting ready for bed and I came out of the bathroom and you were sitting there bawling your eyes out” Wynonna’s words were spoken so softly, so delicately, it was like she was afraid to put any more volume into them in fear that they would break.

Nicole’s heart jumped in her chest now. She remembered what Wynonna was referring to. She nodded just once “I felt so bad about ruining your night.”

“No you didn’t” Wynonna’s voice was still barely above a whisper. “I remember what you said to me like it was yesterday, Nicole.”

Nicole, again not exactly sure what Wynonna was getting at, shrugged a single shoulder “What?”

Wynonna offered a very soft smile now. Her hand squeezed tightly around Nicole’s and held that way as she repeated the words her best friend had sobbed out to her all those years earlier “I’m sorry, Wynonna, but I’m not built like you are. Sneaking off to kiss boys is not my idea of fun.” She laughed very lightly as the words echoed in her mind as she spoke them. Her head gave a single shake as a sigh came from her lips now “You were so terrified I wouldn't wanna be friends anymore.”

Nicole shrugged a single shoulder and she held a crooked frown on her lips “I’ve kind of always been terrified that people wouldn't like me or would treat me differently. You, though…..” She smiled very slightly as her eyes held gratitude as they focused on her friend “....you never let it affect our friendship. Hell you even stood up to anyone who made even the most vaguely negative remark about anything remotely gay.”

Wynonna smirked proudly and gave a single nod “Had to make sure people knew there was nothing wrong with being gay but mostly I wanted to make sure you knew there was nothing wrong with it.”

Nicole blushed and tried to shake the words Wynonna had spoken away quickly. “I never really thought there was anything wrong I just…..” She sighed slightly and gave another weak shrug “…didn't want to be treated differently because of it. I didn't want to be discriminated against. I guess that's why…” she trailed off again and motioned vaguely at nothing in particular with a shake of her head “The teasing and the article got to me. It took me back to a time where I was not as secure as I am now.”

“Nicole you're the strongest, bravest, and most genuine person in the world. I am so lucky to have you in my life. If my teasing you makes you feel anything less than completely badass than I will never do it again.”

“Wynonna, that's not-” Nicole tried to interject but Wynonna kept rambling over her.

“And if that story being out there is going to bother you I will have them all beheaded” Wynonna
puffed out her chest proudly and gave a stern nod of her head as if making her point known.

Nicole let out a laugh know because she realized Wynonna was seriously wanting to apologize for the teasing but she had never been good at sincere emotions so she had to throw in a joke to cover it up. Her head gave an amused smirk and her hand reached out to take hold of Wynonna’s. She gave it a soft squeeze and nodded just once “I was just being overly sensitive for a moment. You can continue to tease me all you want.” She let go of Wynonna's hand now and pointed at her “In fact I'd start to think something was wrong if you didn't tease me.”

Wynonna rolled her eyes but gave her friend a grateful smile. She was glad to hear she hadn't completely offended her friend. She sat back in her chair now and nodded just once “As long as you never doubt how proud of you I am and how insanely much I love you.”

“That has never been a doubt I've ever had in my life, trust me” Nicole said softly, her gaze locked on Wynonna, with a serious tone. She needed her best friend to know that thought had never crossed her mind. In fact there had been times when Wynonna’s unwavering support had been the only thing keeping her going.

“Damn right” Wynonna stood now and moved toward her closet. She needed to get dressed to start her day.

Silence filled the room now as Wynonna searched her clothing and Nicole focused on some breakfast. She had a smile on her lips as she thought about the conversation they had just had. She really shouldn't have been so sensitive. She knew Wynonna and Waverly picked on her because they truly loved her

“Hey, Haught?” Wynonna walked out of the closet now wearing some jeans and a random tshirt.

“Hmmm?” Nicole's train of thought left as she looked up to Wynonna as she broke the silence in the room.

“All teasing aside” Wynonna pointed firmly as Nicole now and gave a single nod “Don’t bang my sister.”

Nicole choked on the sip of coffee she had been taking as Wynonna spoke. She coughed and wiped her mouth of the few dribbles that had slipped out when she coughed. Her head shook and she drew in a deep breath to try to clear her throat of the liquid she had breathed in.

Wynonna smirked at Nicole's reaction. She was teasing. Kind of. She knew Nicole would never actually do that but also there was a part of her that was terrified it would happen. She had no idea why that thought terrified her but it did and she couldn't shake it.

Nicole was finally able to catch her breath again. She cleared her throat and gave her head another slight shake “Wynonna, I would never.”

Wynonna rolled her eyes and waved her friend off. “Come on let's go. We have shit to do” She motioned for Nicole to follow then moved quickly from the room. She did have actual important things to do today.

Nicole followed quickly as her mind swirled with Wynonna's words. She had no idea why her friend would even playfully tease about that. Waverly was the last person she would ever think about like that. She was her best friend's sister. It would be an utter betrayal. No she would never do that. Besides she didn't even look at Waverly that way. At least she could pretend she didn't because at the moment she didn't really know how she saw Waverly. All she knew was the girl confused her. She
had to figure that out first before she could think about banging her. Not that she would ever! At least that's what she would keep telling herself.

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But if anyone can do it it's Wynonna fricken Earp

Nicole hid a yawn behind her hand as she listened to one of the older members of the court go on and on about something. She wondered if it was bad that she had no idea what the lady was talking about. On the other hand she didn’t care. Her job included protecting the Earp Sisters and all that came along with the task. If they weren’t talking security she was not interested.

“Thank you” Wynonna said with a sweet smile to the woman as she finished her long and drawn out speech. She then looked down at the stack of papers she held and gave a nod “It looks like we are about done here. Chetri is the last on the list here” She looked up at the sweet smiling face of her lead science guy and motioned for him to go ahead “What do you have for us?”

“Thank you” Jeremy said with an enthusiastic nod before looking down at his papers. He shifted a few of them around then stood up as he cleared his throat. “As you all know I am head of research and development here in the Palace and-”

“You don’t have to stand” Wynonna said with a laugh.

“Oh sorry” He moved to sit but paused and looked at Wynonna curiously “But can I?”

Wynonna bit back another laugh and nodded at him “If you want to you are more than welcome to.”

“Cool” Jeremy grinned then straightened so he was standing fully upright again. He cleared his throat again “Okay as I was saying I am head of research and development here…”

There were soft laughs around the table because he had just repeated himself but no one else interrupted. Nicole smirked in amusement and glanced to her left to see that Wynonna and Waverly were both smirking too. The boy was adorable. He was a little disorganized and always seemed nervous but that is what made him endearing. It was easy to tell he had not come from a royal background either. Nicole liked that about him.

“One of the biggest mysteries that has been dampening this regime since it’s inception nearly 400 years ago is the odd and bizarre circumstances surrounding the changing of power. Be it suspicious or tragic deaths there seems to be a pattern. The Earp Curse as it is known and-”

The room gasped. Although everyone in the Palace, and outside the Palace as well, knew about the supposed curse it was almost forbidden to speak of it. Not really forbidden by law or anything but people simply did not talk about it. So to hear Jeremy use the term so casually shocked everyone.

Jeremy paused at the gasp. He looked around the table with a mix of surprise and confusion at the reaction. He perked an eyebrow curiously and his eyes landed on Wynonna “I’m sorry, Your Majesty, am I not supposed to talk about that?”

Wynonna swallowed the lump in her throat. The Earp Curse was something she had heard about as a child but thought it was just the adults lying to her so she would behave. But as she grew older and began to learn her family’s history she had started to believe it was real. After what had happened to her father she had no doubt about it. She didn’t want to think about it because she knew the curse was after her next, as she was the head of the House of Earp at the moment, and it terrified her. But she tried to be casual about it in that moment. With all eyes on her, seeing how she would deal with it, Wynonna gave a slight shrug of just one shoulder as if it were no big deal “A lot of people are superstitious here. If you talk about it then it must be real. But it’s just…” She tried to laugh and wave the subject off but the laugh fell flat. She bit her lip and shrugged again “Please continue.”
“I’m sorry I didn’t know it was off limits” Jeremy looked around the table again and saw every set of eyes on him. He felt nervous all of the sudden. More nervous than he usually felt. A soft, timid laugh escaped his lips and he looked back down at his papers. When he spoke again it was a lot less confident than before “Well anyway I think with technology today I have a really good chance of being able to solve the mystery. See what causes the supposed curse and how to stop it.”

This seemed to surprise everyone. There were a few soft mumbles from around the table. Nicole was surprised as well. She knew both of the Earp girls secretly feared the curse and how it would come for them. She looked over at the two of them now and could see the interest on both of their faces.

Wynonna lifted a hand quickly to quiet the mumbles. Once it fell silent she spoke calmly but with a very soft hint of excitement in her tone “You think you can break it?”

“Maybe?” Jeremy’s voice squeaked when he spoke. He blushed because that was embarrassing. He cleared his throat and tried again “Maybe. I mean if it’s even a curse at all. I’ve already started my research but my sources are so limited. I wanted to ask permission to access the Royal Archives.”

“Yeah sure” Wynonna said quickly.

“My Queen do you think that’s a good idea?” An older man, the guy in charge of book keeping and records for the Royal Family, spoke softly to Wynonna.

“Hell yes I do” Wynonna nodded and let out a laugh. “If this guy thinks he can figure it out I say give him all the access he wants! Hell I will let him read my childhood diaries if that’s what it takes.”

“I don’t need to read-”

“I know, Jeremy” Wynonna said with a smirk of amusement at the nervous boy and his tendency to ramble. “My point is that you can look at whatever you want. Go as far back into the history as you need.” She motioned to the older man that had questioned Wynonna and nodded “Herb will be your right hand man. He knows the archives and library better than anyone here. In fact, I think he was around 400 years ago when my family’s legacy began.”

Everyone laughed softly except for Herb. He gave an old man huff and shook his head in disapproval.

“Awesome!” Jeremy grinned happily now and quickly sat in his chair. “Thank you so much, Queen Wy-”

“Please, Jeremy, for the love of whiskey just call me Wynonna” She let out a laugh then looked around the table again. “Are there any other concerns that need immediate attention?”

Her inquiry was met with mumbles. A few people shifted papers around but no one spoke up. When there was relative silence around the table Wynonna stood and clapped her hands “Then off you go. Do whatever it is we pay you to do here. Oh hey…” She motioned to one of the younger girls near the end of the table and snapped a few times “Um...um…” She had clearly forgotten her name.

“Rosita” Nicole leaned over and whispered to Wynonna.

“Right. Rosita will you please give me an update as soon as possible when you have fixed this rumor mill problem we have going on. I want an official charge of slander against whoever wrote that hideous article in the paper today.”

“Wynonna you don’t have-“
Wynonna lifted her hand to stop Nicole from arguing then smiled at Rosita “Thank you kindly m’dear.”

Rosita gave Wynonna a smile and thumbs up before she rushed out of the room to fulfill her duties.

Nicole sighed and shook her head. She looked at Wynonna with a bit of a frown on her lips “I’m not glass. I won’t break.”

“I know, toots” Wynonna gave her a wink then reached down to arrange all the papers she had been handed in the meeting into her folder. “But if we strike early and harshly it will deter others from opening their mouths and selling false stories to the tabloids.”

“Wynonna” Waverly, who had been chatting with someone else in the court, now turned and put a hand on her sister’s shoulder. “So since it’s Friday I was wondering if I could use some of that promised free time and go out tonight. It’s just a small group of friends. Some dinner and a movie.”

“Sure” Wynonna gave a nod as she closed the folder she was stuffing papers into. She straightened up, since she had been hunched over the table slightly, and turned to smile at her sister. “Have fun.”

“Seriously?” Waverly looked completely surprised. She blinked once as if she was trying to ensure she was awake.

“Yeah” Wynonna shrugged then turned and handed the folder that she had not so neatly organized to Nicole who was standing behind her. “We made an agreement and you have upheld your end so I will do the same. Just be careful and remember you do have that interview tomorrow morning.”

Waverly was smiling from ear to ear. She had expected Wynonna to push back. She could not believe her sister was being so cool about it. Maybe they really had turned a corner of trust. She quickly threw her arms around her sister and gave a tight squeeze before pulling away with a bounce “Thank you so much. I promise I won’t miss my interview tomorrow.” With an excited squeak she turned and rushed out of the room.

“That was nice of you” Nicole said with a laugh as she flipped through the papers in the folder Wynonna had handed her. She was trying to straighten them a little better than they were.

Wynonna whirled around with a huge smile on her face. She snatched the folder back from Nicole and laughed very softly “Oh my dear sweet Lady Haught I am surprised you don’t already know what I’m thinking.”

Surprised by the sudden swiping of the folder from her hands, Nicole blinked a few times. She then focused on Wynonna and when she saw that look of mischief in her eyes she felt her stomach twist. A groan came from her lips and she pouted “Wynonna, no. Please do not send me out on babysitting duty tonight!”

“Not babysitting” Wynonna gave a cheerful shrug and held her smile. “I know you are already going to assign two of your best guards to work her detail tonight. So I do not want you to babysit. I need you for something else.”

“What?” Nicole was really confused now. She was almost sure Wynonna had been about to go into a lecture about how Waverly couldn’t be trusted and that is why Nicole had to go watch her every move.

“When is the last time you left the Palace?” Wynonna’s grin held because she knew the answer to that. Aside from the public appearance they had made the day before, Nicole had not left the Palace in nearly a month. So instead of waiting for the answer she kept going “I think you and I need a
night on the town.”

Nicole let out a breath of a laugh now because the words Wynonna were speaking were absolutely nuts. “Oh okay you think the Queen of an entire country can just go out dancing at a club and no one is going to notice?”

“That’s not what I was thinking” Wynonna wiggled her eyebrows now playfully. “I was thinking we get a few snacks, download some movies, and I will bring the whiskey since you’ll be driving.”

“Driving? Where are we going?” Nicole was growing more and more confused by the moment.

“Roadtrip” Wynonna’s tone dripped with excitement and her eyes held that sparkle of mischief.

“Again, I will ask, where we are going?” Nicole laughed very softly because her friend’s excitement was just too much. It was the first real excitement she had seen Wynonna have in weeks.

Wynonna gasped now. Her smile faded and her head gave a shake as she stared in shock at her friend with her mouth hanging open. When Nicole still did not get what she meant Wynonna huffed out a laugh of disbelief “Don’t you remember when we were younger and Waverly had her first date? We stole one of the guard’s cars and followed her.”

“Oh my god!” Nicole let out a loud laugh as the memory came back to her. “We got into so much trouble for that.”

“Well you did” Wynonna said with an amused smirk. “My dad tried to ground me but it didn’t work out too well.”

“I remember my father didn’t let me come to the Palace for two whole weeks. He made me stay with one of my aunts” Nicole’s lip curled in disliking of the old woman who had watched her while she was grounded from Wynonna. The memory faded quickly though as her mind focused back on what Wynonna was getting at. She shook her head quickly “And no, Wynonna, spying on Waverly is only going to upset her. You two are in a great place. You are working well together. Why are you going to risk that?”

“Oh come on” Wynonna rolled her eyes at her friend’s hesitation. She turned away from Nicole and headed out of the room since it had been empty for a few minutes now. She had to go get ready for her next engagement. “Neither of us have done anything really fun since…” She glanced next to her where Nicole had caught up to her and shrugged because they both knew she was talking about the plane crash. No need to say it. “This way we get out of the Palace, safely, and we can spend some quality time together without any one starting rumors about it. Plus I just wanna make sure Waverly is being honest.”

“What makes you think she’s not?” Nicole asked curiously as she kept pace with Wynonna.

Wynonna just shrugged. She thought it over for a moment then paused in her walking. She turned to look at Nicole with a more serious look in her eyes “I have a gut feeling that she’s not telling me the whole truth. I just want to make sure she’s not doing anything stupid.”

The concern on Wynonna’s face was like a punch to Nicole’s gut. She did not like her friend worrying so much about Waverly’s safety. That was her job. “You know my guys are directed to let me know if anything Waves does isn’t ideal, right?” She spoke as soothingly as she could as her hand reached out to lend a comforting touch against Wynonna’s arm.

“Your naivety is so fucking adorable” Wynonna cooed sarcastically as her hand reached up and pinched Nicole on the cheek playfully. She let out a laugh as her hand dropped away after Nicole
swatted at it. “I don’t know if you’ve noticed but Waverly is kind of a babe.”

“What?!” Nicole’s eyes got wide and she felt herself blush. Had Wynonna really noticed that Nicole had maybe stolen a few too many glances at Waverly lately? She shook the thought off quickly and tried to calm her blazing cheeks as she cleared her throat and spoke as casually as she could manage “What do you mean?”

Wynonna smirked at her friend. It was just too fun to tease her. Of course she wasn’t blind. She could see that Nicole had noticed how beautifully Waverly had grown up. So she was going to tease her about it. But that was a subject for another day. Right now she was trying to be mostly serious “Don’t tell me you forgot how many times I flirted my way out of trouble with the guards?”

Nicole, thankful for the change of subject, laughed now. She smiled softly as the memories came back to her. “You used to bat your eyes and they would melt. I don’t think they told your dad anything we did wrong unless it was actually life-threatening.”

“My point exactly” Wynonna lifted her right hand with just a single finger raised as if emphasizing the word point. “Waverly is charming and lovable. She is also a grown woman with the figure of a tiny amazon. Most of your guards are men, Nicole.” She gave a single shrug and shake of her head. “They aren’t telling you shit.”

Nicole let out a long sigh because she knew Wynonna was probably right. Men were idiots. The only real loyalty they had was to their penises. She was very well aware of how attractive Waverly was. She knew how hard it was for her to focus around her sometimes. She could only imagine how easily Waverly could persuade her guards to let her get away with whatever she wanted. So she relented to Wynonna with a nod “You’re right. I think if she is being dishonest it’s better to know now instead of after it’s too late.”

“So…” Wynonna’s excited smile was returning as she stared in Nicole in anticipation.

“We will go out tonight” Nicole conceded.

“I knew I could talk you into it!” Wynonna laughed and pumped her fist in the air.

“Under one condition” Nicole added quickly. When she saw Wynonna’s excitement fade slightly she gave a nod “We stay out of it. No matter what you see happening we do not interrupt her. Unless it’s actually life threatening we are simply there as observers.”

“Deal” Wynonna said with a quick nod. Her face lit up again. It was plain to see how excited she was about the adventure that awaited them. It would be like old times. Except that she was now Queen and didn’t risk being punished for her actions. That did take a little of the fun out of it but that didn’t really matter anyway. She was honestly just excited to spend some time with her best friend doing something normal. Well kind of normal. Normal for them.

“Deal” Nicole repeated. She saw her friend’s face and she couldn’t help her own smile now. She knew it was a horrible idea to spy on Waverly but at the same time she was excited. It would be nice to leave the grounds of the Palace and be left alone. There were always people around. There was never a real moment of silence. She was looking forward to not being Lady Haught for the evening. She couldn’t wait to be just Nicole and Wynonna. Just like it always had been. Just like it always would be.

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“Ugh I’m so bored Nicole” Wynonna whined out as her forehead tapped gently against the
passenger side window. They had been parked outside the restaurant where Waverly had met her friends for an hour now. They could see her table through the windows so they always had her in their sights. But all that was happening was dinner. People eating and talking and it was not exciting at all.

Nicole let out a laugh and looked up from the file she had been examining. She looked into the restaurant then over to Wynonna “Are you already out of snacks?”

“No” Wynonna snarled. She then sat up and reached for the bag of junk food she had brought with her. “But I’m out of the powdered doughnuts.”

“You ate that entire pack already?” Nicole gasped and reached over to look in the bag. When she saw only the wrapper for the doughnuts she frowned. “I don’t think you even offered me one.”

Wynonna gave an unapologetic shrug. Her eyes then landed on Nicole’s lap and the papers she was looking at. She motioned to the stack then looked back to the restaurant “I didn’t know there would be studying.”

“This is work” Nicole mumbled softly. She reached out and took her cup out of its holder in the center console to take a drink. When she tipped the cup to her lips and was met with nothing she gasped. She took off the lid quickly and saw that there was nothing left. She looked over at Wynonna with absolute offense all over her face “You drank my coffee?”

“I was bored?” Wynonna offered with a shrug. She laughed out and motioned to the bottle of whiskey she held in her hand. “It tasted really good if I took a shot, a bite of the doughnut, then followed it with the coffee. I am thinking of pitching it to bars around town. Call it the Queen’s breakfast or something. Make millions.”

“Unbelievable. Now what am I supposed to drink?” Nicole asked with slight annoyance in her tone. Without taking her eyes off of the restaurant Wynonna offered the bottle of whiskey to her friend.

“Cute but I’m driving, remember?” Nicole motioned to the steering wheel she sat behind and let out a sigh. She looked around where they were parked and saw just a half a block down the road was a convenience store. She glanced at her watch and bit her lip. She wondered if she would have enough time to walk down there and get some more to drink. She let out a sigh and folded the file she was looking through closed before tossing it onto the dash “I’m gonna walk to the store real fast. I can’t go the rest of the night without something to drink.”

“I’m coming with!” Wynonna chirped in excitement and reached for her door handle.

“Are you nuts?” Nicole quickly pressed the button to lock all the doors in the car and turned to stare at Wynonna in horror. “You can’t just walk down the street. Did you forget you’re the Queen?”

“Please” Wynonna rolled her eyes and reached into the bag she had brought with her. After a few moments she produced a pair of large sunglasses and a hat. She grinned as she slid both items onto herself then gave a shrug “No one will even notice me.”

“Are you…” Nicole was dumbfounded. She just stared at Wynonna in complete disbelief. She didn’t even know how to respond. Her head shook and she let out a laugh “You really think a disguise like that is going to work? You are the most recognizable person in the country.”

“Oh come on it’s like…” Wynonna motioned through the window to the store down the street and shrugged. “Five minutes. The streets are busy. It will be a quick trip. Besides I know you have other guards watching us right now.” She perked an eyebrow in a way that dared Nicole to deny it.
Nicole bit her bottom lip. She was busted. She let out a soft laugh and rolled her eyes “Did you really think I would let you leave the Palace without a little more backup than just me? I mean I’m good at what I do but I can not possibly be watching every inch of our surroundings at all times.” She shrugged slightly “Better safe than sorry.”

“It’s fine” Wynonna waved it off with a smile. Truthfully she loved that about Nicole. She took her duty very seriously. It just once again reinforced within herself that she had made the right decision when she had put Nicole in charge. “So can we go?”

“Fine” Nicole huffed out her surrender. She did not want to bicker about it. She needed some more to drink and she had a feeling they were in for a long night. She had a set of guards with Waverly in the restaurant and another set a block away watching over them so she was pretty confident a quick trip down the street would cause no harm.

Wynonna was out of the car before Nicole could even blink. She bounced excitedly over to the driver side to wait for Nicole as she looked around them. It was dark but still only early evening so there were plenty of people about. She was certain no one would even look her way.

Nicole reached into her back seat and grabbed an old ball cap. She did not want to wear her official Royal Guard cap that she had because that would be a dead giveaway. So she pulled out the one she had gotten from her father when she was twelve and slid it over her braided hair. She then slipped out of the car to join Wynonna. “In and out, you hear me?”

“Yes ma’am!” Wynonna gave a playful salute to her friend then let out a laugh. She waited for Nicole to step onto the sidewalk then immediately linked her arm with Nicole’s as they fell in step beside each other. It was a nice night. Not too cold but with a slight breeze so they both had on jackets. The air smelled fresh. She wondered if the air in the Palace was recirculated or something because it didn’t smell the same as the air in that moment. No this was actual real people air.

“Stand down on Car Jack. Temporary movement on foot. Eyes up only. Jim is still inside” Nicole’s hand reached for her shoulder where her walkie talkie was clipped and spoke into it softly as they walked.

Wynonna could not contain her amusement. She let out a gleeful giggle and looked up at Nicole with her mouth gaping open in surprise “What did you say?”

“I just told them not to follow us but keep a lookout” Nicole laughed very softly. Wynonna always teased her about how she talked into her walkie talkie.

“I still think it’s fucking hilarious that our code names are from whiskey” Wynonna quipped with an amused shake of her head.

“I thought it was perfect” Nicole mused with another laugh. She pulled her jacket over herself a little more, mostly to cover her gun and walkie talkie, then turned her eyes to her feet. She smiled with each step they took. It was nice to be out in the world.

A silence fell between them as they walked. Both of them seemed to be relishing the moment. Neither of them had really had much of a normal life so any time they got to step out of the royal ties and into civilization it was always nice. Sometimes Wynonna wished she could leave it all behind and just be left alone.

“Do you think I should abdicate?” Wynonna asked softly out of nowhere.

Nicole looked shocked at the question. She stopped her walking and turned to look down at
Wynonna to see if she was serious. When she couldn't see her friend’s eyes through the dark glasses, she huffed in disbelief. Her head gave a shake and though she had stopped breathing, it had felt like, she managed to choke out “Absolutely not.”

“Really?” Wynonna perked an eyebrow at the answer. “I mean it would kind of make sense, you know? I was never supposed to be Queen, not really. It was always Waverly. She was the one daddy was always preening. She was the one he always said was a natural born leader.”

“So?” Nicole shook her head slightly. She looked around them and when she noticed they were standing in the middle of a busy sidewalk she grabbed Wynonna’s hand and led her out of the way. Now tucked up against the building she spoke softly “You’re doing an incredible job as Queen, Wynonna. I don’t think renouncing your throne and stepping away from this all would make you happy. You’d be a pariah. You’d have to hide out in the countryside until the day you die. What kind of life is that?”

“A free one” Wynonna said with a shrug. She looked around them and when she realized they were close to the store she grabbed Nicole’s hand and started to pull her toward it. She was met with resistance which made her frown. She glanced over her shoulder and when she saw Nicole’s firm look she let out a sigh “Can we talk about it when we get back in the car? You said we needed to be quick.”

Nicole blinked just once. She looked from Wynonna to the crowd around them and realized she was right. They needed to hurry back. So she nodded and with her hand still held by Wynonna she started to walk again.

They were quiet for the rest of the walk. Nicole kept her hand tightly around her friend’s as they moved. Even once they were inside the store she did not let go. She kept her hand squeezed tightly there because she was afraid she would somehow soften on the subject if she let go. She held onto the hand as a way of holding onto the subject they had been discussing. It was only at the counter when she needed to pay for their drinks and additional snacks that she let her hand slide free. It was only momentary though. As soon as the transaction was complete she took the bag of goods and Wynonna’s hand and headed out of the store. Not another word was spoken as they moved down the street, hand in hand, back to the car.

Wynonna let out a sigh once they were both settled back in their seats. She took the bag that Nicole handed over to her and frowned slightly “You’re my best friend, Nicole. I thought that I could talk to you openly without you judging me.”

“You can” Nicole said softly. She took her ball cap off and tossed it into the back seat again. She then looked over to the restaurant and saw Waverly and her friends were still there. She looked at her watch with a frown. It was definitely getting late and she wondered if they were going to make the movies.

“Well I feel pretty judged right now” Wynonna grumbled as she dug into the bag. She pulled out a bottle of water and cracked it open. She took a few long drinks out of it then looked back over to Nicole next to her “It was just a thought. A thought I’ve had a lot since taking over as Queen. It’s been fucking hard, Nicole. Even the strongest person would have their doubts.”

“I’m not judging you. I’m just surprised.” Nicole glanced over to her friend and saw the frown on her face. She let out a soft sigh and her stiffness at the subject faded. She reached out and took hold of Wynonna’s hand again gently. She gave the softest squeeze and spoke tenderly “I had no idea you were thinking about it so much. It kind of breaks my heart thinking about the idea that I was right beside you this whole time and was clueless to the fact that you were having such doubts.”
Wynonna lifted her shoulder in a slight shrug. She rolled her eyes and looked down at where Nicole’s hand held her own. She smiled at the sight. It was a summary of their friendship. Nicole was always there to hold her hand through tough times. She drew in a deep breath and let it out slowly before she spoke again “It’s not your fault. I’ve been trying to be strong for everyone. I mean…” She looked up at Nicole now with a frown on her lips “It’s not just me. It’s Waves and you and the rest of the fricken Palace full of people. Not to mention the entire country.” She let out a downtrodden sounding sigh “It’s a lot of pressure to suddenly have placed on your shoulders.”

“But if anyone can do it…” Nicole smiled softly and gave a confident squeeze of Wynonna’s hand now “It’s Wynonna fricken Earp. You’re a badass. You play by your own rules not because it’s fun to rebel but because you believe so strongly in your own way of doing things.”

“It is fun to rebel” Wynonna lifted the hand not being held up in a point. She smirked quickly then let it fade. She dropped her hand and gave a nod “I guess having everyone suddenly watching to see if I really would fail is what got to me. I didn’t feel like I had anyone on my team. I mean I felt like even Waverly was against me.”

“That’s insane” Nicole shook her head. She let go of Wynonna’s hand in favor of reaching out to wrap it around her shoulders. She used her other hand to pull at Wynonna until the girl leaned into the middle of the car. There, the best they could over the center console, Nicole wrapped her arms around her best friend for a tight hug. Her chin came to rest on Wynonna’s shoulder and she spoke softly against her ear “There is no one in the world who is on your team more than Waverly is. She looks up to you. She’s so proud of you.”

Wynonna felt herself tremble softly against the embrace from Nicole. It felt nice to be comforted, truly comforted by someone who cared about her. She had been so strong and been so afraid for so long that it was nice to let that all go for a moment. It was a relief to let someone else have a little bit of her burden even if it was for just a minute or two. Her eyes closed and she simply let herself be held. She had no idea how she had gotten lucky enough to have the bravest person in the world as her best friend.

A few minutes passed and Nicole gently eased out of the hug. She smiled at her friend once they were now able to see each other’s faces. Her hand lifted and she swiped a single tear from Wynonna’s cheek. It was the only tear she had let drop but Nicole knew the tear held a lot of its own weight. “I’m proud of you, too.”

“Gee thanks” Wynonna said with a soft laugh. She laughed because the moment was too real. Her vulnerability had passed and now the emotional stuff was overwhelming. She pulled all the way away from Nicole now and gave a nod. She reached for the bottle of whiskey she had abandoned when they had walked to the store and quickly unscrewed the cap. She took a swig then offered it over to Nicole.

“If you tell me you’re driving once more I will cut off your head” Wynonna spoke sharply but playfully. She smirked at her friend and nodded to the whiskey “One drink. If we get stopped I am pretty sure I can talk you out of a ticket. I know someone at the top.” She gave a wink to her friend at her words.

“Fine” Nicole relented with a laugh. She took the bottle and drank out of it quickly. She made a face at the taste and handed the bottle back with a cough. Her head shook and she wiped the taste from her lips “That is disgusting. Where did you get that?”

Wynonna let out a laugh and looked at the bottle “It was still locked up in daddy’s old room. Figured
he wouldn't miss it.”

Nicole frowned at that. She knew Wynonna missed her father. She missed her own. But at least she had expected her father to die in the line of duty. No one could have guessed the plane crash would happen.

“I don’t think they are going to a movie” Wynonna mumbled suddenly.

Nicole looked over to her friend but before she asked what she meant her eyes were drawn to the street in front of the restaurant. Waverly’s group of friends were all getting into their cars. One by one they had pulled away until it was just Waverly and one of the guys from the group left. Nicole perked up and focused her attention there. She lifted her hand to her shoulder to speak into her walkie talkie “Do we have ears on the street?”

“Affirmative, ma’am” The voice came back on Nicole’s walkie talkie.

“Stand still for now. Ears up for any unapproved movement” Nicole spoke into her shoulder again.

Wynonna’s face lit up and her mouth dropped open. Her eyes sparkled slightly at her friend. “You are such a little sneak! You bugged her?”

Nicole rolled her eyes at the notion but a smirk slid over her lips and gave her away. She gave a single shake of her head “I simply extended my surveillance to include her purse and car.”

Wynonna reached over and slapped Nicole’s shoulder playfully before letting out a laugh. “That’s my girl! I have never been so proud of you in my entire life.”

Another laugh escaped Nicole’s lips and she shrugged it off. Her eyes shifted back to where Waverly and the gentleman stood on the street chatting. “I was just doing my job. After our conversation earlier I decided to help set your mind at ease. So I went in to visit Waves before she left and had a casual, friendly chat. When she went to brush her teeth I slipped the bug into the side pocket of the bag she was taking tonight.”

“Well I am still very impressed” Wynonna said with a nod. Her eyes were focused on her sister and the guy now too. “Thank you.” She added softly.

“No problem” Nicole said just as quietly. The two of them fell quiet as they watched Waverly and the gentleman stood on the street chatting. “I was just doing my job. After our conversation earlier I decided to help set your mind at ease. So I went in to visit Waves before she left and had a casual, friendly chat. When she went to brush her teeth I slipped the bug into the side pocket of the bag she was taking tonight.”

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“No problem” Nicole said just as quietly. The two of them fell quiet as they watched Waverly. They couldn’t tell what was being said but that did not mean they could not tell what was going on. Body language was something easy to decipher and soon it was obvious the two of them on the sidewalk were interested in more than just friendship.

Wynonna groaned softly and motioned toward her sister across the street “I knew she had ulterior motives. If she wants to go on a date all she has to do is tell me that. Who is this guy anyway?”

Nicole reached for the file she had been looking at before their trip to the store earlier. She flipped through it for a particular piece of paper. Once she found it she pulled it out and started to read the details from the paper “Duke Chandler Hardy III.”

“Champ??” Wynonna turned to look at Nicole with wide eyes and a look of horror on her face. She took the paper from Nicole and looked down at it. Her face twisted with disgust and she let out another groan “No wonder she didn’t tell me. He’s an idiot and I would never let her go on a date with him.”

Nicole looked immediately concerned. She took the paper back from Wynonna and read over it. Her head gave a soft shake before she looked back to her friend slowly “I don’t get it. I’ve been doing
background checks on everyone Waverly invited to her birthday party like I promised I would. I didn’t see anything about him that raised any red flags."

“You wouldn’t” Wynonna rolled her eyes. She glanced back out the window and gave her head a shake. “When she was ten his family moved into power in one of our Territories. My dad invited their family here to celebrate and extend his hand in peace and helping. There was a huge party. That night while the adults were getting sloshed off ceremonial wine the kids were all ushered into their own separate ballroom where they could all be looked over. You know the usual Royal shenanigans.”

Nicole nodded. There had been plenty of segregated parties that she had been a part of while growing up with the girls in the Palace.

“I remember I couldn’t find Waverly for a half hour at least” Wynonna continued the story softly. The look in her eyes reflected the seriousness of the story.

“I think I remember” Nicole said with a little nod. “We were going to sneak out again but before we went you came to me in a panic because Waverly was missing.”

Wynonna nodded just once. There was a sadness in her eyes now.

There was no need for Wynonna to finish the story now. Nicole knew what had happened. Her head shook and she looked down at the paper again. She could not believe she didn’t recognize him. It had been over ten years but the memory of that night was still fresh in her mind. She looked up from the paper and sighed “I can tell her you saw he was invited and you don’t want him at the party.”

“It’s fine” Wynonna said with a shake of her head. Her eyes moved back to look out the window again. She sighed and whispered softly “Don’t do something stupid, babygirl.”

Nicole frowned at the whisper. She had no idea that this guy that Waverly was obviously smitten with was the same kid she and Wynonna had nearly beat to a pulp so many years ago. She remembered it like it had just happened. Wynonna was in a panic because Waverly was gone. They searched everywhere for her. When they finally found her she was hiding in a closet with Champ. They both claimed nothing had happened but Champ’s pants had been undone. Nicole had to pull Wynonna off of the younger boy. If she hadn’t she was sure Wynonna would have killed him.

“No, don’t do it” Wynonna’s voice got louder. She leaned closer to the window. Her hand lifted to press against the glass and her head shook quickly “Ew, please don’t do it. Do not- EW!” She turned her head away quickly with a disgusted sigh.

Nicole looked passed Wynonna and saw that Waverly was now engaged in a kiss with Champ. It felt like a punch right in the pit of her stomach. She wasn’t sure if the reaction was because of her very confusing attraction she suddenly had toward Waverly or because of what had happened all those years before. Either way she felt sick.

“Oh come on” Wynonna rolled her eyes and yelled toward Waverly even though the window was up. She stiffened up a little bit and the longer the kiss drew on the more obvious her anger became. Within a few seconds she was seething. “That’s it I am going to break this up!” She reached for the car door handle and pulled to open the door.

“Wait!” Nicole managed to catch Wynonna by the shoulder and tug her back into the car. She gave her head a quick shake and kept her grip tight. “Wynonna, breathe. If you go over there right now she will know you were spying and she will never trust you again. I have eyes on her and if she gets in any car but ours they will move in before she can even buckle her seatbelt. So just wait.”
“She’s being a fool” Wynonna yelled out in frustration. Luckily when she had been pulled back into the car by Nicole she had also pulled the door closed so her yell was not heard outside. She turned around to look at her friend with an almost pleading look in her eyes. “Stop her.”

“I…” Nicole blinked with a little panic on her face. She did not want to do anything crazy but the way Wynonna was looking at her made her heart ache. She looked around the car as if looking for an answer. Suddenly something came to her and she reached for her walkie talkie “Alert alert. Code black 200 block North. Bail out Jim. Report when safe.”

Wynonna hadn’t understood what Nicole had just said. Her head turned and she watched as one of the guards that had accompanied Waverly slowly approached her and interrupted the kiss. He leaned in and whispered something to her. Waverly immediately looked disappointed. She turned and said something to Champ quickly before the guard was escorting her into the car. Wynonna let out a laugh and pointed at what had just happened “Holy shit what did you do?”

“Told them there was a bomb threat two blocks away” Nicole admitted with a guilty look on her face.

Wynonna gasped out in surprise then burst out laughing. She leaned across the car and grabbed Nicole’s face with both hands. She gave a little shake of her face then leaned up and kissed her right in the middle of the forehead. She then released Nicole’s face and clapped her hands together once “Haught damn I love the shit out of you!”

“Yeah well now we gotta hustle” Nicole said with a relieved laugh. She started the car then pointed at where Wynonna sat “Buckle up. We have to beat Waverly home or we’re gonna be busted!” Without another word Nicole popped the car into drive and sped away down the street. Hopefully she remembered her evasive driving skills she had learned in the academy because she was going to need them now more than ever before.

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“Ma’am” A soft whisper pierced the peaceful quiet that was consuming Nicole’s entire being like a glass being shattered. Her eyes shot open in a panic and she sat up in bed like a shot. She was disoriented. A few blinks to help her eyes focus and she realized very quickly that she was in bed and not being attacked. Being a deep sleeper who was easily awakened was a bad mix most days.

“Sorry” The guard that had whispered to Nicole was standing near the bed now with a concerned look on his face. “I didn’t mean to startle you. I was told you were needed immediately.”

“It’s fine” Nicole mumbled, her voice raspy with sleep, as a hand lifted to push her long messed hair out of her face. She was starting to fully wake up now and with that came the realization of where and who she was. She also realized it was completely dark still and her brow creased in concern. It must be the middle of the night. As that realization sank in she started to panic a little. She looked at the guard standing next to her bed with a frown “What time is it?”

“It’s like four in the morning, ma’am” The guard said with a nod. “I was told to disturb you even though you were in the Queen’s bedroom. It is urgent.”

The Queen’s bedroom. Nicole looked to her right and saw a still sleeping Wynonna. Correction she heard a still sleeping Wynonna. That girl snored most nights and could sleep through a stampede. Nicole was thankful for that in the moment. If there was an emergency she wanted to be able to handle it before having to worry Wynonna.

A nod came to Nicole and she looked back at the guard. “Give me a minute to get dressed and I will meet you in the hallway.”

“Roger” The guard said with a nod then moved toward the door quietly. It was kind of creepy how quietly he walked. It was also probably a good thing considering the Royal Guard needed to be able to go undetected while they surveyed the Royal Family and Palace.

Nicole yawned and swung her feet off the side of the bed. She sat at the edge of the mattress for a moment and gathered her wits. After a moment she finally felt awake enough to stand so she got to her feet and went in search of some clothing.

She made quick work of changing then moved quietly into the bathroom. She brushed her teeth then looked in the mirror to see her long, untamed hair looking back at her. She did not have time to do her usual braid so she quickly gathered it all up and put it into a high ponytail. She wondered if maybe she should cut it. But that was a thought for another day.

Moving now toward the door Nicole stopped at the bedside table on her side of the bed. She grabbed her gun and strapped it on her waist like she always did. She then pinned her Royal Guard badge to her chest. Turning now to head from the room she gave a glance back to make sure Wynonna had not stirred before slipping out of the door as quietly as possible.

In the hallway now another yawn passed through her lips. She quickly shook it off and looked a little more focused as she nodded to the guard that had come to wake her “What is it?”

“Miss Rosita wants to meet with you, ma’am” The guard said with a firm nod. “You know the way to her office?”

Nicole gave a quick nod of her head then turned in that direction. She took three steps and stopped. She looked up the hall then turned and looked the other way. She perked an eyebrow and looked
back at the guard who had been watching her carefully. She rolled her eyes and gave a sheepish grin
“Okay so I’ve never been there.”

The guard tried not to smile and motioned for Nicole to follow him as he headed in the opposite
direction than Nicole had. The two of them walked quietly through the corridors of the Palace.
Nicole yawned every now and then. It was early, she hadn’t gotten much sleep the night before, and
the Palace was still pretty dark. She felt like a walking zombie. But when duty called she always
answered.

When they finally reached the door the guard that had escorted her gave a nod. She thanked him
with a return nod then turned to look at the door. It was definitely a more modern looking door. In
fact the entire wing they had stepped into looked modern. It looked more like a standard business
building with several doors leading to several different offices. She wondered if this part had been
renovated recently.

The thought faded when the guard standing outside that door greeted her “Morning, ma’am. Miss
Rosita is waiting for you.” He then reached out and opened the door for Nicole to go ahead and step
through.

“Thanks” Nicole gave him a nod and passed by him. She was immediately greeted with what she
imagined a corporate business that did sales or took customer complaints looked like. There were a
bunch of cubicles and each one held a computer. They were all empty at the moment. The only light
on was the one at the end of the row so Nicole assumed that was Rosita’s office. Without any
hesitation she headed that way.

She gave a soft knock once she finally reached the partially opened door because she did not want to
startle Rosita who looked completely engulfed by a paper she was reading.

The sound of the knock brought Rosita’s eyes up. When she saw Nicole she quickly stood “Lady
Haught, thank you so much for coming. I know it’s early but this is important and I wasn’t really
sure how to proceed.” She motioned to a chair across from her at her desk and gave a nod “Please,
sit.”

“You can call me Nicole” She said with a nod as she moved to the chair that Rosita had offered. She
sat with her posture stiff and motioned to the other woman “What is it?”

Rosita looked immediately worried. She pulled her lower lip into her mouth and gave it a little nibble
as if she were trying to decide how to delicately put what she needed to say. When nothing came to
her she gave in with a sigh and turned the paper she had been reading toward Nicole so she could
see it “This is just one paper. We got it about a half an hour ago. I am sure all the major papers are
going to have similar stories for their headlines this morning.”

Confusion came to Nicole’s face and her head shook as she looked down at the paper “I’m sorry but
I have nothing to do with PR. I mean that is why the Queen hired you. I have no idea what-” She
gasped loudly and stood like a shot from her seat. Her jaw dropped and she ripped the paper off the
top of the desk to pull it closer. There on the front page was a huge picture of herself and Wynonna
holding hands. It had obviously been taken while they were walking to the store the night before.

It wasn’t the picture that startled Nicole. It was the headline in bold letters right above it that had
caused the surprised reaction from the girl. She blinked a few times as if she were trying to decide
whether or not she was really seeing what she was seeing. When nothing seemed to fade from the
paper she let out a groan and started to read out loud:

“Though sources say the pair have always been this close it seems they might be growing closer by
the day. The pair covertly snuck out of the Palace last night using Lady Haught’s personal vehicle so as not to be detected by the public. Photographers caught the two holding hands during a romantic stroll through the crowded streets. Reports say they spent the majority of the night in the car alone. One witness says they watched the pair talk for hours and though the subject matter was obviously unheard it seemed to have ranged from light hearted and fun to personal and deep. Everything from laughter to tears was witnessed throughout the night. At one point the two were even seen canoodling…”

Nicole let out an offended sounding breath and shook her head. She turned the paper to show Rosita and stared in disbelief. “We were not canoodling. I don’t even know what that means! I mean look at these pictures!” She pointed to a few of the pictures that had accompanied the story. They were holding hands in the biggest one. A few of the smaller ones included Wynonna and herself looking very much like they were on a date. There was one of them embracing in the car when Wynonna had been upset. But taken out of context the pictures looked pretty definite.

“You see why I called for you?” Rosita said with a shrug and a vague motion toward the paper. “Usually I’d ignore it or issue a denial if that is what my clients wanted. But this is different. This is the Queen. I didn’t know if there was a more intense protocol in place.”

Nicole had only been the Head of the Royal Guard for about a month now. She had not been briefed on situations like this. Nothing like this had ever really happened when her father had been in charge so she wasn’t sure if this was even in her scope of responsibility. It was just gossip. Every person who had ever sat on the throne in the history of the Monarchy had dealt with people spreading rumors about them. Most of the time they were ignored or laughed off but this was different. This could cause a scandal. They had already faced enough attention lately. The last thing they needed was a rumor that the saving grace of the House of Earp was gay and therefore would never produce an heir.

Nicole plopped back down into the seat she had shot out of with a sigh. She stared at the paper and silently read the article again. She had no idea what to do. She was less worried about herself, because it didn’t matter if the Head of the Royal Guard was gay. No one cared really. But it did matter if the Queen was.

After a moment Nicole put the paper down. She looked up at Rosita and nodded just once “Alright here is what we are going to do about this. You will get in contact with every newspaper in the country. Tell them that if they have a story similar to this that is going in their issue today that they must stop it before it runs. When they ask why tell them it is treason.”

“Is it?” Rosita looked surprised at that news.

“I have no idea. I am going to contact the legal department here because I am sure they are way more equipped to deal with this than I am.” Nicole stood up from the chair now. She grabbed the newspaper and folded it up very sloppily before tucking it under her arm. She looked at Rosita seriously now “Call in your team immediately. I want every paper shut down before it prints. I want every blog post or insta-whatever news quip shut down and taken off of the internet. I know it’s going to be hard to stop it from leaking but if we can just slow it down and maybe spread the word that it’s treason then maybe we can get on top of this thing.”

“You got it” Rosita reached for her phone on her desk and started dialing. With her other hand she was was sending out a mass text with her cellphone. It was easy to see in that moment why she had been hired as the PR head.

“Thank you” Nicole said even though Rosita was already threatening whoever was on the other end of the phone call. So Nicole turned and left the office. She waited until she had put a little distance
between the office area and herself before she paused and looked down at the paper. Her heart was racing. She had no idea how Wynonna would react.

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“What the fuck, Haught” Wynonna looked completely annoyed as she stormed up to her friend in the middle of one of the corridors. It was the middle of the morning by now. The sun was filling the Palace with light through all the windows. People were moving about doing the work they did every day. Wynonna stopped in front of Nicole and gave her a shrug “Where have you been all morning?”

“Something came up” Nicole sounded exhausted. She had already been up for six hours. She had made more phone call in those six hours than she had made in her entire life combined. She let a yawn slide out of her lips and she blinked lazily as she looked down at Wynonna “Didn’t you get my message?”

Wynonna huffed and pulled out her phone with a nod. She pulled the the message she had received and read it “Something came up. I’ll explain later.” She gave a frustrated shrug at that “That was five hours ago. You haven’t responded to any of my messages since then. I was starting to worry.”

The good news was that apparently the news of the slanderous articles had not reached Wynonna. Nicole was thankful for that at least. She gave a shake of her head and an apologetic shrug but her tone sounded annoyed as she spoke “I’m sorry I’ve been really busy this morning. My job is to protect you and Waverly, not be there when you wake up.”

Wynonna was taken back by the tone. She blinked in surprise and her face crunched into a scowl “Excuse me for being concerned about my friend. I had no idea worrying about you was such a bad thing. Forgive me for enjoying my best friend’s company every day. You can sleep in your own room from now on if that’s how you feel.” She had nearly shouted the last of her words. She hadn’t meant to but the way Nicole was acting had really hurt her feelings.

“Will you calm down” Nicole said sharply. She grabbed Wynonna’s hands and led her now to the side of the corridor and glanced around. She could see a few passerby’s had noticed the shouts and stopped to see what was happening. She let out a frustrated sigh at that and looked back to Wynonna with a firm glare “I will explain it all if you just take a fucking breath and stop yelling at me.”

Again Wynonna was surprised at Nicole’s firm tone. Nicole was one of the most patient and kind people she had ever met and for her to be acting this way meant that something really bad had happened. Immediately she felt bad and her scowl faded into a look of worry. Her voice softened to a whisper “Oh my god what is it?”

Nicole looked around again. She knew she couldn’t talk to her there in the open. She had no idea who was listening. So she took Wynonna’s hand and started to lead her down the corridor until she found a secure room. She gave a nod at the guard standing there protecting the door then slipped inside. She had no idea what room it was but if a guard was standing watch that meant it was important. More importantly it meant it was safe.

Once they were both inside and the door was closed Nicole let go of Wynonna. She let out a sigh that sounded defeated and reached under her shirt where she had tucked the newspaper. She pulled it out and handed it over to Wynonna without saying a word.

Wynonna looked confused. She eyed Nicole carefully but reached out to take the paper from her all the same. “You’re really starting to worry me here. I don’t like when you get quiet. Nicole Haught being quiet is a sure sign that somethi- OH MY GOD!”
“Shhh!” Nicole lunged toward Wynonna and put a hand over her mouth to stop her surprised shout. She looked around and noticed they were in the Palace Library. Thankfully it seemed to be empty. Looking back at Wynonna she slowly removed her hand from her mouth then motioned to the paper “I have been dealing with this all morning.”

“Oh my god” Wynonna repeated as she stared in horror at the paper in her hands. She read a few lines and shook her head “Oh my god.” It seemed like that was the only phrase she could string together. Each time it came from her mouth it sounded more panicked. “Oh my god!” She looked up now, eyes wide with dread “Has Waverly seen this?”

“I don’t think so” Nicole shook her head quickly. She glanced at the watch she wore and shrugged “Either Rosita is really good at tracking down the story and shutting it down or Waverly isn’t up yet.” She took the paper from Wynonna and looked down at it. “The good news is there doesn’t seem to be any mention of Waverly so hopefully she never finds out that we were out spying on her.”

Wynonna’s head gave a shake. She took the paper back and looked it over again. She groaned as she read a few more lines and looked at a few more pictures. There were three pages of pictures and gossip about them. Looking back to Nicole she gave a shrug “So what is our plan of action here?”

Nicole just shook her head slightly “I have been talking to the legal team most of the morning. It’s technically a form of treason. Definitely slanderous as well. But they are hesitant to launch real legal action over it because that would mean taking down most of the free press.” She shrugged and folded the paper up again. She lifted her shirt and tucked the paper safely in the top of her jeans before sliding her shirt down to hide it. “Technically there is no law in the country that states all media has the freedom to post whatever they wish but since the invention of the internet and all of that it has been pretty lax on punishing people for stories like this.”

“Okay” Wynonna nodded and her face softened into thought. She mulled over what Nicole had just said and after a moment she nodded again. “So how did you and Rosita shut down the story so fast?”

“I said it was treason” Nicole said with a shrug and a slight laugh. “I kind of panicked. But now we do have the legal team verifying that it is so that’s good.”

“Always quick on your feet” Wynonna smirked in amusement. Her friend was sharp as a tack when it came to split second decisions.

Nicole gave a single shoulder shrug and an almost shy looking smile. Wynonna’s faith in her ability to do her job still flattered her more than she could say. She shook that thought off though and cleared her throat “You have a meeting with legal in…” She glanced at her watch and gave a nod “Twenty minutes. They are going to go over their action plan with you. At the end of the day you get the final say on how to proceed but they are going to lay out some options.”

“Thank you” Wynonna said very softly. She had no idea how she would deal with shit like this if it weren’t for Nicole fighting by her side through it all. “And what are you going to do in the meantime?”

“I am going to go find Waverly” Nicole said with a nod. “I know she has an alert on her phone that lets her know anytime anyone posts anything about her online. I am hoping to be able to somehow turn that off before this hits.”

“Good idea” Wynonna nodded quickly. “I will go get ready for my meeting. I’ll let you know when I’m done and update you then.”
“Sounds good” Nicole motioned to the library door and gave a nod “I’ll let you know how it goes with Waverly.”

“Good plan” Wynonna moved toward the door now. She paused right before she opened it and gave a smile “For what it’s worth I think we make a damn good team, Haught.”

Nicole let out a soft laugh and nodded as she pushed the door open “We always have.”

“Damn right” Wynonna gave a wink then playfully swatted at Nicole’s ass. She laughed as her friend groaned in annoyance. “See you in a bit, toots” She gave a little wave then moved quickly toward her chambers so she could dress for her legal meeting. This situation was not ideal but she knew if she took it too seriously she would go crazy. So she would continue to joke and smile about it until the time came to be serious. Hopefully that time would never come.

Nicole shook her head at her friend as she watched her walk away. If she kept that up the rumors would never go away. It sounded dumb because that had always been how Wynonna and herself interacted. Now they had to watch their every move. Hopefully this would not dampen their friendship because Nicole was not sure she could do this job if she wasn’t allowed to have her best friend unencumbered by her side.

Nicole was not sure if Waverly was awake yet. She glanced at her watch and saw that it was nearing noon. The girl should be awake. So when she reached her door she gave a soft knock and waited. When there was no answer she assumed she was still asleep. This was good news. That meant that she had not checked her phone yet. Hopefully she could distract Waverly long enough to clear any sort of alerts she might have gotten about the story.

She walked into the room quietly so as not to disturb the sleeping girl. She tiptoed over to the bed slowly. It wasn’t until she was right next to the mattress that she noticed Waverly was not there. She blinked just once in surprise and looked around. Had the girl gotten up already?

Before she could call out, Waverly came out of her bathroom. She had her toothbrush in her mouth. She was wearing just a robe, which was hanging open, and a very cute matching bra and panty set. It was obvious by the looks of her that she was getting ready for the day.

When she saw Nicole standing next to her bed she let out a yelp of surprise. She put a hand to her heart then laughed softly before reaching to remove the toothbrush from her mouth “I didn’t hear you come in!”

Nicole’s eyes went wide when she saw that Waverly was barely dressed. She quickly whirled around and put her back toward the girl and gave her head a shake “I am so sorry! I didn’t mean to sneak up on you. I knocked!” Her face was blazing hot with a bright blush. The imagine of Waverly in just her undies was burned into her mind forever.

“It’s okay” Waverly said with a soft laugh. “I was just getting ready for a meeting later. I went to meet you and Wynonna for breakfast but neither of you were there…” She shrugged it off then turned to head back to her bathroom. She quickly rinsed off her toothbrush and cleared her mouth of any remaining toothpaste. Once she was done she walked back into the main part of her room. She had yet to draw her robe closed. Why would she? It was just Nicole.

“Uh yeah” Nicole mumbled and reached to the back of her neck to give a nervous scratch to the hairs that were pulled tight there by her high ponytail. “I am sorry about that. I’ve been up for hours dealing with…” She paused because she didn’t want to lie. So she just waved her hand to the side
then dropped it away “...anyway. I hadn’t seen you so I wanted to make sure you were up. Ask you how your night went.”

Waverly perked an eyebrow at Nicole. She was acting strange. She hadn’t turned back around to look at her since she walked out of the bathroom. The way she had scratched at her head and avoided the topic of what she had been doing all morning was weird. She seemed uncomfortable and Waverly wondered what was going on.

“Well have you had breakfast?” She now offered in an attempt to relax Nicole a little bit. “There is plenty of mine left if you want” She motioned to the table where a tray holding more food than any one person could eat in a single day sat.

Nicole turned slowly to the table. As soon as her eyes saw the food her stomach gave a grumble. No she had not eaten. She had been too preoccupied all morning. She had managed to drink a single cup of coffee and that was it. Breakfast sounded perfect at the moment. So she gave Waverly a shy smile, still avoiding looking directly at her, and moved toward the table to take a seat “I am starving. Thank you so much.”

Waverly could see how tired Nicole looked. Her posture was slouched, her skin was a little paler than usual, and the fact that her hair was pulled up into a sloppy ponytail told her that Nicole had been in a rush that morning. So Waverly slowly moved over toward the table once the other girl had sat, speaking calmly as she did “Whatever you’ve been doing this morning must have been really important if you didn’t even have time to braid your hair.” She smiled as she reached out now and gently ran her fingers along the dangling red locks on the back of Nicole’s head “Its so weird seeing your hair like this.”

Try as she might to fight it, a shiver slid through Nicole’s spine at the feel of Waverly’s fingers running through her hair. She drew in a deep breath to try and calm herself and refocus her thoughts. She had a mission to accomplish. She needed Waverly’s phone. So she cleared her throat and gave as subtle of a shrug as she could “Yeah I was woken up at like four this morning. It was weird. The entire Palace was still dark and quiet.”

“I know what you mean. I have definitely snuck into the Palace at that time” Waverly said with a soft laugh. She stilled her hands, bringing them to rest on Nicole’s shoulders, and shrugged slightly “Would you like me to braid your hair for you while you eat?”

Another shiver slid through Nicole at Waverly’s touch. She drew in a sharp breath and held it. She let the sensation pass before exhaling slowly. She had to focus! She also couldn’t deny the fact that she wanted nothing more than to feel Waverly playing with her hair so she agreed with a nod to the offer “That would be awesome. Thanks.”

“Of course. What are friends for?” Waverly gave a cheerful squeak at Nicole’s answer. She loved playing with hair. “Do you want just the one French braid like you usually do? I can do two, one down each side of your head, if you wanted to try something new?”

Nicole laughed very softly. She glanced over her shoulder and gave Waverly a gentle smile “Surprise me. I trust you.”

Waverly returned the smile before her hand reached up to the top of Nicole’s head. She grabbed it and turned it quickly so that Nicole was facing forward again “Okay don’t move! I don’t know how sensitive your head is so tell me if I pull too hard.”

“You could never pull too hard” Nicole gave her head a little shake that was immediately met with a warning tug from Waverly. It was soft, meant to be playful more than anything, but it sent a tingling
sensation through her entire core. She bit her lip to fight off a moan. Maybe this was a bad idea. She wasn’t really sure if she could handle it. She drew in a slow breath and focused on her food. She could get through this if she just thought about anything else but Waverly’s hands on her.

A silence fell between them. Well a relative silence. Waverly was humming as she went to work dividing Nicole’s hair so she could braid it a little easier. Nicole focused on her food. Each bite she took made her feel a little better than before. She did not realize she had been running on empty until she had started to eat.

After a minute of the quiet Waverly cleared her throat. Her eyes were focused on what she was doing and she spoke softly “So is Wynonna mad at me?”

“What?” Nicole was surprised at the question. She breathed out a laugh and shook her head. She was met with another tug to remind her to sit still. Her eyes closed and she let the sensation that the tug sent through her body pass before she spoke again. “Why would she be mad?”

“Well I know she knows I was on a date last night” Waverly said with a little bit of guilt in her tone. Nicole’s eyes opened in surprise. She turned herself in the chair the best she could so as not to pull her hair out of Waverly’s hands but to be able to look at the girl. “How do you know that?”

“I think you two forget that I am not a child” Waverly said blandly. She then pulled Nicole’s hair to the side softly to indicate she wanted her to turn back around in her chair. When the other girl did just that, Waverly continued “I know you two were spying on me last night. I would be mad about it but I kind of thought it was funny.”

The sensation caused by the tug from Waverly faded and was replaced with a bit of a panic at the girl’s words. She closed her eyes and let out a soft groan before her posture slumped a bit in the chair “How did you know that we went out to watch you last night?”

“Please” Waverly let out a scoffed laugh that sounded a bit offended. “She used to always spy on me whenever I went out. Did you really think I didn’t suspect she would do the same thing last night? She has been cooped up in this Palace for weeks now. I knew she would jump on the chance to get out and spy on me in a heartbeat.”

Nicole felt a little bad for having been spying on Waverly the night before but she had to admit she was relieved to hear that she didn’t seem too upset by it. “So did you purposely not go to a movie and hang back to make out with that guy just to annoy your sister?”

Waverly smirked slightly. She nodded even though Nicole couldn’t see it and let out a soft laugh “Did it work?”

Nicole laughed too and nodded even though she couldn’t see it and let out a soft laugh “Did it work?”

Nicole laughed too and nodded once only to be met with another tug from Waverly. This time she couldn’t fight the grunt that slipped from her lips. She immediately felt herself blush and hoped Waverly had not noticed the sound of liking.

“Well good” Waverly said softly to herself as an eyebrow rose curiously on her forehead. She had definitely noticed the sound Nicole had made. Her eyes focused on what she was doing to Nicole’s hair and she was quiet for a moment. Finally she cleared her throat again and asked “Did that last pull hurt?”

Nicole felt her entire body go hot. She could not believe she had let herself grunt like that. Her cheeks were blushing so hard she was surprised Waverly couldn’t feel the heat radiating off of them. She drew in a deep breath and slowly released it before she answered softly “No it didn’t hurt.”
Again an eyebrow raised on Waverly’s forehead but this time it was due to interest at Nicole’s answer. If the pull had not hurt it must have had the opposite effect. A smirk came to her lips at the thought. She wasn’t sure why but she was glad she had this information about Nicole. Maybe it was in the Earp genes to tease people. All she knew was she might have to use that information to her advantage one day.

Nicole didn’t know how to take Waverly’s silence. Her mind was racing with dreadful thoughts of what Waverly could possibly be thinking. Hopefully she had not weirded her out or anything like that. Unable to deal with the anguish of the silence she decided to change the subject “So the guy you were making out with…”

Waverly bit her lip to fight a smile and gave a nod even though Nicole still could not see it. She waited for a question to follow but when it didn’t she laughed very gently “What about him?”

“Is it serious?” Nicole asked softly. She wasn’t sure why she cared. Well she knew that Wynonna hated the guy and she wasn’t fond of him either because of what had happened in the past. Yeah she would totally go with that excuse if Waverly asked why she wanted to know.

Waverly shrugged. She was quiet for a moment as she thought it over. She had finished with Nicole’s hair and was working to secure the hair ties to hold the braids in place. She had decided on two French braids, one down each side of her head, because she wanted to see what it looked like. Once she had the ties in place she stepped around the chair and looked down at Nicole. She smiled as her head tilted from side to side to take in the new look. Finally she gave a thumbs up “You look like you’re about twelve but it’s cute.”

Nicole let out a very soft, shy sounding laugh. She reached up now to feel her hair, allowing her fingers to trace down each braid individually, before her head nodded “I am sure Wynonna will give me shit but I don’t care. I appreciate it. That ponytail was obnoxious.”

“My pleasure” Waverly said with one more happy nod. She then turned and walked toward her closet since she had yet to get dressed. She started searching through it and after a moment she spoke again “To answer your previous question about whether or not it’s serious…” She paused and looked at Nicole with a shrug “Honestly I picked him because I knew Wynonna hated him for some reason but he was actually really sweet last night so maybe there is potential.”

Nicole’s gut twisted around itself at the answer. She wasn’t sure if it was because of the memory of what had happened when they were younger or if it came from somewhere deep inside her that was jealous of Champ. It was probably a mix of the two. She drew in a sharp breath and stood from the table now. She gave a loud clearing of her throat and shrugged “Well Wynonna does not approve. So just be….” She looked at Waverly now with a deep sense of sincere caring for the girl “…careful.”

Part of Waverly had wanted to snap and be angry at the fact that Wynonna did not approve. She was an adult she didn’t need her sister’s approval. But that anger faded quickly when she caught Nicole’s eyes and the deep look of genuine concern they held. She felt her own gut twist and she gave a slight nod “It’s new still but I promise I’ll be careful.”

Nicole gave one nod at Waverly’s words. She stared at the girl for a moment, the same deep concern in her eyes, before she finally blinked and turned now toward the door “I should go I still have a lot to deal with today and-”

“Nicole” Waverly said quickly to stop her from leaving. When she saw the girl pause she moved over to her in a few fast steps. She offered her a smile and reached out now to touch her arm very gently “I know what the tabloids are saying about you and Wynonna’s outing last night. I know
that’s what you’ve been dealing with all morning. I just wanted to say I’m sorry but also thank you.”

Nicole blinked just once. She had not expected Waverly to confess she knew what was going on. She had not expected the girl to not be upset about it all. She most definitely did not expect to be thanked. She gave her head a shake and tried to smile but it fell flat “Thank you for what?”

Waverly smiled almost shyly now as her hand dropped away from where it had been resting against Nicole’s arm “I know you two were only looking out for me. As much as it annoys me that you can’t trust my judgement I am also glad I have you watching my back.” She bit her lip and shrugged slightly as her eyes lifted and locked with Nicole’s now “You’d do anything for me and that’s something I will never take for granted. You’ve always been an amazing friend.”

Nicole felt her heart flutter. Her breath hitched in her throat. The way Waverly was looking at her in that moment was almost too much to handle. She wasn’t sure why the girl she had known for her entire life was affecting her in this new way and it was getting harder to figure out. She had to remind herself that this was Wynonna’s sister. Hell Waverly was practically her own sister. She could not be feeling this intensely about her. So she did her best to pretend she wasn’t trembling on the inside and put a weak smile on her lips before mumbling boredly “It’s my job, Waves.”

Waverly just nodded a few times as her smile faded. Nicole was being weird again. It was like she was uncomfortable around her. Maybe Nicole was more serious about her job than their actual deep friendship connection. Either way Waverly felt like there was something different between them now and that bothered her. Hopefully it would go away soon because she missed her friend. As close as Nicole and Wynonna had always been that had never stopped Nicole from being kind to Waverly. She liked that. She hoped that would always be true.

Nicole’s phone suddenly went off. She jumped and looked down toward her pocket where it was tucked away. She gave Waverly a sheepish smile and pushed her hand into her pocket “Sorry that’s…” She pulled it out and nodded as she read the message. “Yep, Wynonna. I have to run. But hey…” She gave Waverly a more genuine smile now and nodded “I’ll see you at dinner tonight?”

Waverly gave a weak nod and stepped back from Nicole. Of course she had to run when Wynonna called. She was getting really tired of her sister monopolizing Nicole’s time. Who cared if she was the freaking Queen? Waverly missed her old friend and wanted more time with her. But who was she to say as much? Her sister had taken on so much and she knew that Nicole was her only real pillar of strength. That didn’t stop her from feeling left out, though. She wondered if anyone knew just how lonely she really was.

“Yeah I’ll be there” She finally said and stepped away completely. She offered her friend a slight wave and watched her move toward the door. She chewed her lip as Nicole gave her one last wave then disappeared from her room. Once she was alone again she let out a sad sigh and looked around. No one was there. At least when her dad had been alive she had always had Wynonna around. Now, she found herself alone more than she had ever been in her entire life. She missed her sister. She missed feeling like she wasn’t a complete burden. Sometimes she wondered if anyone knew just how lonely she really was.

The thought was all too appealing but it passed as quickly as it came. She shook it off and went back to picking out clothes. She had a duty to do and if Wynonna could step up then she knew she could too. So she would put on her Princess face and do what she was born to do. She was definitely looking forward to her birthday weekend more and more with each passing day. Any excuse to get away from the Palace and feel like a normal human for once in her life. No one knew just how badly she needed the escape, not even herself.
Don’t look at me, man. I am just as surprised as you are

The day of Waverly’s 21st had finally come. The country all celebrated the day with parties and events all around cities and towns. As was tradition there was to be a gala held that evening in the Palace. All Royal families around the country were to attend. There was to be a large feast, toasts from different Dukes and Earls, a speech from Waverly herself, and a formal dance at the end of the day. Everyone was excited for the huge celebration.

The Palace was buzzing with everyone decorating the Grand Hall and preparing the feast. The seamstress had prepared gowns for the Queen and Princess. Everyone was expected to wear their nicest and most formal outfits. It was an extravagant event. As old fashioned as the tradition was it was one that Wynonna actually enjoyed. She liked huge parties for no reason other than someone existing.

Nicole had spent most of the day going over the heightened security measures that she was putting in place for the evening. She had most of her guard assigned within the Palace. Very few men had gotten to take the evening off. It was all hands on deck. With the amount of people coming into the Palace there was no way of knowing if they brought a threat with them or not. So they were going to be sure to take every precaution in order to assure the safety of everyone in the Palace.

The guard members, even though heavily armed and stationed all around the entrances, were all in tuxedos or dresses. It helped them blend in a little. Just because there was more security on hand than usual didn’t mean Nicole wanted people feeling uncomfortable. So she had made sure all of her men had tuxedos and all of the women had elegant gowns.

The day had gone off without so much as a hiccup. All the people on the guestlist had arrived on time. The feast, the speech, and even the toasts from people that Waverly had never met had all been lovely. There were some of the families from around the country that were not very friendly toward one another but had seemed able to put that aside to celebrate their Princess. The day could not have gone any better.

The gala was winding down now and although most of the older guests had started to thin out there was still a large group of younger Parliament members hanging around and dancing to the fancy instrumental music.

Nicole stood near one of the doors with her eyes scanning the room. She held a glass of champagne but she wasn’t really drinking it. It was more to blend in than anything. With her focus on security for most of the day she hadn’t really had a chance to talk to Wynonna or Waverly outside a few passing smiles and waves. Of course both girls had been fulfilling their Royal duties as hosts. The sisters had spent the majority of their day chatting about politics and other things that the leader of a country might concern themselves with. Nicole was glad all she had to do was make sure everyone was safe.

Nicole glanced up the stairway at the exact moment that Waverly was descending it. In that moment their eyes met and Nicole felt her heart jump. Waverly looked stunning in the turquoise strapless gown she had been wearing all day. The corset style top hugged her curves tightly but gave way to the free flowing ruffles that started about midway down her thighs. It looked like it was hard to walk in but she had somehow managed it without stumbling once.

As she reached the bottom of the stairs she approached Nicole with a wide smile. She had to admit her friend looked incredible in her purple gown with one wide shoulder strap and a shiny dark sash across her midsection. But as much as she liked the dress it was Nicole’s hair that stood out. Her long
red hair was loosely curled and hanging freely about. It really brought out the color of the dress.

Before she could say as much, though, Nicole was the first to speak as they moved toward one another “You are a vision.”

Waverly shook her head and glanced over herself before lifting both shoulders in a shy shrug. Her eyes lifted back to Nicole and motioned now to the girl vaguely “I could say the same about you. I love the hair.” Before she could stop herself her hand was reaching out so her fingers could lightly glide along one of the hanging curls near Nicole’s shoulder.

Nicole’s skin lifted with a patch of goosebumps near where Waverly touched her hair. She bit at her lip to fight the sensation off before putting on a smile “Better than the braid?”

“No better” Waverly shook her head. Her eyes were focused on the little curl her finger was now loosely tangling with. She half smiled before nodding just once “It’s just different.”

The way Waverly seemed hypnotized by her hair made Nicole’s stomach twist. She wasn’t sure why but the simple act of being admired by Waverly was almost too overwhelming. She had to do something to break it up. So she cleared her throat and looked around the room again. “Have you had a good day? I mean with it being your birthday and all.”

Waverly let out a soft laugh at the change of subject and let her hand drop away from playing with the curl of Nicole’s hair. Her eyes lifted now to glance around as well before finally nodding her head “People I’ve never met in my entire life are giving me gifts so I suppose I can’t complain. I am, however, more than ready to get out of this stuffy dress and have an actual party with people I like.”

Nicole laughed very lightly at that. Her eyes moved from scanning the room to look back at Waverly. She smiled as soon as her gaze landed on the girl in front of her “I feel kind of bad I haven’t gotten to hang out with you much today. I’ve just been so busy.”

“It’s okay” Waverly said with a nod. “I haven’t seen Wynonna in over an hour and she’s my sister.” She let out a laugh and looked around once again. “As long as you come to my actual birthday party that is all I care about.”

“Well I’m in charge of security there, too” Nicole gave the girl a wink before laughing lightly and relenting a slight nod. “You know I wouldn’t miss it for the world. Ooh look!” Her eye caught something across the room and she interrupted herself to motion to it. “I found Wynonna.”

Waverly turned all the way around to look in the direction that Nicole had pointed. When she saw her sister looking trapped by some of the older members of Parliament that were lingering about she bit her lip. She knew Wynonna could only take so many outdated opinions on how she should run things and in the moment it looked like she was about to strangle someone. “Oh no they have her cornered. She has that crazy look in her eyes…”

“One step ahead of you, Waves” Nicole said more seriously as she slowly moved around the girl and toward Wynonna. Her eyes were focused on them so she did not lose sight of them through the moving crowd. It took her about ten seconds to get all the way across the room to where two white haired dignitaries were grilling Wynonna about when she would bear the next heir.

“Excuse me, Your Majesty” She said as seriously as she could as her hand gently came to rest on Wynonna’s shoulder. She looked at the two older people and nodded just once. “There is a situation.”

Immediately the two older guests looked worried. Nicole moved a few steps away with Wynonna
before she gently leaned into the girl’s ear and whispered to her “The situation is they were about to be throat chopped.”

Wynonna fought off a laugh. She loved how well Nicole knew her. She gave a serious looking nod and returned the whisper against Nicole’s ear “I could kill them without going to jail. I am the Queen.”

Nicole bit the insides of her cheek to stop herself from smiling. Her eyes flickered to the two older people watching the exchange. She tried to keep her face as serious looking as she could before whispering yet again “Wouldn’t it be more fun to see how annoyed they get when you go against yet another tradition that is centuries old?”

Wynonna pulled away from where she was huddled next to Nicole’s face. She caught her friend’s eyes and gave her a little smirk. It was true. Wynonna loved seeing the old farts in her Royal Meetings huff and puff whenever she decided to abolish another outdated and unnecessary tradition.

“I think Waverly is ready to get out of here” Nicole said a little louder now that they weren’t within whispering range. Her face was still very stoic because, well, she was actually pretty serious about that. She knew she was exhausted so she could only imagine how tired Waverly was.

Wynonna gave another nod. She glanced around the room once more before bringing her eyes back to Nicole. “Tell her she can leave. Then tell your men to start clearing everyone else out. I am going to make my rounds to say goodbye and then I am going to wiggle myself out of this fucking ridiculously puffy dress and light it on fire.”

Nicole let out a soft laugh at that. It was a nice dress. It was very ornate, though. A lot of detailed beading and threading for the design all around her torso. The bottom flared out much like Waverly’s but only wider and with more puff. She was the Queen, afterall, she had to have the biggest dress of everyone in the room. At least it was a soft baby blue color and nothing hideous like yellow.

“I’ll hang back while you say goodbye to make sure everyone gets out quickly. Let me just go tell Waverly she can leave.” Nicole motioned to the general area of where she had left Waverly.

“Yeah yeah I’ll be fine” Wynonna waved her off and turned to walk away from her before she had even finished her thought.

Nicole shook her head in amusement at her friend. She honestly did not know where the sudden ability to be patient came from in Wynonna. Her oldest and dearest friend who she had grown up with would have blown a fuse by now and yelled at someone. It was astounding to see the change that had taken place so quickly. It was another little thing that reinforced in Nicole’s mind that Wynonna had absolutely been meant to be Queen.

She shook the thought off and moved back toward Waverly. Thankfully she hadn’t gone too far. She was chatting with one of the younger Duchesses that was waiting for her parents to call it a night. With a polite clearing of her throat, Nicole interrupted, and put a hand on Waverly’s shoulder as she stepped up behind her. “Sorry, My Lady, but I need the Princess.”

The younger girl understood and gave Waverly a soft wave as the two girls moved away from her. Once they were a few steps away Nicole’s eyes fell on Waverly and she smiled ever so softly “Wynonna said you can go ahead. She is kicking everyone out right now anyway.”

“Really?” Waverly’s smile had a mix of relief and satisfaction in it as she looked up at Nicole. “Because my feet hurt.”
Nicole laughed very softly and gave a nod of confirmation “Go. Your real party starts in a little while so you should definitely rest your feet for the real dancing tonight.”

Waverly bounced up on her toes and gave Nicole a quick and excited hug. She pulled back and was grinning from ear to ear “Thank you so much! I will see you later!”

The hug sent a shiver dancing along Nicole’s spine. She drew in a sharp breath as Waverly let go. She watched the girl bounce out of the room, accompanied by her usual guard, before she let the breath she had drawn in out. She really needed to pull herself together around Waverly. It was only a matter of time before someone was going to notice and that would not be good.

Her thought was broken up by the sound of a glass breaking. She whirled around in the direction of the sound and saw two men shouting now. As if it were a reflex Nicole drew her gun and moved quickly in the direction. She gave a loud shout as her eyes focused on both men “Freeze, both of you. I want your hands where I can see them. Do not make any sudden movements.”

“Woooaahhh, Haught, take it easy” Wynonna, seemingly coming out of the shadows, approached Nicole quickly from the side and grabbed a hold of one of her arms that were stiffly aiming her gun. “No need for guns! It was a misunder- HEY!”

One of the men had swung his fist at the other. Before Nicole could react, though, one of her guards who had moved closer to the situation has lunged at the man. He grabbed his arm mid-swing and used the momentum to whip the guy around before pushing his face into a nearby wall. He had him pinned with his arm behind his back now.

“Cuff him” Nicole said to her fellow guard. She holstered her gun back into the garter she had around her right thigh then moved to the other guy that had caused the commotion. She took hold of his arm then started to maneuver his hands behind his back “Alright bud let’s take you somewhere to cool off for the night shall we?”

Both men argued that it was the other guy that had started it but in the end it didn’t matter. Fighting in front of women was technically punishable by imprisonment. It was an outdated rule that no one actually followed in the modern world but it did justify Nicole throwing both men in jail for the night. She did that mostly so they could sober up before being released to the world.

By the time she had both men in the back of police cars and given her instruction to the officers who did not work in the Palace on how to book them it was an hour later. Everyone had gone home. Clean up of the party had already begun. Wynonna and Waverly were, presumably, both back in their chambers with their gowns far removed and both wearing much more comfortable clothing. She was jealous. That sounded fabulous.

She let out a sigh as she peeled off her heels before continuing her walk through the Palace toward her own room. She was sure there was going to be another juicy story in the paper tomorrow about how the Princess’ birthday gala ended in a brawl. She rolled her eyes at the thought. That was really the last thing she wanted to deal with tomorrow.

“Lady Haught” One of her guards interrupted her thought as he stopped her in the corridor where she was walking.

Nicole blinked and looked at the man. She perked an eyebrow and yawned before motioning to him “What is it?”

“The Queen wants to see you” He motioned now toward the direction of Wynonna’s room.
Nicole let out another yawn and nodded in acknowledgement of his words. She then changed her course and headed down the new corridor that led to Wynonna’s room. Once she reached the door she gave a nod to the guard standing outside then walked in as another yawn came through her lips. She was not sure how she was going to be able to stay up the rest of the night to watch over Waverly’s second party.

“Okay, so” Wynonna started talking excitedly as soon as she saw Nicole walk into the room. She moved off the bed where she had been kicked back relaxing and over to her friend. She had a wide smile on her lips “First of all, I can’t believe there was almost a fight and I wasn’t even involved.”

Nicole laughed and nodded because it was true. Wynonna had caused so many fights in her youth.

“Secondly, although I don’t think it was necessary, it was also totally badass and a little bit sexy when you pulled out your gun” Wynonna smirked and gave Nicole a playful nudge with her shoulder before she motioned toward the closet in her room. “Also I had your clothes moved into my room so you could change before Waverly’s party.”

“Wynonna” Nicole gave her friend a little bit of an annoyed frown. “You think moving all of my clothes into your closet is really the best way to stop all the rumors going around about us?”

“Screw the rumors” Wynonna rolled her eyes and motioned for Nicole to go get changed. “We know the truth so who the Hell cares what anyone else thinks?”

“The entire country cares” Nicole said in a soft mumble under her breath. She didn’t argue though and instead just reached for the back of her dress to unzip it so she could get rid of it. She could not wait to be back in some jeans and one of her button up shirts.

Wynonna sat now at one of the chairs that was at the table in her room. Her eyes were on Nicole as she changed. Not in a perverted way. In the exact way she had always looked at her best friend when she changed clothing. Neither of them were shy about it. At least Wynonna wasn’t. She assumed Nicole wasn’t either.

“Just so you know, it is protocol to draw your weapon when there is a threat of violence in the Palace” Nicole half yelled because she had stepped into the huge walk in closet and was browsing through her clothes. She stood in just the panties she had worn under her dress and the first bra she had saw and pulled on as soon as she had shed her dress. Now where were her jeans?

“Blah blah blah protocol schmotocol” Wynonna grinned widely. She thought she was so funny.

Nicole rolled her eyes. She fought off a laugh because it was really funny even if it was completely
immature. But that was who Wynonna was. She was completely immature in all the best ways and yet totally capable of being a Queen when the moment called for it. She was actually quite good at balancing it. It was impressive.

“You’re right, by the way” Wynonna continued her thought as she watched Nicole finish putting on her pants. “I did not know it was protocol.”

“That’s why you have me” Nicole gave her a sarcastic grin then reached for her shirt. “To know and follow all the rules.”

“Boring!” Wynonna faked a yawn then let out a laugh. She watched Nicole slide her arms into the button up shirt. Then something funny happened. Nicole did not do up any buttons right away. Instead she paused and started to lecture Wynonna on something. Something that Wynonna did not register because she was too busy staring at the small sliver of stomach that was still exposed by the shirt hanging open. For some reason the sight made her breath hitch and her stomach knot. When the Hell did Nicole Haught get abs and why couldn’t she stop staring at them?

“Wynonna are you even listening to me?” Nicole huffed out in annoyance. She reached down now and started to do up her buttons with a shake of her head. “You are like talking to a five year old sometimes I swear it.”

“Huh?” Wynonna finally tore her eyes from Nicole’s stomach. She blinked a few times and lifted her gaze to Nicole’s face. That is when she saw the frown on her friend lips. She let out a soft sigh because she didn’t know what else to do in the moment “What did you say?”

“Forget it” Nicole’s hands dropped away from her shirt now that she had all but the top three buttons fastened in place. She moved back to the closet to find her belt with the holster for her actual service weapon and her handcuffs on it. She put that on before snatching some shoes off one of the shelves and heading over to the table. She sat with a huff and started to slide on her shoes. She was so annoyed and the last thing she wanted to do was babysit a bunch of drunk people at Waverly’s party. But it was her job.

Still reeling at why the Hell she had just stared at her friend’s stomach, Wynonna frowned. She could see she had upset Nicole. “I’m sorry I didn’t mean to piss you off. I was just messing with you. You don’t have to do the party tonight. You have extra men here I am sure they can handle it.”

“It’s fine” Nicole finished tying her shoes then stood up. She glanced at her watch and noticed it was about time for guests to start arriving. “I better get down there for security screenings. Are you going to show up?”

“Yeah I’ll be there a bit later. I want to sneak in. I don’t want to take any attention from Waverly tonight.” Wynonna’s tone was soft. She felt really bad that Nicole seemed upset.

“Just call to let me know when you’re on your way down so I can sneak you in the back without anyone else noticing” Nicole nodded then turned toward the door.

Wynonna was going to say something more but she honestly had no idea what. So instead she just watched Nicole leave. She bit her lip and let out a heavy sigh as she fell back fully against the chair where she sat. She had no idea what the Hell was happening. Nicole was pissed at her for some reason. Plus she had just drooled over Nicole’s stomach like some teenager. Her head gave a shake as she tried to push the image of the abs out of her mind. Maybe she was just exhausted. She should probably call it a night but she wanted to be there for her sister. Family first. That was the House of Earp motto. As Queen she was expected to uphold it even when all she wanted to do was nap for a few days and hope everything else was better when she woke up.
Nicole stood near the only exit to the party with her hands at her belt. Her thumbs were hooked in the waist of her jeans and her fingers were curled around the leather band of her belt. Her back was pressed lightly against the wall and her eyes were scanning the room. This party was surprisingly mild. It was far easier to monitor everyone because there was a fraction of the people there. That didn’t mean Nicole wasn’t on high alert. There was much more alcohol at this party so she wanted to be on her toes.

But another yawned ripped through her. She shook it off the best she could and refocused her eyes. She could see Waverly sitting at one of the tables near the back of the room. She was surrounded by guests with a huge smile on her face. It was plain to see that she felt like a true Princess. Technically she was a true Princess. It was good to see her actually being treated as such.

Nicole watched carefully. Honestly the only thing she really cared about was Waverly’s safety. It was not her job to make sure everyone else was safe. Well it kind of was but she didn’t really care about that. She had other guards there to do that. So she kept her eyes on Waverly to make sure no one was trying to do anything sneaky. Even if they were all so-called friends of Waverly you just never knew what a drunk idiot would do.

As if on cue the biggest drunk idiot of them all walked over to Waverly. Champ stood near where she sat at the table and it was plain to see that Waverly was immediately consumed by his presence. Her eyes locked on him and her smile grew. Whatever he was saying must be the most interesting thing in the world.

Nicole huffed at that and rolled her eyes “He can’t be that charming…” She mumbled to herself. Thankfully her phone went off just then to distract her from having to watch Waverly drool over the pathetic Boy-Man. She pulled it out of her pocket and glanced at the text. It was Wynonna saying she was ready to come to the party. Nicole didn’t answer. Instead she put her phone away and looked back across the room. Wynonna could wait for a few minutes. She was still kind of annoyed at her antics from earlier.

So Nicole just watched. She watched Waverly giggle at Champ. She watched her hand reached out to take a hold of Champ’s hand. She watched her try to urge him to sit next to her but instead he continue to refuse. The more he refused to sit with her the more Waverly’s smile faded. Soon it was easy to see that she was upset. Everyone else that had been around the table had moved away. It was obvious they had started arguing.

Nicole pushed off of the wall now and took a few steps closer. Her eyes narrowed on the scene that was unfolding before her but she kept her distance. She wanted to make sure to give them space so they could work it out but be close enough just in case. She wasn’t sure what just in case would entail but she still wanted to be close.

Waverly’s hand had reached out again to try and take hold of Champ’s hand once more. She was speaking very calmly to him. It seemed that he was too drunk and she wanted him to sit down and relax for a while. He was very adamant that he did not want to relax. His hand ripped away from Waverly’s attempt to take his hand and when he did so he shouted loud enough for all nearby to be able to hear.

“Stop being such a prude! You are ruining my buzz!”

“Champ, please” Waverly’s cheeks immediately pinked in embarrassment at the fact that there were several sets of her friends’ eyes on them now. The last thing she wanted was a drunken argument to be all that people remembered of her birthday party.
“Don’t touch me! I am having a good time and you refuse to dance with me!” Champ yelled. He stared down at Waverly with a firm scowl on his lips “Get up right now.”

“No” Waverly folded her arms across her chest tightly. Her eyebrows knitted together and she returned the same stern scowl that he had given her “I think you should sit for a while.”

“Get up right this instant!” Champ’s yells were loud enough now that most of the party had stopped to listen.

Nicole was standing near the table that was settled next to the one Waverly sat at. She was about three strides away from them with her eyes fixed on Champ. She did not want to cause any more of a scene by unnecessarily tackling him but she wanted to be close enough in case that was needed.

“I am the Duke and you will follow my commands! Get up and dance with me!”

“Are you joking?” Waverly’s face fell from a scowl to a look of amused disbelief. She let out a huffed laugh and shook her head. “Champ you’re being an idiot right now and causing a scene. Just settle down, get some water, and we will talk about it.”

“Get up!” Champ’s hands both reached down now and grabbed ferociously at Waverly’s arms. He gave a firm tug and managed to rip them away from where they were crossed over her chest.

“Stop it. You’re hurting me Champ!” Waverly howled and tried to pull her arms free. His grip was too strong. His fingers were digging into her flesh, undoubtedly leaving behind finger shaped bruising.

When Nicole heard Waverly say she was being hurt she sprung into action. She leapt over the chair that had been in her path and took two quick steps before she was on top of Champ. Her left arm came down with a heavy swing, hitting him at the elbows, folding his arms up into him and effectively removing him from Waverly. Her right hand simultaneously gripped the collar of his shirt right near his throat. The movement of her approach carried both of their weight right into the wall behind Champ. His back hit the solid surface with a loud thud.

“Keep your hands to yourself” Nicole growled in his face. Her eyes were wide. Her teeth bared as she spoke to him just inches from his face. Her grip on his shirt was so tight her knuckles were white. She used her entire body to pin his folded arms between them which rendered him unable to move.

“Get off me you…” Champ spit with every drunken word he slurred at her. “You….disgusting-”

He didn’t get another word out. Nicole’s right hand had released the grip on his shirt only to move just a few inches up and grab tightly to his lower jaw. This made him unable to continue speaking. Her fingers curled against his flesh and in that moment she felt she might actually contain the power to rip his jaw from his face.

“Nicole, stop!” Waverly shot up from her seat and quickly grabbed Nicole’s right wrist to stop her from doing whatever she might do next. She looked between Champ and Nicole before her eyes settled of the latter. When she spoke she spoke firmly but softly “Just let him go. I’m alright.”

Nicole blinked for the first time since seeing Champ put his hands on Waverly. It was like her vision had tunneled and her mind had gone blank. Her reaction was completely involuntary. The innate urge to protect the Earp family with every fiber of her being had kicked her into auto pilot. But Waverly’s voice snapped her out of it. She drew in a breath and her head turned to look at Waverly.

When she saw the worry on Waverly’s face she immediately backed off of Champ. She stepped back and released him from how she had pinned him to the wall. Her left arm dropped away and his...
arms were freed. Her hand that still held onto his lower jaw like her life depended on it slowly released. She gave Waverly just one nod as if silently telling her she was just doing her job.

“I know” Waverly said softly. Her hand let go of where she had held Nicole’s wrist. She then looked over to where Champ was whimpering huddled on the floor. As soon as Nicole had released him he had slid down against the wall. He was now sitting on the floor, his hands cradling his face, and his shoulders hunched into his knees. He looked pretty pathetic.

“I’m sorry” Nicole blinked again when she saw how badly she had hurt Champ. Her hands lifted as if she were holding them in surrender although no one was asking that of her. She took a few more steps backwards and shook her head again as she watched Waverly kneel next to the crumpled mess of a boy.

“It’s okay” Waverly said softly as she patted Champ’s back. Her eyes lifted to Nicole and it was obvious that she had not been speaking to the boy. She let her eyes linger on Nicole for a moment as her head gave a single nod. It was a silent gesture that said she was grateful that Nicole had been there. She had been terrified by how suddenly Champ had grown physical with her.

Nicole was relieved that Waverly had given her instant forgiveness but that did not mean she was not still shaken by her own reaction. She had experienced a split second there where she knew she could have killed Champ and not felt bad about it. That was a scary feeling to have. It was a feeling she was not proud of at all. She had never wanted to feel an anger intense enough to trigger that thought inside her head. She was horrified with herself.

Thankfully her phone went off once more in that moment to distract her. It was once again Wynonna asking where Nicole was at. Looking at the message now Nicole shook her head to try and push any remaining horror and anger from her. She looked back up at Waverly now and motioned to her phone “Waves it’s your sister. I will be right back.”

“Go” Waverly nodded quickly and offered a very soft smile to show she was not upset at the girl. “I think the party is about over anyway.”

“Want me to have the guys-”

“It’s fine” Waverly gave a flick of her hand to the side to stop Nicole from finishing her thought. “I can get everyone out of here. Just go and tell Wynonna I called it an early night and that I am not mad at her.”

“Are you sure because she really wanted to come” Nicole frowned slightly. She had not meant to ruin the party.

“Totally” Waverly smiled sincerely now and nodded once more. “I’ve got this. Just go.”

“Okay” Nicole gave a nod then took a few steps away. She paused and motioned toward the exit “Do you want me to come by after you get everyone out of here?”

Waverly shrugged and gave a motion with her hand as if shooing Nicole away “We will talk later. Just go.”

Nicole still felt bad but she didn’t argue. She gave one more nod to Waverly then hurried out of the party. She let out a heavy sigh as soon as she hit the fresh night air. The party had been held in a separate building on the Palace grounds. It was a concert hall for any acts that came and played for the Royal Family. When it was first built it had been a theater for plays. It had since been renovated and was the perfect place to hold a party like Waverly had wanted.
She thought about walking through the grounds but she knew it would take too long to get back to the main building so Nicole hopped into her security golf cart and quickly navigated the pathway toward the entrance that she knew was closest to Wynonna’s room. As soon as she got close she parked and hopped off. She jogged now into the Palace and toward the all too familiar corridor that led to the sleeping quarters area.

Nicole gave a nod to the guard standing outside Wynonna’s room as she walked passed and inside now without any hesitation. She was talking before she was even all the way inside the huge room “I am so sorry there was an-” She paused in her tracks when she realized Wynonna was not alone. Her eyes widened and she looked at the other two people in the room. She then slowly looked at Wynonna and shrugged “Okay what’s going on?”

“Have a seat” Wynonna motioned to the chair that sat empty next to her at the table where everyone else was settled.

Nicole nodded and made her way to the chair without questioning why. She sat then looked at the other two across from them. She gave a sort of confused smile then shook her head “I’m going to ask again: What is going on?”

Jeremy smiled warmly at Nicole now “Good evening, Lady Haught.”

“Nicole, please” Nicole waved it off because she felt Jeremy would never change his ways. She shook her head and shrugged “Out with it. You all had serious looks on your faces when I came in here which is really freaking me out.”

“Remember how we wanted to research the Earp Curse?” Dolls spoke now in a tone that fit the mood of the room much better. It was stoic and serious.

Nicole nodded but didn’t speak now so they could get to the point.

“Well I developed an algorithm to help organize all data surrounding the circumstances of each catastrophe that has befallen the House of Earp for the last 400 years. It was actually quite simple. Just in put names, dates, what happened, how it happened, who was involved, and-”

“We figured it out” Dolls interrupted Jeremy very unapologetically.

Jeremy’s excited smile faded. He was learning when to be serious and when to be excited. Now was the time to be serious. He nodded at Dolls’ words and cleared his throat before speaking again. This time his tone held no excitment at all “Turns out it isn’t a curse at all.”

“It’s not?” Nicole looked surprised. She perked an eyebrow now and looked curiously at Wynonna.

Wynonna shrugged and gave her head a shake “Don’t look at me, man. I am just as surprised as you are.”

“It seems to be an inside job” Dolls cut in now. He had no sense for the dramatic.

“Wait what does that mean?” Nicole’s surprise did not fade as she looked back at Dolls.

“There is one constant throughout everything that has happened. Everything points to one family that apparently has had it out for the Earps the entire time.” Jeremy took out a piece of paper now and read off it. “Apparently over 400 years ago one of the Earp Princesses was sworn to a Prince. If they married it would have put the family of the Prince in charge. The Princess refused to marry him. She rebelled and ended up marrying another man. The Monarch of the betrayed family swore a curse to the Earp House for all of eternity.”
“I know where the legend comes from” Wynonna let out a huff and looked at Nicole. “We have both heard that story a hundred times growing up.”

Nicole nodded in agreement “Yeah this is not news to us.”

“Well did either of you know which family House was betrayed?” Jeremy asked now with excitement boiling back into his eyes because he knew the answer was going to blow their minds.

Both the women shook their heads but neither spoke. The suspense was honestly too much for them to handle. They just wanted to know the answer.

“Hardy” Jeremy said quickly as a smile spread over his lips. “Once I figured out the source of the apparent curse it was easy to figure out the rest. The fact is it’s not a curse at all. From that day until now there has always been someone from the House of Hardy in power in one of the territories within the Ghost River Triangle that your family rules over. They have been successfully taking out the current Monarch at regular intervals in hopes that they would be able to move in and take over as the sole leaders of the entire country. The only problem is there is always an heir. These killings have to be carefully planned and thought out as to not draw any suspicions.”

“They’re professionals and they are closing in on you and Waverly” Dolls spoke now directly to Wynonna. He was sick of Jeremy’s long winded explanations. “But now that we know where the threat lies we can take it out.”

“Hardy?” Nicole looked from Dolls to Wynonna as recognition slid over her features. “Isn’t that-”

“Fucking Champ” Wynonna growled through her gritted teeth. Her eyes slowly looked over to Nicole. They held a deep burning hatred for the boy that she had caught trying to coax her little sister into something unsavory at the age of ten. She had never trusted him and now she knew why.

“Oh no” Nicole let out a heavy breath and shook her head. “I have something to tell you abo-”

“Save it for later” Wynonna politely stopped Nicole from continuing by squeezing her arm gently. She shook her head then looked back at Dolls. “So do we have a plan yet?”

After the four of them had agreed on a course of action they all called it a night. Once Dolls and Jeremy had left Wynonna’s room the other two settled in for the night. Well Wynonna settled immediately in for the night but Nicole couldn’t do that. She stood nervously near the edge of the bed where Wynonna had collapsed in exhaustion.

“Are you going to just stand there and worry or are you going to tell me what’s going on inside that always churning mind of yours, kid?” Wynonna mumbled before a yawn took over and she rolled from her stomach to her back. She perked an eyebrow at the way Nicole was staring at her and she shook her head “What is it.”

“It’s about Champ” Nicole said timidly before pulling her bottom lip between her teeth and chewing nervously.

Wynonna lazily lifted her hand toward Nicole in a motion that told her to spit it out. She was too tired to beat around the bush.

Nicole let out a sigh. She wasn’t really sure how to word it so it didn’t sound horrible. It was awful. She knew how Wynonna felt about Champ and now with what they had learned that night she knew it would probably upset her even more. But she also knew Wynonna needed to hear it. She paced a
few steps next to the bed before finally giving in and sitting on the edge of the mattress. She drew in a deep breath and turned to look at Wynonna with a serious look in her eyes “Something happened tonight at Waverly’s party.”

Wynonna perked an eyebrow at the words. She sat up slowly now without taking her gaze from her friend. She pulled the blankets around herself a little more tightly as if they would shield her from whatever was about to be said. She had a feeling it was worse than awful. But she also knew it was something she needed to hear. She gave a single nod to indicate to Nicole she was listening.

Nicole’s hand reached out now and gently laid against Wynonna’s leg. She gave a tender squeeze before clearing her throat softly “He was drunk and he wanted Waverly to dance with him. When she tried to get him to just calm down and take a seat he freaked out. They argued for a little bit and then things got physical.”

“How physical?” Wynonna sat completely upright now. Her eyes widened and she stared in horror at Nicole. She drew in a deep breath and when she asked again there was a tremble in her voice. “Haught, don’t sugar coat it. What happened?”

“Not too physical” Nicole said quickly. She could see Wynonna freaking out and the last thing she wanted to do was worry her. She scooted up the bed more now so her hip was even with where Wynonna’s was. She reached out to take one of her friend’s hands and held it tightly. “I stepped in right away. As soon as he put his hands on her I was there. But he hurt her, Wynonna. I heard her say he was hurting her and I just…” Her eyes dropped and she looked down to where she held Wynonna’s hands. She let out a shaky sigh and shook her head again “…I snapped. I threw him against the wall and there was a moment there where I knew I could have ripped him piece from piece and not given a second thought about it.” Her eyes lifted slowly to find Wynonna staring at her with a mix of shock and admiration. The look made her stomach twist and she whispered weakly “I scared myself.”

Wynonna’s hand squeeze tightly against Nicole’s. Her head gave a single shake and when she spoke it was filled with determination “I wouldn’t have blamed you. In fact, I’m impressed you didn’t. I’m not sure I would have been able to stop myself from doing it if it had been me.”

Nicole just let out a soft sigh. She bit her lip again before she spoke softly “I’m not sure I can be around him without wanting to snap his neck.”

“I get it” Wynonna nodded a few times. She gave a very tight squeeze of Nicole’s hands and a smile came to her lips. “That is what I love about you, kid. You are so fiercely loyal and you will do anything to protect the people you care about.” Her tone was serious and unwavering. Her stare was unblinking. When she spoke again it was with the most purpose she had ever spoken with “That is exactly why I need you with Waverly at all times.”

“What?” Nicole breathed out in surprise. She blinked a few times and gave her head a quick shake. “What about you?”

“I’m fine here” Wynonna motioned around to the huge room where she was and shrugged. “This Palace is secure. There are more men and women here willing to sacrifice their lives for me than necessary.”

“Wynonna, I’m the Head of the Royal Guard. That means my job is to protect you first.” Nicole’s head started to shake faster now in disagreement.

“You are also supposed to follow my every command” Wynonna said more firmly. “This isn’t a choice, Nicole. This isn’t a cute suggestion. I have no doubt that the Hardy family is trying to take
out Waverly in order to get to me. So I need you there with her. Until we figure out how we are
going to stop them from destroying my family it’s more important now than it ever will be for you to
put Waverly first.”

“Wynonna, I-”

“Will listen to me and you will not question me” Wynonna pointed at her friend sternly now. Her
eyes narrowed. It was clear to see there was no room for debate. “Especially with Champ around.
You heard Dolls tonight, Nicole. The best course of action is to keep your enemies close. Champ is
an idiot and I know it’s only a matter of time before he fucks up and reveals something. Until then
you have to make sure he doesn’t hurt my little sister again.”

Nicole opened her mouth to argue but the look on Wynonna’s face told her it was useless. So she
gave in and just nodded. Her eyes fell to where she still held onto Wynonna’s hand tightly. She gave
another squeeze before letting it go. She licked at her lips and looked back to Wynonna with a more
serious look in her eyes now “Okay. You’re right. Working as a spy while protecting Waverly is our
best move at the moment. But, Wynonna, I can’t promise I-”

“I know” Wynonna said quickly. She cut Nicole off because she knew her friend did not want to say
it out loud. If she said it out loud it made it real and she knew that it scared Nicole to admit. So she
wouldn’t make her say it. She let it be left unspoken that if Champ laid his hands on Waverly again
Nicole would have a hard time not killing him.

Instead she gave a single nod and did the one thing she never thought she would. She spoke a direct
order as Queen to her best friend “We need him alive until we figure this out. If you kill him, I will
kill you.”

Nicole’s heart twisted in her chest. She felt like she had just been punched in the gut. Never had she
thought Wynonna would use the power she held as Queen against her. Yet that is exactly what she
had just done. It hurt. But she knew it was her duty to obey the Queen. So even if she didn’t agree as
a person she gave an obedient nod as the Head of the Royal Guard.

It almost killed Wynonna to have to give the command. The look on Nicole’s face in that moment
made her heart ache like it never had before. Her stomach was knotted and she felt vomit rising in
her throat. But it was for the best. It had to be like this for now. Waverly was more important than
even her friendship with Nicole. Hopefully one day Nicole would see it that way as well.

“Then I better go” Nicole cleared her throat to stop herself from crying and stood from the bed. She
turned her back on Wynonna immediately and headed to the closet where all of her clothes had been
moved. She found a suitcase and started to haphazardly stuff clothing into it. She was biting the
inside of her cheeks so hard to stop herself from crying that she started to taste blood. There was a
burning in her chest and she knew she was experiencing heartbreak again. The only other time she
had felt like this was the day she had heard her father had died.

Wynonna got out of her bed. She walked slowly to the end of it and slid her arm around the huge
bedpost as her eyes focused on the closet. She could see little flashes of Nicole as she moved around
to grab clothing. Each little glimpse of her friend twisted the knot in her stomach tighter. She had
been through a lot in her life, experienced a lot of loss, but what she had just lost was the worst of all
of it. Even if they came out of this unscathed as a Royal Family she felt like her friendship with
Nicole would never be the same.

Nicole wiped a single tear from her eye before zipping her suitcase and leaving the closet. She
moved quickly through the room toward the door. She paused as she passed Wynonna and gave her
a single nod before their eyes met. There was pain radiating out of both sets of eyes in the brief
moment that they met. Nicole looked away just as quickly as she had looked up and gave another single nod “I’ll keep you updated, Your Majesty.”

“Nicole come on it doesn’t have to be like that. You know I-” But Nicole was gone before Wynonna could get the words out. As the door slammed she felt herself break. As the sobs she had been choking down burst out of her she slowly slid down the bedpost to the floor. There she sat, huddled and broken, letting the pain and disgust she felt for herself consume her. It was all in the name of family. Nothing was more important to her than protecting the House of Earp. It had been that way for centuries. Family over all else, right? Then why did she feel like she was stuck between the family she was born with and the family she had chosen?

~.~.~.~.~.~.~.~.~.
She knows she can’t get through any of this without you

Nicole sat staring at the falling snow outside the window of the lodge that she was trapped in. For some unknown reason Waverly had decided she wanted to go skiing for her birthday weekend trip. So Nicole, having been given a new assignment, accompanied her on the trip. The trip had not gone off as planned from the very get go. Waverly had been upset that Wynonna had sent Nicole to watch over her. The sisters had gotten into a yelling match right before Waverly had left for the trip. Nicole had stayed out of it. She felt it was not her place any longer. Wynonna had made it very clear that she was not part of the family. She was just another one of the Queen’s minions.

She let out a sigh and shook that thought away. She knew that was not how Wynonna felt but that did not stop her from hurting still. It had only been three days. A betrayal like this did not just subside in three days. It would take her a while to get over it. Maybe if she had a distraction she could stop thinking about it. Maybe she could stop hearing Wynonna’s words echoing in her ears.

Unfortunately the entire weekend had been spent indoors. A huge winter storm had hit the night they had arrived at the lodge. It was not safe for anyone to go outside. The roads were all snowed over. The phone lines were down. There was no cellphone service. So the staff and guests of the lodge had done their best to entertain one another for three days. It helped that a lot of people had movies or television shows downloaded on various personal devices. Luckily the power never went out so there was at least something to watch constantly playing on the lounge tv.

Nicole sat in her room by herself. She was sharing it with the two other guards that had come along with her on the trip but they were currently sitting in the lounge with Waverly and Champ. Yeah, Champ had come with her on this trip. Nicole wanted to argue that it was not a great idea but Waverly assured her what had happened the night of her birthday party had been because of the alcohol and that he had promised never to touch her, or the booze, again. But knowing that Champ’s family had been secretly taking down the members of the Earp family for centuries made it hard for Nicole to believe him.

When they had first arrived at the lodge Nicole had demanded Waverly stay in the safety of the SUV they had come in so she could do a safety sweep of the room where she would be staying. In reality she had bugged the room so she could hear everything Champ said. She didn’t trust him and she was sure he was up to something. So every moment of his time in that room was being recorded. Nicole spent hours each day listening to the recordings for any hint of what his family might have planned.

She sighed gently and finally looked away from the blinding whiteness of the blizzard outside. She looked at her watch and a frown came to her lips. It had been snowing non-stop for hours. At this point she was worried they would be stuck at the ski lodge for a week. Even if she was mad at Wynonna that didn’t mean that she didn’t want to be back at the Palace so she could be there in case anything bad happened.

Her thoughts were interrupted by a soft knock on her door. She blinked once and her eyes lifted to the direction of the sound as if she wasn’t sure she had really heard anything. There was no reason anyone should be coming to her door. The other guards were supposed to radio her if something went wrong.

When another knock came she stood from the chair where she had been sitting next to the window. She moved to her door slowly. As she reached for the doorknob her other hand reached for her gun. She leaned into the door and put her eye to the little peephole there. As soon as she saw who it was knocking she let out a sigh of relief and her hand dropped away from her gun.
“Waverly” Nicole greeted the girl with a smile as she pulled the door open. “What are you doing here?”

“I thought you could use some cocoa” Waverly grinned happily as her hands lifted to reveal two steaming mugs of hot chocolate.

Nicole’s smile warmed. Waverly had always been incredibly thoughtful. She gave a nod and stepped aside to allow the other girl to come into her room before she shut the door behind them. “I thought you were going to be preoccupied with Champ all weekend. Besides…” She motioned to the small table in the corner of the room to indicate that Waverly should make herself comfortable “This is your birthday weekend. You shouldn’t have to hang out with your security detail.”

“They are my security detail” Waverly motioned vaguely toward the door of the room to indicate a different area of the building they were in as a gesture toward the other guards. “You are my friend. In fact, you’re family and I should not ignore family just to snuggle up to a boy all weekend.”

“Well I can’t argue with that point” Nicole said with a soft laugh as she took the mug that Waverly offered to her now that she was sitting across the table from her.

“Besides” Waverly spoke a little more carefully now as her eyes focused on Nicole. She wasn’t sure how the girl would take to the next statement she would make. “I have a funny feeling you could use some company.”

Nicole glanced over the top of her mug as she took a sip. She saw the seriousness in Waverly’s eyes and her heart jumped. Of course the girl had picked up on Nicole’s mood. She had been quiet and mopey since before they had even left the Palace. She was actually surprised it had taken Waverly this long to mention anything.

The look from Nicole was all the confirmation Waverly needed. She set her mug down now and let out a sigh “What happened between you two?”

“It’s complicated” Nicole said with a wave of her hand as if trying to swat away the subject of Wynonna.

“That is such a typical thing to say when someone thinks the other person won’t understand what’s going on” Waverly sounded a little annoyed now.

“It’s not that I don’t think you won’t understand it” Nicole could see that Waverly looked a little hurt at the moment. But honestly what could she tell her? They had all agreed that not telling Waverly about Champ’s family was a good move. If they could keep him close and make him think they were clueless it could only work to their advantage. Unfortunately that meant Waverly had to be left out for now. That killed Nicole to do but it was the best option.

“Well if you think I can understand it…” Waverly offered a shrug of her shoulders as a look of expectation filled her eyes “Then why aren’t you telling me what happened?”

“It’s just that…” Nicole sighed and closed her eyes. The look in Wynonna’s eyes as she told Nicole she would have her killed if she disobeyed her command was the first thing she saw. She gave a quick shake of her head to try and rid herself of the image. Her eyes flickered open and she looked almost helplessly at Waverly “There are things going on with your sister that I can not talk about and I know it sounds like I’m taking the easy way out, okay?” She lifted a hand to stop Waverly from interrupting before giving a single nod “But for now it’s nothing you need to worry about. Unfortunately I can’t tell you what it is. Orders from the Queen.”
Waverly rolled her eyes and folded her arms across her chest “Like Wynonna would ever give you an order. That is so gross. She knows she can just trust you to do the right thing without having to use her power over you.”

“Yeah…” Nicole let out a heavy sigh at the words Waverly spoke. They were true. At least they had been up until the night of Waverly’s birthday party. But when Wynonna had made her demands and her threats everything had changed.

Waverly saw the way Nicole frowned and the genuine hurt on her face. This made her sit up a little straighter in her seat and reach for Nicole’s hand gently. She shook her head and spoke softly now as if speaking any louder would hurt Nicole again “She gave you an order? Like an honest to God order from the Queen? Like if you don’t follow it you could be punished by law?”

Nicole’s eyes dropped to where Waverly’s hand held her own. She didn’t want the girl to see the betrayal that came with the truth of her words.

“Holy shit” Waverly shook her head in disbelief. She moved her chair around the small table to draw herself to Nicole’s side. She slid her free hand around her friend’s waist and slowly started to rub along her back “Hey, you know she would never use her power over you unless it was truly important, right? She trusts you with her life. She trusts you with my life and we both know how much more she values my life than hers. So if she gave you an order she did it out of desperation. Not because she didn’t trust you but because she wanted to make sure whatever needed to be done gets done no matter what.” She gave Nicole’s hand that she still held a squeeze then added “And if she gave you an order it means something really bad is going on and now I’m worried.”

“Hey, no” Nicole turned now to look at Waverly. Her entire face frowned in worry and her head gave a shake “You do not need to be worried, okay? We have this under control. The right people know what’s going on and we are all doing our part to take care of it. So the only thing you need to worry about is going on about your daily life as usual.”

“Right” Waverly rolled her eyes at that. “Little Waverly can’t handle adult responsibility so we will protect her from everything even if it’s some sort of huge bad thing happening to her family.” She stood from her chair now and gave her head an angry shake. She put her hands on her hips and when she spoke again it was filled with frustration “This is my family too, Nicole. I’m an Earp just the same as Wynonna. I grew up knowing I would have to continue my family’s name. I knew I would have to help rule over the country. So why am I always being left out of everything huge that’s going on? Especially when Wynonna needs me most!”

“Hey” Nicole spoke calmly. She did not want Waverly to feel like she was trying to silence her concerns. She stayed seated and gave her head a single nod “I know you can handle yourself. I have no doubt you can handle any problem your sister has or will face. But what’s going on now? Trust me, Waves, this is not something you need to concern yourself with at the moment. When the time comes for you to be brought into the fold, you will be.” She lifted a hand to her own heart and locked a serious stare on Waverly’s eyes “I give you my word.”

Waverly knew that Nicole’s word was her everything. It was her honor. It was her trust. It was the only thing she had to swear by. So she believed her. That did not mean she was not frustrated by the fact that Wynonna was hiding something. She let out a sigh at that “Fine but I really wish she would trust me.”

“She does” Nicole said with a quick nod. “She trusts you more than you will ever know.” She offered a smile now and motioned with her hand around the room “Why do you think I’m here? Not to babysit you but because your life is more important to her than her own. She needs you safe so that when the time comes she can share every big problem with you. She needs you. She knows she
can’t get through any of this without you.”

Waverly knew that Nicole was just trying to make her feel better. She smiled because it was working. Nicole had always been the level-headed one. She had always been the buffer between the sisters when they fought. Wynonna and Nicole had been inseparable growing up and yet Nicole and Waverly had formed a bond almost just as close. Nicole really was their rock.

“Fine” Waverly finally relented and moved back to the table. She sat in her chair next to Nicole and reached for her mug of cocoa. She took a sip then looked back to Nicole with a very soft smile “You know if it wasn’t for you I bet she and I would have ripped each other’s heads off by now.”

Nicole let out a soft laugh at that because she could not argue. The sisters loved one another with a passion unlike any love Nicole had ever seen. They could fight just as passionately sometimes. She had been in the middle of far too many of those fights and somehow came out unscathed. Honestly she wouldn’t have it any other way.

“I’m really sorry you and Wynonna fought or whatever before you had to come here” Waverly motioned to the blizzard outside the window and sighed. “I’m sorry I stranded us here without any way of communicating with the outside world.” She looked over at Nicole with a little frown “I am sure she’s tried to apologize over text a hundred times by now.”

Nicole just shrugged and took a sip from her mug. She thought about it for a moment then looked at Waverly as a smirk came to her lips “She can sweat over the fact that I’m not responding. Maybe it will make her think twice about it next time.” The two of them shared a laugh but Nicole’s died quickly. She knew even if Wynonna apologized a hundred times it wouldn’t make what she had said alright. The more she thought about it the more she was convinced their friendship would never recover.

“Shit” Wynonna yelled at her cellphone again. She threw it across her room and turned around with a wild determination in her eyes. “Why are neither of them picking up?”

“There was a huge storm, ma’am. There is no way to reach them until it breaks” The guard assigned to Wynonna while Nicole was gone said with a firm nod.

“Well then get me a fucking helicopter or a snowmobile or a goddamn Yeti to give me a piggyback. I need to talk to Nicole.” Wynonna yelled and pointed to the door of her room.

“But ma’am it’s too dangerous to-”

“Leave! And if you come back before you’ve figure out a way to get me in contact with Haught I will cut off your arms and beat you with them!” Wynonna’s shout echoed in the huge ceilings of her bedroom. She watched the man scurry out of her room before she collapsed onto her bed. She was panicking. Jeremy had just come to her with some really bad news and she needed Nicole to know about it. The situation had changed drastically.

On the morning of the fourth day in the ski lodge the snow finally let up. Nicole woke to the sight of a blue sky and broken clouds. This made her smile. She hoped that maybe it would hold off long enough for them to be able to pack up and get on the road back to the Palace. She did feel a little bad that Waverly hadn’t really gotten to do anything fun over her birthday trip but maybe she could convince Wynonna to let her go somewhere else. That was a thought for another day. For now she
had to get in touch with someone to check on the conditions of the road.

She had made her way down to the front desk and was informed that the phone lines were operational. Without hesitation Nicole had quickly dialed her own cellphone number to check for any voicemails she might have. The cell service still seemed to be down but at least she could access her voicemails this way. That helped to calm her nerves down. If something was wrong her voicemail would be the best way to find out before they left the lodge.

Though she had not anticipated any bad news in her voicemail that was exactly what she got. The first couple had been Wynonna apologizing. She had skipped those but saved them to listen to at another time. Maybe. The next few were a very panicked sounding Wynonna. She was vague in her messages which really worried Nicole. The fact that Wynonna would not go into detail meant something was seriously wrong and she was afraid their calls might be somehow compromised. Each new panicked message from Wynonna caused her heart to drop further and further until she was practically standing on it.

She dropped the phone on the receiver and tried to offer a smile of thanks to the woman who had let her use it but it fell flat. Instead her face read like a book. All the worry about what was happening flooded her and there was no way to hide it. They needed to get back to the Palace and they needed to do so immediately. So she quickly made her way back up to the floor where their rooms were and called for the guards to meet her in their room for a very brief meeting.

“What about the Princess?” The one standing guard at Waverly’s door while she slept asked.

“This will be very quick. It is still early I am sure they are still asleep.” Nicole motioned for him to join her down the hall where their room was and he did so very quickly. Once the three of them were inside the room she shut the door and spoke very quietly “I don’t know what is going on but the Queen has left me several very serious voicemails. She wouldn’t get into specifics which means she probably thinks someone is listening to her calls. So I need you” She pointed to the man on her left “to organize us transport immediately. Whatever it takes. We can take the SUVs as far as possible then jump into a freaking snow plow for all I care. Just get us home. I want to leave in a half hour.”

“Yes ma’am” The man gave her a salute and hurried off to fulfill the task he had been given.

“Now you” She motioned to the only other person in the room and gave a firm nod. “Pack up the surveillance equipment as discreetly as possible.” She knew that was going to be hard considering they had bugged Wavery’s room as well as set up many hidden security cameras throughout the lodge. It was standard protocol but now they had to undo it without anyone else seeing. “I’ll pack the room here then go inform the Princess we are leaving. I’ll also try to get the bug from her room” She bit her lip as she tried to decide how she would go about it. Then she shook it off and motioned to the other guard “Move out.”

“Ma’am” He acknowledged her order with a nod then moved from the room in a hurry. Nicole let out a soft sigh and looked around their room. All of them had packed lightly, as was standard for all security details on vacation, so she knew it would be easy for her to pack it all right away. So instead she headed to Waverly’s room to give her a heads up. She knew Waverly would need some time to get all of her stuff together.

She moved down the hall the few doors away and gave a light knock. She wondered if the girl was up yet. She looked around while she waited for an answer and found herself feeling grateful no one else was on that floor. They had rented the entire floor for safety and privacy purposes.

When there was no answer Nicole knocked harder. She waited a few more beats then turned her first to use the meaty side of her hand to pound loudly on the door now “Waverly! It’s Nicole! I need you
to get up there’s-”

Her shouts were cut off when the door was pulled open. Waverly stood with her blanket wrapped snugly around herself and her hair looking a mess. She blinked sleepily and gave a shrug “It’s barely even sunrise. What in the world is going on?”

“Look” Nicole spoke quietly now because she knew Champ was in the room and chances were if she had woken Waverly she had woken him as well. “Something is up” She gave a firm nod and locked her eyes with Waverly’s. She waited a moment for the girl to catch her gaze and see the seriousness behind it before speaking again “I don’t know what. All I know is I have a few really worrisome sounding voicemails from your sister. The snow has let up so we are going to get on the road as soon as possible, alright? I need you to get your stuff and wake up that thing…” She motioned into the room toward the bed where Champ was sleeping and gave a displeased roll of her eyes. “You have a half an hour.”

Waverly would have been annoyed at the way Nicole addressed Champ but that emotion was overridden by the worry she was feeling. She knew it had to be serious if Nicole hadn’t even blinked while talking to her. She hadn’t smiled or greeted her good morning. She knew Nicole well enough to know when to take her seriously and now was the time. So she gave a single nod of her head and responded just as softly as Nicole had been speaking “Yeah, no problem. I’ll get him up and I’ll pack right away.”

Nicole nodded too. She reached out and put a hand on Waverly’s shoulder, giving it a soft squeeze, before she added very softly “Try not to worry too much. I’m already doing that enough for the two of us.”

Waverly tried to give a weak smile but it fell flat. She was already far too worried and there was nothing she could do to stop that. She just gave Nicole a nod then stepped back into her room and shut the door. She had some work to do. Her mind was racing and she hoped her sister was alright.

Nicole let out a heavy sigh when Waverly shut the door. She knew this was not an easy thing to hear first thing in the morning but it also came with the territory. There would always be a sense of urgency. There would always be a slight threat level. The Royal Family was never completely at ease because of the nature of their life. They were always being watched whether they wanted to be or not.

She headed quickly back to her room to start packing everything up. It was pretty easy considering none of them had really unpacked anything. The most time consuming thing was all the electronic equipment that she had to pack away neatly and carefully. Even that went as smoothly as could be. She left the case open so her guard could put the cameras away as soon as he returned from getting them all from around the lodge.

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Wynonna whirled around where she stood staring nervously out of the window in her room when she heard someone walk in. She had been trying to reach Nicole or Waverly all morning to no avail. She had demanded someone, anyone, find a solution. She had never felt so helpless in her entire life. When she saw Jeremy approaching she let out a heavy sigh “Oh thank god. Have you been able to use your huge science brain and contact them?”

Jeremy just shook his head. Before Wynonna could speak, though, he lifted a hand to stop her. “But the snow has stopped. I contacted the ranger station near the resort where they are staying and they said the telephone lines should be up soon. We have been speaking over satellite phone. He says the lodge doesn’t have one but he is going to use his snowmobile to drive down the slopes to deliver a
message to Nicole. All I need to know is what you want me to have it say.”

Relief, though minimal, came to Wynonna’s face. She nodded and moved over to where Jeremy stood. She took the pad of paper and pen he had come in with before offering as much of a grateful smile that she could muster “Thank you so much, Jeremy. I haven’t slept at all. I can’t believe I let her go on this stupid trip with Champ knowing what we know about his family. It's all my fault.”

“Hey” Jeremy reached out now and put a hand on Wynonna’s shoulder in an attempt to soothe her. When she looked up at him he gave her a very gentle smile “This isn’t your fault. Dolls thought keeping Champ close while we watched over him and his family was the best idea. We all agreed remember?” He nodded just once and let out a sigh “This isn’t anyone’s fault. We were trying to take action without causing any backlash.”

Wynonna just shook her head. She looked down at the paper she held and closed her eyes. She swallowed the lump in her throat and fought back tears. She would not let them win. She would not let the cowardice family who had been silently assassinating her kin for centuries win. She knew they would get through this. She had to swallow her fear and trust it would all be alright. So she drew in a deep breath and her eyes came open again.

She then looked up at Jeremy and shook her head “I have to believe everything is alright. Nicole is with her” She nodded and looked back at the paper. “He would be an idiot to try anything while she’s there. I mean she nearly ripped his jaw off the other night.” A small flicker of a smile came to her lips at the thought of Nicole being so fiercely protective that she would have maimed Champ. God she was so fucking lucky to have such a loyal best friend.

That thought put her at ease. Everything was going to be fine. She would get her message to Nicole, they would return to the Palace, and they would figure out their next step. She nodded at that because it was her only real option. She had to believe it because what she had learned about her father seemed too unreal to accept as true. There was no way her father would have promised Waverly to Champ. There was absolutely no way her father was selfish enough to give away his youngest daughter in order to save his own life.

Another lump formed in her throat at the idea. She had believed her father was the greatest man to ever live. So when Jeremy had uncovered the secret contract between himself and the Hardy family it had almost made her sick. She had accused him of lying. She had nearly thrown him out on his ass and demanded he never step foot in her country again. Dolls had managed to calm her down before proceeding to go over all of the details they had uncovered. When Wynonna had realized it was a real possibility she had tried to contact Nicole right away. Even if it wasn’t true, if it had been an elaborate lie, the only people devious enough to be behind it was the Hardy family so she had wanted Waverly to return home immediately so she could ensure her safety.

Wynonna shook the thought away and scribbled down a quick message for Nicole. It was in code so it made no sense but she knew her best friend would understand. They had been using this code for years. It went back to their days as teenagers and their need to communicate without their parents knowing what they were saying.

She ripped the note off the pad of paper. She folded it sloppily then handed it over to Jeremy. She gave a nod and tried to sound strong as she told him to hurry.

With everything packed and stacked near the door, Nicole did one last sweep of her room. Once she was assured she had everything she went over to the mirror to check herself out. She had her gun on her hip, her radio on her shoulder, and her bullet proof vest strapped on tightly. She wasn’t sure what
they would be returning to at the Palace so she wanted to make sure to be prepared. She would advise her other guards to do the same once they returned.

It was only a few minutes later that the others had returned. Both had succeeded in their missions. With transport ready and all the surveillance equipment collected they all worked swiftly to pack their things in the vehicle they had come in. A quick glance at her watch told Nicole it had been more than a half hour but it was close enough. So with the two other guards waiting in the SUV she moved back into the lodge toward Waverly’s room. She was hoping she was ready because every second they were in that lodge was a second she felt Wynonna was in danger.

When she reached the room she lifted her hand to knock but was stopped by the sound of a shout within the room. Her heart leaped into her throat. The shout came from Champ and was so loud that every last word he said was easily heard through the door.

“Screw that, I don’t have to leave. We didn’t get to do anything but sit around and watch movies. I could have done that with anyone at home. This is a fucking joke!”

“Champ just calm down” Waverly said softly. Nicole had pressed her ear to the door now and could hear the entire conversation.

“I’m not going to calm down!” Another angry shout filled the room.

“Listen it’s not ideal but this happens sometimes. It’s always been this way for me. My family rules over the country so there will always be threats against us. Sometimes that means packing up and getting to safety no matter what you’re doing or where you’re at.”

“This is bullshit. If you think I’m putting up with this once we’re married-”

“Married?” Waverly scoffed out in disbelief. “What in the world makes you think I am going to marry you? We’ve barely started dating and I quite honestly don’t know if I like the sides of you I’ve started to uncover.”

“Oh trust me you will marry me” Champ’s tone turned poisonous. It was like a snake hissing at its prey. “Sweetie you don’t have any other choice.”

“Like Hell I don’t” Waverly said with a disgusted huff of a laugh. “The days of arranged marriages in the Royal circle have been dead for decades, Champ.”

Champ let out a wicked sounding chuckle. His hand came down in a heavy slap against the table near where Waverly was packing her suitcase. “Looks like little miss perfect Princess hasn’t been let in on her daddy’s little secret.”

Waverly had jumped when Champ slapped the table. She looked up at him now with fear in her eyes. She took a step back from him and shook her head “What are you talking about?”

“Oh this is perfect” Champ’s wicked laugh came again. “You don’t know what your father did to protect himself. To protect your sister.” He took a predatory step toward Waverly with an evil glint in his eyes “He made a deal with my parents. You marry me and the Earp Curse ends.”

“The curse?” Waverly’s voice was weak. She blinked a few times and gave another shake of her head “No, you’re lying. He’s not here to defend himself so you’re making this up just so you can marry me. You’re pathetic, Champ. You and your entire family has always been jealous of the Crown and it’s pathetic. I can’t wait to tell Wynonna and-”

Her words were cut off when Champ’s backhand swung out of nowhere and landed across her face.
She stumbled backwards and tripped over the chair that was untucked from the table. She hit the ground with a thud and immediately started to back away from Champ who was stalking toward her like a lion over his next meal.

“And when we’re married and I am set to be King you will have to obey me or else” His hand lifted and he swung once more.

The second blow didn’t land. At the sound of the first slap Nicole had kicked the door in and charged into the room. She managed to hook her arm around Champ’s lifted arm and use her momentum to swing him away from Waverly and into the window of the room. She had pulled his right arm behind his back and used it to pin him there. Her other hand was pressed to the back of his head, squishing his face into the window, and rendering him completely unable to move. She leaned over his shoulder and hissed in his ear “You are so lucky I can’t kill you.” She then softened her face and turned to look at Waverly on the floor “Are you alright? I heard everything.”

“Fine” Waverly said with a scared nod as her hand lifted to her face. Her eye was already starting to swell.

Nicole turned back to Champ now. She moved her left hand off the back of his head in favor of reaching to her shoulder to call on her radio. “Situation red on Jim. Repeat situation red-” Her call was cut short when Champ’s head jerked backwards and connected with her face.

Pain consumed Nicole’s entire head. It was enough for her to stumble away from Champ completely. She lifted a hand to her nose and immediately felt blood. She blinked and tried to regain her focus. The blow had stunned her.

As soon as he was free Champ had turned and released a fury of kicks to Waverly who was still huddled on the ground. “I am going to bring my family the glory they have been robbed of for centuries!” He shouted between his landing kicks.

A few blinks later and Nicole could see enough to focus in on Champ. She lunged forward and wrapped her arms around him. She planted a foot and used her momentum to lift him away from Waverly. She used her body to tackle him through the table that was nearby. The combined weight of both of their bodies caused the table to crumble around them as they fell through it. She landed on top of him with a thud and it was obvious that Champ was stunned by the way he laid frozen in pain on the broken bits of wood below him. From there everything seemed to be a blur. Blinded with sheer rage she had no control over herself. Fist after fist connected with Champ from where she sat on his torso. One to the face, one to the ribs, and another to the throat. Anywhere her fists could land, they were, and there was nothing Nicole could do to stop it from happening.

Suddenly her fists were stopped and she was being tugged to her feet. She blinked and the entire world stopped spinning out of control. She could focus. Thoughts came back to her. Her hearing returned. She looked to her right and saw one of her guards holding her back. She nodded a few times then tugged at her arm for freedom. “I’m fine. Let me go.”

The man did so hesitantly.

Nicole whirled around and her heart stopped. Her chest tightened. Every last bit of air in her lungs was sucked out. She thought she was going to faint. Waverly laid crumbled on the floor. Her face bloodied. The other guard had a hold of her and was calling for medical back up.

“Move” Nicole suddenly had control of herself again. She knelt down and put a hand on the other guard’s shoulder. “Go get in the truck” She said firmly. When he seemed like he would argue she yelled “An ambulance will not be fast enough! Get in the god damn truck!”
As he scurried off Nicole moved quickly. She slid her arms under Waverly as delicately as she could and pulled her into her arms. She cradled the smaller woman into her chest then stood gently. “Shhh I’ve got you Waves.” She felt herself choking up. Her eyes were starting to sting with tears. She could not believe this had happened. She hated herself. She should have ripped Champ apart the night of the birthday party.

She somehow managed to keep her composure as she moved out of the room. She hardly blinked as her feet moved swiftly against the floor, down the steps, and finally out of the front door. She was greeted by the other guard standing with the back door of the SUV open and waiting. She gently laid Waverly’s trembling body against the seats then climbed in on the other side. She shouted to the guard driving to take off before he was even back behind the wheel.

“Ma’am what about the Duke?” The driver glanced behind him to look at Nicole with concern in his eyes.

“Fuck him. Your duty is to the Princess and he just attacked her. He is lucky he isn’t dead. Now drive.” She screamed the last words before looking back down at Waverly. She held her head and most of her torso across her lap. She leaned over and whispered to her as gently as she could “I’m going to make sure he never touches you again. I am so sorry” At the word sorry she felt herself break. The tears she had been holding back sprung free and fell down her cheeks rapidly. She closed her eyes and pulled Waverly closer to her chest. She managed to bring her forehead to rest against Waverly’s head and she held her like that as she sobbed. She would never forgive herself for letting this happen.

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“Wynonna!” Jeremy burst into her bedroom now, his eyes wild, his head on a swivel as he looked around for her.

“What?” She jumped up from where she had been eating her lunch at the table near the window. Her heart was racing because he had broken suddenly into the silence of her room and scared the living shit out of her.

“Oh good you’re here” He rushed over to her and put both of his hands on her shoulders. He took in a deep breath and nodded a few times. He opened his mouth to speak then stopped and drew in a few more quick deep breaths. It was obvious that he had run over there and he was not used to running.

“Oh my god Jeremy you need to do more cardio!” Wynonna growled and lifted her hands now to take hold of his shoulders. She gave a few firm shakes in an attempt to get him to focus. When his eyes met hers she dropped her hand ms away from him and shrugged “Spit it out! You’re really starting to freak me out.”

“Sorry” Jeremy said through another heavy exhale. He drew in one last breath and finally felt like he could talk. He licked his lips and let the breath out slowly before speaking “The ranger got back to me and he said that by the time he got to the lodge, everyone was gone. Well, not everyone, but all the people we care about.” He motioned to himself then Wynonna then blinked and shook it off “Nicole and Waverly took their truck in a hurry this morning.”

“Oh thank god” Wynonna let out a breath she had not realized she had been holding. She let out a soft chuckle as her body instantly relaxed. She moved back to her table now and sat back down “With the way you burst in here screaming like a banshee I thought something bad had happened.”

“That’s the thing” Jeremy chewed his lip nervously now. He stepped closer to the table but kept his
distance just in case Wynonna was someone who lashed out in panic and threw something. “The ranger said the front desk lady had to call an ambulance.”

“What!” Wynonna shot out of her seat so fast the table tipped over and spilled her food everywhere.

Jeremy held his hands up to Wynonna in an attempt to try and keep her calm “The ambulance wasn’t for Waverly. It was for Champ.” He bit his lip and let out a heavy sigh “They said he looked beat to Hell. No one knows what happened but they saw Nicole carrying Waverly in her arms when she left the lodge. That’s all I know.”

Wynonna blinked. She felt all of the blood drain from her body. She felt completely numb. Her head started to spin and she felt like she was going to faint. Something horrible had happened and it was all her fault. She blinked again and looked at Jeremy as a weak breath tumbled from her lips “Find them.”

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You’ve messed with the wrong bitch

“Where is she?” Wynonna stormed through the front door of the hospital and right up to the counter where all new patients were checked in. “I want to see my sister right now.”

“Hey, woah, Wynonna hold on” Nicole, who had been sitting in one of the waiting room chairs, got up quickly and moved to Wynonna. She reached out and put a hand on Wynonna’s arm. She gave her head a shake when the girl looked at her “She’s in good hands. You just have to wait.”

Seeing Nicole nearly broke Wynonna in two. There was so much emotion flowing through her at the moment that it was hard to cope with. She was confused and scared and worried. She was hurt. She was so pissed off she could hardly see straight. But when she saw Nicole she felt relieved. It didn’t matter what had been said the last time they had seen one another. All that mattered now was her best friend was safe and had done something to save her sister. So she wrapped her arms around Nicole quickly and pulled her into a desperate embrace “Oh my god I am so happy to see you.”

“It’s okay” Nicole nodded and wrapped her arms around Wynonna without hesitation. Nothing mattered to her more at the moment than making sure her oldest friend was comforted. “She’s going to be okay.”

“What happened?” Wynonna pulled back just enough to look at Nicole. She noticed patches of blood on the shirt her friend wore, dried blood on her face, Nicole’s blackening eyes, and worry surged up in her throat. Her head gave a single shake and when she spoke again her voice was weak “What did he do?”

Nicole looked around the waiting room quickly. Even though most of the Royal Guard had descended on the small mountain town hospital to secure it and ensure privacy that didn’t mean she completely trusted that it was safe to speak openly. She didn’t know if the hospital staff could be trusted. She didn’t know if there were any other spies for the Hardy family hanging around. So she decided to err on the side of caution. She took Wynonna’s hand and motioned for her to follow.

The two moved across the waiting room to a secluded corner. Nicole sat first and motioned for Wynonna to do the same. Once they had both settled into their seats Nicole scooted as close to her friend as possible. When she spoke it was softly and very carefully. She had no idea if anyone watching them would be able to pick up on what was being said just by body language so she wanted to be as neutral as possible as she spoke. “As soon as the phone lines came up I checked my voicemail. I got your messages and immediately set up for us to get home. I let Waverly know we were leaving soon. Then I left her alone so she could pack while I went to pack too. When I-” She stopped and cleared her throat. She felt herself choking up.

Wynonna reached out and took Nicole’s hand. She gave it a gentle squeeze as her eyes looked calmly at her friend. She wanted to let her know that whatever was said would not be held against her. “It’s okay Nicole. Just tell me what happened.”

“I went to get her, to tell her we were ready to go, and I heard them arguing” Nicole’s voice was ragged. It was easy to see she was fighting back tears. “He was mad because he didn’t want to leave. Then he started shouting about how when she was his wife she would have to obey him. Then I heard him hit her and I just…” She motioned vaguely forward to indicate she had gone into the room at that moment. “I had him pinned to the wall after the first time he slapped her. He was subdued, you know? He couldn’t hit her again.”

Wynonna nodded slowly and calmly even though anger was boiling in her stomach. She could not
believe that scumbag had put his hands on her sister like that. She should have said no when Waverly told her she wanted to take Champ with her on her skiing trip. But that didn’t matter now. She would have plenty of time to blame herself later. She needed to know the entire story “So why are we here?”

“I took my focus off of him for a split second, Wynonna” Nicole choked on the words. She paused and closed her eyes. Her head shook and she cleared her throat. When she looked back to her friend she felt tears slide down her cheeks “I took my hand off his head to use my radio. He head butted me and got free. It all happened so fast. He was kicking her before I could regain my balance.”

Wynonna drew in a slow breath. Her eyes closed and she counted to ten. She then slowly released the breath she had been holding. At this point she was fighting off her own tears. She had to be strong. She had to know what happened. When her eyes opened it was clear to see she was holding back tears as she nodded for Nicole to keep going.

The look in Wynonna’s eyes broke Nicole’s heart all over again. She hadn’t known she had any pieces of her heart left that were big enough to break and yet it was happening. She had to clear her throat again. Her mouth was so dry it was hard to keep talking. “I threw him off of her and then it all gets a little fuzzy…” She let out a shaky breath and her eyes closed. She felt more tears slide down her cheek as she managed to whisper “I think I killed him, Wynonna.”

Wynonna shook her head and moved to pull Nicole against herself. She wrapped her arms tightly around her friend’s broken form and held her as she whispered against her ear “It’s going to be okay, Nicole. You did the right thing. Waverly is what matters here. You got her out of there. You did your job and that is the only thing that I care about right now, okay?” She turned her head and buried it into Nicole’s neck because she couldn’t hold back any longer. She broke down. Everything that had been building since the moment Nicole had stormed out of her room four days prior finally came pouring out. This was the last straw on the back of an already overloaded camel.

The two friends sat huddled together and wrapped around one another for a long time. There was relative silence in the hospital. It helped that the waiting room they were in had been blocked off to all public access. They had plenty of other waiting rooms people could use. So the only people allowed in this one were the two of them, the guards, and the staff working Waverly’s case. This afforded them some privacy which was the smallest little light in this dark storm.

Finally Nicole pulled back from the hug. She used her shirt to wipe the snot, and now rehydrated blood, off her nose with a flinch before she reached out and used her thumbs to wipe away Wynonna’s tears. She offered her friend a soft smile and their eyes met in that moment. It was a split second, just a blink, but that was all they needed. They both knew the fight they had gotten into before Nicole had left didn’t matter now. All was forgiven.

“How did you get here so fast?” Nicole asked as their eye contact broke and she wiped Wynonna’s tears on the leg of her pants.

“Helicopter” Wynonna pointed to the ceiling to indicate the helipad on top of the hospital.

“Duh” Nicole rolled her eyes at herself, because that should have been obvious, then let out a soft laugh.

“Excuse me, Your Majesty” One of the men standing guard at the outside door of the hospital came over now. He gave Wynonna a dip of his head before speaking “Sorry to interrupt but we are getting word that there is an incoming ambulance with a critical patient. They are asking permission to stop here. The next hospital is fifty miles down the mountain.”
“Yeah of course” Wynonna waved her hand to the side as if dismissing the notion that she would deny care to someone in need. “That’s fine.”

“The ambulance is coming from the lodge” The man spoke firmly now. When Wynonna looked up at him he perked an eyebrow and gave a little nod that confirmed it was indeed the ambulance carrying Champ.

Wynonna drew in a sharp breath. She looked over at Nicole in silence asking of what she thought she should do.

Nicole opened her mouth to speak but nothing came out. She just gave her head a shake and slumped her shoulders in defeat. She had no idea what to do. The largest part of her wanted to let Champ die in that ambulance. But the best part of her, the part that made her a good human being, knew that wasn’t the right thing to do. She honestly couldn’t give Wynonna her opinion because she didn’t have one.

Wynonna’s eyes fluttered and she looked back up to the guard. She gave a nod and spoke weakly “Do you know if he’s alive?”

The man nodded once “We’ve been monitoring the radio. He’s awake. He’s in a lot of pain but he is awake.”

Wynonna gave another nod. Honestly she was relieved to hear that. Her eyes looked back to Nicole and she could visibly see her friend sighing in relief as well. She hadn’t beaten the man to death. There was another tiny plus in this situation. Although in the same situation Wynonna wasn’t sure she could have stopped herself from finishing the job.

Shaking away the thought she looked back to the man and gave a her head a dip “Let them in. But I want to see him first.”

“What?” Nicole reached out and put a hand on Wynonna’s shoulder. “I don’t think that is a good idea.”

“I want to see his face” Wynonna looked at Nicole with a fire in her eyes now. The anger was rising in her again and there was no denying how determined she was to see him in pain.

“Wynonna, I-”

“I just want to see him” Wynonna lifted her hand to stop Nicole from arguing. She looked back at the guard and nodded “Let me know when he arrives.”

The man nodded and hurried off to radio the driver and let him know they could bring the ambulance there.

“Wynonna” Nicole spoke more gently now. Her hand reached out and she took a hold of her friend’s hand. She gave it a tight squeeze as her eyes focused on Wynonna’s face “What are you doing?”

“He hit her” Wynonna bit back at Nicole sharply. She drew in a quick breath at her own tone because she knew she had just lashed out at her unfairly. She swallowed and tried again “I want to make sure he looks up into my face and realizes he has not won. That the Earps will not be destroyed by his cowardice family. I want him to fear me.”

Nicole hated the pain she saw in Wynonna’s eyes. She couldn’t say she blamed her for wanting to see Champ in pain but she knew it was out of spite and nothing else. She also knew there was no
arguing with her. So she gave a nod “I’m coming with you.”

“You don’t have to” Wynonna shook her head just once.

“I want to” Nicole said firmly. Her hand squeezed Wynonna’s once more. Truth was she wanted to see the damage she had done to him. She knew nothing would make her feel better about Waverly getting hurt but it would definitely help knowing how badly she had hurt him. She hoped she had broken all the bones in his face so he would look like a gargoyle when he healed. She shook the thought away and nodded once as if to cement what she had said. She was coming with Wynonna to the ambulance.

The radio on Nicole’s shoulder went off to tell them that the ambulance was pulling in. Nicole stood now and used her grip on Wynonna’s hand to help her to her feet. She gave her friend a nod in silent reassuring that they could do this before the two of them turned and walked hand in hand out of the doors and into the parking bay for all incoming ambulances.

It came to a stop just a few feet away and the back doors came open. Wynonna pulled Nicole firmly as she hurried to look inside the back doors. There on the stretcher was a very bruised and bloodied face looking back at them. They had it set so he was sitting up and as soon as Champ’s eyes fell to Wynonna and Nicole he started to yell frantically “No! Get them away from me! That one there, the redhead, she is the one that did this to me!”

“You’re damn right and I’d-” Nicole’s anger boiled over immediately and she nearly jumped into the back of the ambulance to finish the job. But she was stopped when Wynonna pulled her arm to stop her.

“Listen here you little shit eater” Wynonna growled and stepped up into the back of the ambulance now before anyone could stop her. She got right over his stretcher and pointed her finger in his face “If you ever come near my little sister again I will personally kill you.”

Champ’s lips parted into a wicked grin. When he did so it revealed blood lingering in his mouth from whatever tooth Nicole had knocked out of his head. He gave a little shake of his head “You stupid bitch. You can’t stop what’s going to happen. I am going to be King once you’re finally dead and my family will finally have what is rightfully ours.”

“If you think my sister will ever go through with marrying you than you’re dumber than I thought. She would rather die.” Wynonna’s hand came down across Champ’s face in a slap so fast it wiped the smirk off his lips “You’ve messed with the wrong bitch.”

Champ’s face curled into a scowl and he quickly managed to pucker his lips and push out a glob of bloody spit that landed right on Wynonna’s left cheek.

Wynonna had lunged at him when the spit landed on her face. But Nicole had grabbed her around the waist and yanked her off of him before she could land any blows. She wrestled her as far away from the ambulance as she could and put herself between Wynonna and the paramedics that were now taking the stretcher out of the back doors of the ambulance and into the hospital. Champ’s disgustingly wicked laugh could be heard until the hospital doors closed behind him.

With Champ gone Nicole turned back around to focus on Wynonna. She frowned as she used the sleeve of her shirt to wipe the bloody spit from her cheek “Don’t let him get to you. If he knows he’s rattled you then he knows he can win. We can’t let them win.”

Wynonna growled and slapped Nicole’s arm away from her face. She turned her back on her friend and used her own hand to wipe at the remaining moisture on her cheek. She shook her head and
closed her eyes. She drew in a deep breath to try and calm herself down. Nicole was right. She could not let them know they had gotten to her. When she turned back around her head nodded and she opened her eyes to find Nicole still there with her “You really fucked up his face.”

Nicole let out a laugh that was a mix of amusement at Wynonna’s words and relief that she seemed to have calmed down. Her head nodded a little bit in agreement “I guess.”

Wynonna moved back to Nicole and without warning wrapped her up into a tight hug. She laid her head against her friend’s neck once more and drew in another deep breath. She held it for a moment then released it. When she did she let go of the hug and stepped back. Her eyes lifted and she nodded as her gaze met Nicole’s “Thank you for saving Waverly. For being there for me even though I was totally out of line with what I said to you and-”

“Hey” Nicole put both hands on Wynonna’s shoulders. She offered a very soft, reassuring smile to her friend before letting her head nod just once “It doesn’t matter what you said to me. I understand why you did. Let’s let it go. Waverly is what matters now, alright?”

Wynonna nodded quickly and her eyes fluttered a few times because she was trying to blink away tears. She drew in another deep breath and wiped at her eyes. She slowly breathed out then put on a forced smile. She reached her hand out to Nicole then motioned with her head to the hospital “Let’s go see if they’ll let us in to see her.”

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Wynonna cracked the door of Waverly’s hospital room open slowly. They had been told they could see her but they weren’t sure if she was awake yet so she did not want to disturb her sister if she was asleep. As she stepped into the room she saw Waverly sitting up in bed and she immediately rushed over to her and threw her arms around her in a tight hug “Babygirl…”

“Ouch” Waverly groaned but did not pull away from the hug. Instead she returned it tightly and though she was in pain she held her sister with all her strength. She couldn’t help it when a few tears fell from her eyes. “I’m so glad you’re here. I’m so sorry.”

“Sorry?” Wynonna pulled out of the hug quickly and looked at her sister in shock. “You have absolutely nothing to be sorry about.”

“I shouldn’t have come with him. I should have gotten rid of him after the way he acted at my party. I was so stupid.”

“You shush” Wynonna reached down now and took hold of Waverly’s hand. “You listen to me, babygirl. The victim is never, ever to blame. So I never want to hear you apologize for that man, or any man, ever again. Do you hear me?”

Waverly nodded but did not look up at her sister. She still felt absolutely horrible. She felt like the dumbest person in the entire world for letting Champ do this to her.

“Hey” Wynonna reached out and took hold of her sister’s chin very gently. She used it to guide her eyes upward and when they met her own she offered a smile “You’re alive and that is all that matters to me, okay?”

Waverly nodded just once. She bit her bottom lip to fight off more tears before giving a few more nods. “Thank you.”

“Don’t thank me” Wynonna motioned to Nicole still standing near the door and nodded. “She’s the one you should be thanking.”
“It’s fine” Nicole said quickly to stop Waverly from saying thank you. Honestly she didn’t feel like a hero. She didn’t feel anything but awful. She should have been there. She should have never left Waverly alone with Champ. If it was anyone’s fault it was her own and she would go to her grave believing that. “How are you feeling?” She decided to change the subject so the focus wasn’t on herself.

“Alright” Waverly said as she glanced down at herself in the hospital bed. “They said I have a mild concussion so they want to keep me overnight for observation. I also have a few broken ribs…” She motioned to her torso and delicately laid her arm across herself. “Oh and I had to get two stitches.” Her other hand lifted and she touched at the gash just below her right eye where one of Champs hideous rings had cut her when he had backhanded her. “But I’ll be alright.”

“You’ll be more than alright” Wynonna said now with conviction. Her hand lifted and she grabbed Waverly’s chin again. She used her grip to gently turn the girl’s head back and forth as she admired the bandaging over the stiches. She gave a nod of approval then dropped her hand away “It’s gonna look badass, babygirl. No one will mess with you ever again.”

Waverly nodded and her hand lifted to touch at the stitches again. Her eye was pretty swollen so each touch hurt. It was a reminder to herself to never be so dumb again. She had to be more careful. She was a Princess, next in line for the Crown, she had to remember not everyone was going to have pure intentions with her.

It was too hard to look at Waverly in that hospital bed. Nicole closed her eyes and turned her face away. Her back was pressed to the door frame behind her and she wished she could melt into the wall and disappear. She would never forgive herself for this. In her eyes she had failed. She had failed as a friend. She had failed as the Head of the Royal Guard. She had disappointed her family. She was so ashamed.

Waverly again spoke softly to break the momentary silence in the room “He was crazy. He kept saying I was going to have to marry him and obey his every command. He said something about what daddy did. Do you know what he was talking about, Wynonna?”

Wynonna felt her gut twist on itself. She was hoping they could at least leave the hospital before having this conversation. But Waverly was smart, too smart, and it was only a matter of time before she asked about it. So Wynonna nodded and let out a sigh “Yeah, babygirl, I do.”

“I’m going to give you guys some privacy” Nicole said softly and motioned behind herself to the door. Truth was she needed some fresh air.

“Stay” Wynonna looked at her friend and pleaded through her eyes for her to stay in the room. She wasn’t sure she could get through this without her there. “I mean, if you want to” She added almost shyly because she still felt absolutely hideous about how she had used her power over Nicole a few days earlier.

Even though she didn’t want to stay she nodded in agreement that she would. When all was said and done she was a part of this family and family was the most important thing to her. So she would always choose them over herself. Always.

Relief flooded Wynonna when Nicole said she would stay. She gave a single nod of thanks then looked back to her sister. She took hold of one of her hands and gave it a gentle squeeze before clearing her throat to speak “Jeremy has been researching how to break the Earp Curse. A few days ago he cracked it pretty wide open actually.”

Waverly sat up a little straighter in bed. Her eyes widened and she looked intently at her sister “What
“Turns out” Wynonna swallowed the lump in her throat before continuing “It’s not really a curse at all. One of the families our ancestors screwed over has been taking revenge on us ever since. Every time one of our family members has died suddenly or tragically it has actually been an assassination.”

“What?” Waverly blinked just once. She looked stunned. She would have never believed it. Throughout their family’s reign over the Ghost River Triangle they had been beloved and celebrated. Well, mostly. There had been a crazy king or two down the line but most of the Monarchs in their family were widely liked.

Wynonna let out a huff of laugh that had no amusement behind it and nodded once “Yep. So anyway Jeremy figured it out. That is actually why Nicole and I fought the other night…” She glanced back at her friend still standing near the door and gave her an apologetic look. She turned back to Waverly and shrugged “I was freaked and scared and I wanted to make sure you were protected so I said something really shitty to her.”

Waverly glanced to Nicole, who dropped her eyes to the floor to avoid eye contact, before looking back at her sister curiously. She motioned to Nicole but didn’t look away from her sister “She refused to tell me what you guys fought about no matter how hard I pushed her. You should have known you can trust her with anything.”

“I do. Of course I do…” Wynonna turned now and looked back to Nicole. When she saw her friend staring at the ground she frowned. She turned and got out of the chair she had settled in so she could move over to Nicole. She reached up and took hold of her chin like she had done to Waverly’s not long before. She used it to guide her eyes upward and when their gazes met she spoke firmly “I know I can trust you with anything. I hope you believe me. I haven’t stopped kicking myself since you left.”

“No it’s not okay” Nicole choked up immediately and turned her face away from Wynonna. She closed her eyes and let the tears trickle down her cheeks. It was all too much. The fight, the feelings of betrayal, the worry, what had happened to Waverly, and now finding out why her father had been killed was just way too much for her to handle. She was starting to break down.

“No it’s not okay” Wynonna argued with the statement that Nicole would have made. She used her grip on her chin to pull Nicole’s face back toward her own. She lifted her other hand and gently used her thumb to swipe the tears off her cheeks gently. “But I will never treat you like that again, I promise. I don’t care if it leads to me being overthrown by the masses. I’d rather be the Queen who everyone hated than be the bitch who used my power to control my best friend.”

Nicole opened her eyes and gave them a roll. She lifted her hand and wiped at her nose, wincing slightly in pain, before shaking her head “I get why you said what you said. It’s going to take some time for me to heal from the hurt it caused, alright? But I’m not mad at you so can we please drop it.”

“What did she say?” Waverly asked now from the bed. In watching her sister and friend interact she had picked up on the fact that what Wynonna had said had been pretty unforgivable and yet Nicole seemed willing to forgive her.

A single tear left Wynonna’s eye as she stared into Nicole’s teary gaze. The two of them shared a deep look where all the pain and ugliness and anger that their fight had caused between them seemed to both live and die. It was replaced quickly with the pure love that they held for one another. Wynonna was not a good enough person to deserve Nicole by her side and yet there she was. Still. She would do whatever it took to make sure that never changed.
“I love you, kid” Wynonna whispered and gave Nicole a little smile before her hand dropped from her chin and she turned back toward her sister. She drew in a deep breath, wiped at her eyes, then returned to the chair next to the bed. She sat back down and without hesitation she took Waverly’s hand in her own. “I ordered Nicole not to kill Champ even though I knew she wanted “to rip him limb from limb.”

“Wh-” Waverly looked completely confused now. Her eyes flickered back and forth from her sister to Nicole and back again. Her head gave a shake and she breathed out softly “Why would she want to rip him limb from limb? I mean…” She motioned to herself in the hospital bed and shrugged “I guess I know why now. But why before this? And…” Her eyes focused on her sister now as she asked more quietly “Why would you have to order that?”

“Because” Wynonna licked her lips. Her mouth was suddenly dry. She didn’t want to say it out loud because it made it all too real. She had been in a world of slight denial and that world was gone now as she sat at her sister’s beside in a hospital because one of the people who hated her family had gotten too close. She gave her head a shake and cleared her throat “The family that has been behind the assassinations is the Hardys.”

Waverly’s heart plunged into her stomach. Her mouth dropped open in shock. She felt her fingers and toes go numb. She blinked just once and looked at Nicole. When she saw the serious look on her friend’s face she knew this was real. She breathed out a shaky breath and turned her attention back to her sister “Champ’s family has been killing our relatives?”

“For 400 years” Wynonna confirmed with a nod. “Since one of our ancestors who had been betrothed to one of theirs ran off with another man and broke the promise the King had made. The Hardys were supposed to be the rulers of the Ghost River Triangle this entire time, essentially, and they are pissed about it.”

“Oh my god” Waverly breathed out weakly. She thought about it for a second then shook her head “Oh my god! They have been in rule over parts of our country this entire time and it’s not enough for them?” Before Wynonna could answer Waverly was continuing quickly “This family is petty enough to continue to kill our family in hopes to take over when we are all dead one day? Oh my god!” She was starting to feel the rage building inside her “How juvenile! I am appalled! We need to take care of this right away, Wynonna. We need to-” She stopped just then as a thought occurred to her. She narrowed her eyes on her sister and spoke in a near growl “You knew this and you still let Champ come with me on this trip? How could you?”

“Hey, woah, take a breath Waverly” Wynonna held her hands up in a motion of surrender because she did not want a fight to break out. “We had it under control. We had a meeting and we all agreed that keeping our enemies close was the best way to get under this. If he knew that we were onto his family we felt there was less of a chance that we could catch them in the act.”

“You used me!” Waverly gasped as her face twisted with betrayal. “You put me in danger just so you could spy on him? And you!” She looked at Nicole now as fury filled her stare “You just sat there and let me be…” She motioned vaguely in no specific motion and shrugged “….NEAR him!? You let him do-”

“I told her to!” Wynonna yelled now to stop the verbal assault on Nicole. She knew her friend felt bad enough about what had happened and Waverly blaming her would only make it worse. “That was my order, okay? That’s why we fought. She didn’t want to go along with it. She didn’t trust Champ. She had your well being in mind. She was fucking right, alright? Is that what you want to hear? That I made the wrong call because I thought spying on Champ could help protect us in the long run?”
Waverly was crying now. Her eyes were locked in a harsh glare at her sister. Her head slowly moved back and forth in disbelief as she looked at the last person she thought would ever betray her. “I will never forgive you for using me as a pawn in your fucking chess game, Wynonna.”

“Waverly, I—”

“I don’t want to hear it” Waverly hissed as she cut off her sister’s weak attempt at an explanation. “You know what’s really stupid? Had you trusted me enough to be an actual adult, to be an actual member of this family, you could have told me what was going on and I could have been prepared. I would have been careful. I would have gone along with your plan and helped you spy on him and maybe even tried to get some information out of him. I could have helped, Wynonna. Instead you sent me out on the front line to take all the damage. I was the body you tossed on the grenade to soften the blow.”

“That’s not it at all” Wynonna looked absolutely wounded by her sister’s words.

“I don’t want to look at you” Waverly closed her eyes and turned away from her sister. “Babygirl, please—”

“Leave!” Waverly shouted.

Wynonna was stunned. This is not how she thought her sister would have reacted to the news. It was a lot to take in, a lot to process, and she knew that. Maybe after she thought it over Waverly would realize Wynonna had been trying to protect her.

Nicole bit her lip. She stared between the two sisters for a moment because she had no idea what to do. She wanted to help but she wasn’t sure she could. So she just stood there. Then Wynonna got up from the chair and moved toward the door. Nicole stood there stiffly and watched her friend approach. They didn’t say a single word. Wynonna gave her a pleading look then motioned with her head back toward Waverly and that was it. She knew that she had to stay and be with her now. So she stepped aside and let Wynonna leave.

When she heard the door close Waverly opened her eyes. She was not surprised to see Nicole still standing there. She let out a soft sob and reached for the tissues on the side of her bed. “I am so sorry she dragged you into this.”

Nicole shook her head and slowly approached the bed. She stayed standing but reached out and put a hand on Waverly’s shoulder “You were right, you know? She should have told you. In fact I told her that she should have told you. But…” She let out a sigh and waved her hand to the side. “You know what? I’m not going to take sides or try and tell you she was wrong just to make you feel better. We both know she was wrong. Hell, she knows she was wrong. That doesn’t matter right now.”

“Doesn’t matter?” Waverly’s voice rose an octave. She motioned feverishly to herself in the bed which caused pain to shoot through her ribs. She groaned and grabbed onto her side before she breathed out slowly “I got the shit beat out of me and it doesn’t matter?”

“It does. Of course that matters” Nicole let out a defeated sigh and sat now. She moved her hand from Waverly’s shoulder to her forearm as she sat in the chair now with a shrug. She felt so stuck. She could see both sides and she agreed with both sides. So what did she do? Just sit and listen, she supposed, because that was the only thing she could do without making things worse. So she nodded at Waverly and spoke gently “I’m sorry this happened. I feel like, everything else aside, I failed you. I had my responsibilities and I didn’t fulfill them and for that I can never be sorry enough.”
“Don’t blame yourself” Waverly shook her head gently. Her hand moved now to cover the one of Nicole’s that was resting on her other arm. “Wynonna has always been clueless when it comes to me. I swear to god she still thinks I’m twelve.”

Nicole nodded in agreement because it was absolutely correct. Wynonna treated her little sister like a child. There was no excuse for it. “I think all of this happening like it did forced her into a position she hadn’t matured enough for, you know? And in her own immaturity I think she overlooks the fact that you’re all grown up too. I mean she loves you and all she has ever really wanted to do is protect you from all of this madness and now that she can’t? I think it kills her.”

Waverly just shook her head. She let out a heavy sigh and her eyes moved from Nicole to the window of the hospital. She stared out into the white snowy hills of the mountains for a moment before she cleared her throat and spoke “I don’t want to talk about her anymore. I think I am going to try and get some sleep.”

Nicole gave a quick nod of her head. She let her hand slide off of Waverly’s arm and she sat back into the chair. “I’ll be right here when you get up, okay? I won’t leave unless you want me to go.”

Waverly smiled very softly to herself. She was so grateful for Nicole’s genuine care when it came to her. Without looking away from the window she reached her hand out in search of Nicole “Stay.”

Nicole bit her lip to fight a smile as her hand moved to take the one of Waverly’s that was looking for it. She gave a tight squeeze then let out a soft sigh “I’ll be right here.”

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As promised, Nicole was by Waverly's side when she woke up. She stayed by her side when the doctors came to check on her. She was by her side every time a nurse took her vital signs. Nicole only stepped out when she was ordered to do so by the radiologist who brought the portable x-ray machine into the room.

She felt bad about the fact that she hadn't left Waverly to check on Wynonna. So while Waverly was being x-rayed she stepped away to find her friend. She knew she had not left the hospital because Nicole would have been notified. So she went toward the only place she thought Wynonna would go. The cafeteria.

She was relieved to find Wynonna sitting alone near a window. Well as alone as she ever got with one armed guard standing nearby. She moved over to the table and sat down across from her with a sigh “This is a public area, you know?”

Wynonna shrugged and didn't even bother looking up from her cup of coffee “It is already all over the news. I've been on the phone all night with what's her face answering questions about how she should approach it.”

“Rosita?” Nicole asked with a perked eyebrow.

Wynonna tapped her nose to indicate Nicole had guessed right before lifting her cup to take a drink.

Wynonna nodded. She figured news of Waverly being brought into the hospital would spread quickly. Hopefully none of the details of why she was there were being shared.

Wynonna let out a sigh and slowly looked up at Nicole. She could see her friend looked tired and she smirked weakly “You look like Hell. You ever sleep?”

“I could ask you the same thing” Nicole quipped back because obviously Wynonna had not slept the
night before either. They shared a slight smile and that was it. Both of them were far too tired to tease each other further.

Silence fell between them now. Nicole watched Wynonna drink her coffee and avoid eye contact. After a minute of that it grew old and Nicole let out a heavy sigh “She was shocked and upset and on some pain medication. She will forgive you.”

Wynonna shrugged and finally brought her eyes to meet Nicole's. A frown was plastered on her features as she spoke “I really shit the bed on this one. I was just trying to keep her safe.”

“This is not your fault” Nicole reached out and gently laid her hand over Wynonna's. Her eyes never left her friend as she spoke firmly “I think a part of us all thought it was the best idea. None of us took two seconds to consider if Champ was dangerous.”

Wynonna just shrugged again. She looked into her cup and realized it was empty. She rolled her eyes and set it down with a little more force than she had intended which caused the side of the styrofoam to crack. A heavy sigh left her lips and she looked back to Nicole “What do I do now, Haught?”

Nicole just gave a shake of her head. She honestly had no idea. She had never seen Waverly this upset before. Finally her hand wrapped around Wynonna's tightly and she offered her a slight smile “I think she just needs a little time. She was in a good mood this morning. Maybe she will be ready to talk by the time she gets to leave tonight.”

“Maybe” Wynonna relented with a shrug. She stood now and took her hand out of Nicole's. “Don’t leave her side until then, alright? I have some shit to deal with” She motioned in a non-distinct direction and shrugged. “Call me when you know when she's being released.”

“Wynonna, wait” Nicole stood now and put her hand on her friend's arm to stop her from leaving.

“Wait? And do what? Sit around feeling like shit? Nicole my family is in danger and considering the son of the people who want me dead is in the hospital too…” She shook her head “I have shit I have to take care of to make sure this doesn't get out of hand. Go sit with Waverly and let me know when she is being released. Alright?” She made it sound like a question but her tone made it clear she wasn't asking.

Nicole nodded. She knew when to argue and now was not the time. She was worried about Wynonna but she also knew if her friend didn't do something to fix this mess it would drive her mad. So she let her go. She waited until she was out of ear shot before she got on her radio. She instructed her team to have three guards on the Queen at all times.

Feeling better that Wynonna was at least not alone she headed back towards Waverly's room. She was stopped just outside the door by one of the nurses. She was greeted with a smile by a shy girl who spoke kindly to her.

“Nicole?”

“Uh yeah” Nicole looked a little confused. She glanced at the door and the guard standing watch outside Waverly's room just shrugged.

“Oh hi. My name is Emily and I'm one of the Princess’ nurses. She wanted me to take a look at your nose” The girl motioned to Nicole's face that was bruising and had dried blood on it. She had yet to clean herself up.

“It is totally fine” Nicole shrugged it off.
“She said you’d say that” The girl smiled very sweetly. She put on a fresh pair of rubber gloves that she had been holding and motioned to her face once more. “If I could just examine-”

“I'm fine. It was just a little- OUCH!” Nicole wailed in pain and stepped back from the nurse with a frown. “What the Hell? I didn't give you permission to touch me.”

“I am so sorry” The girl looked terrified. “The Princess was so insistent and I didn't want her mad at me so I just…” She bit her lip and looked like she was going to cry.

Nicole closed her eyes. She was such a damn sucker for a girl in tears. She hated seeing any girl cry. She let out a sigh and lifted a hand in a slight shushing motion as her eyes opened again “Alright, alright there's no need to cry. Just be careful.”

The girl looked relieved. She licked her lips and lifted her hand back toward Nicole's nose timidly now. She paused and looked at her one last time for permission. When she got the go ahead nod she once more grabbed the injured nose.

Nicole groaned but did not pull away. Her eyes welled with tears immediately. Pain was radiating through her entire face.

“It is definitely broken” Emily sounded sad as she released Nicole's nose. “Luckily we have a really good plastic surgeon who can set it for you.”

“What? I need surgery?” Nicole's eyes widened in surprise and fear. She had never had surgery before.

“Oh I don't know…” Emily mumbled out shyly again. Her head shook and she motioned to Waverly's room now. “I will send him in once he is available. He can answer any questions you might have. Again I am really sorry. I am just so nervous.”

“It's fine” Nicole grumbled and moved toward the room without saying goodbye. She moved passed her fellow guard and quickly slipped into the room. Once inside with the door shut behind her she let out a huff at Waverly. “You told her to force herself onto my nose?”

“Oops?” Waverly's nose crinkled in a look of guilt. “I was worried. It looks bad. Plus I knew you had been so focused on me you hadn't stopped to check on yourself so I did it for you.”

“Yeah well she says I might need surgery” Nicole moved now to the bathroom that was attached to the room. She turned on the light and looked into the mirror. She was immediately greeted with the sight of bruising under her eyes and all around her nose. It did look terrible. She sighed and turned out of the bathroom now. She went and plopped herself down into the chair she had been sitting in all night. Her fingers touched at her nose and she winced “Well now it hurts.”

“Stop touching it” Waverly said with a soft laugh. She watched Nicole touch her nose a few more times before she rolled her eyes and reached her hand out to take hold of Nicole's. She pulled it away from her nose and gave it a squeeze “Why don't you try and get some rest while we wait for the doctor to come check on you.”

Nicole wanted to lie and say she wasn't tired but at that exact moment a huge yawn ripped out of her mouth. She let it pass then let out a soft laugh. Her head nodded a bit and she slid down the chair enough to kick her feet onto the bed so her position mimicked laying down “If you need me at all just wake me up.”

“There's plenty of room up here” Waverly had scooted over in her bed to make a space for Nicole. “You saved my life the least I can do is share my bed.”
“No, Waves, you don't need to-”

“Get your ass up here” Waverly said sharply but with a smile on her face.

Maybe Nicole should have said no. In fact she was positive she should have. But in that moment she didn't care. She smiled and climbed up next to Waverly. As soon as she laid back she felt how sore her body was. She nodded to herself then looked at Waverly “If I hurt you at all I want you to push me out of bed.”

“I think I'll be fine” Waverly said with a laugh. She looped her arm through Nicole's and gave a tight squeeze “Get some rest now.”

Nicole had already closed her eyes. Her body was already succumbing to the comfort of the bed. She hadn't realized she was so exhausted and now there was no fighting it. Within minutes she was asleep.

Waverly watched Nicole drift off. Once she was sure the girl was asleep she leaned over and kissed her very gently on her forehead. She laid her own head near Nicole's on the pillow and whispered to her softly “Thank you for saving my life.” She knew Nicole would never accept being thanked so she took the chance to do it now and hoped beyond hope that she had heard it in her dreams.

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Nicole had indeed been told that she would need a quick surgery to fix her broken nose. It was a simple enough procedure with no real risk. The only reason she needed to have it fixed in surgery and not just set by hand like usual was because of how it had been broken. The bone had been pushed up and into her face instead of shifted to one side or the other. So a little anesthesia, a few tools, and Nicole would look good as new in no time. That didn’t stop Wynonna from being worried about her friend. She had demanded all the best treatment for her.

She sat next to Nicole’s hospital bed now waiting for her to wake up. She wasn’t worried that something had gone wrong she just wanted to make sure Nicole wasn’t alone when she came off the medicine. Her best friend had been by her side through pretty much every little hiccup in her life so it was the least she could do to be there for her now. That, and, being here meant she didn’t have to see Waverly who was still refusing to talk to her.

Nicole groaned as the anesthesia started to wear off and she started to wake up. She was still on pretty good pain medication but that didn’t stop all of the pain. As soon as the fuzziness of the drugs that put her under for the surgery wore off she could feel the pressure in her face. It felt like they had grabbed hold of her nose with huge metal pincher and pulled until it popped back into place. Which was, actually, exactly what they had done.

Her hand lifted and she touched at the bandages around her nose before her eyes even opened. She wasn’t even sure if they could open with how swollen they felt. Her fingertips brushed the soft plastic acting as a brace on either side of her nose and she winced at the pain it caused. She let her hand drop and she let out a sigh “Damn it.”

“Hey” Wynonna had moved the chair she sat in closer to the bed once she realized Nicole was coming to. She reached out and gently laid her hand against her friend’s arm. “Take it easy, Nicole. I’m right here.”

A soft smile came to Nicole’s lips when she heard Wynonna’s voice. Her head rolled very gently on her pillow as her eyes opened. When her gaze fell on her friend she nodded just once “You’re still here?”

“Oh course I’m still here” Wynonna said with a laugh. “There is nowhere else in the world I would rather be.”

“Don’t you have a country to run?” Nicole asked with a smirk. “And a shit storm from the press to shut down?”

“Wow all you think about is work don’t you?” Wynonna rolled her eyes and gave a laugh. “All of that can wait a little longer. I wanted to be here when you woke up.”

Nicole nodded against the pillow again. Her hand once more lifted and she touched at her bandaged nose. She let out a heavy sigh at the pain it caused. “I can’t believe that asshole actually broke my nose bad enough that I needed surgery to fix it.”

“Well there is one positive that came out of it” Wynonna said with a little shrug as she leaned over the bed now to look more directly at Nicole’s face.

“Yeah? What might that be? The fact that I got a decent night’s sleep for once?” Nicole smiled
slightly to herself because she thought she was funny.

“That too” Wynonna said with a nod “But, actually, I was talking about the improvements to your face.” She fought a smirk as her hand started to point at various places on Nicole’s face “I told them since they were going in anyway they could spruce you up. Make you a real hottie.” She reached down now and grabbed the handheld mirror she had brought with her. “Take a look!” She bit back a laugh as she turned the handle so the glass part of the mirror was facing Nicole. Only there was no glass. Instead she had replaced it with a cut out picture of herself. She nodded and looked at her own face looking back at her then turned it to show Nicole again “Look at that babe!”

“Very funny” Nicole rolled her eyes even though she laughed as well. She was glad Wynonna was having so much fun teasing her. At least it meant she wasn’t letting everything that had happened totally get her down.

Wynonna laughed softly and put the fake mirror down. She sat back in her seat and reached for Nicole’s hand now. Taking it gently into her own she gave a light squeeze “In all honesty how are you feeling, kid?”

“You should really stop calling me kid. It wasn’t cute when we were teenagers and it definitely isn’t cute now” Nicole mumbled as her head turned to the side on her pillow so she could see Wynonna now that she had sat down.

“Oh come on” Wynonna let out a huff of disapproval. “What am I supposed to call you? That’s been my pet name for you pretty much our entire lives!”

“Nicole?” She offered her own name as a solution as if that should have been obvious.

“Boring” Wynonna brushed her own hair off her face and shrugged. “How about red? Or I could call you toots or slugger?” She lifted her shoulders in a slight shrug at her own suggestions. “There’s always sugar tits?”

“Oh my god” Nicole groaned and rolled her head back so she wasn’t looking at her friend any longer. She let out a soft laugh “What is it with your need to nickname everyone?”

“That is not true” Wynonna protested with a slight laugh. “I use identifying features to indicate who I am talking about because I am shit with names! If I give you an actual nickname it is done lovingly and as a term of endearment.”

Nicole just shook her head and laughed very lightly. Honestly she was glad Wynonna was there to distract her and keep the mood light. If she had woken up alone she would have been miserable. She drew in a breath and turned her head back to look at her friend before breathing out softly “Fine you can call me kid, I guess. I mean it’s stupid since I’m only two years younger than you but I’d rather that than sugar tits.”

“Are you sure?” Wynonna seemed really concerned for only a second before she smirked “Because I was really liking the sound of sugar tits.”

“No” Nicole laughed the word out softly. She gazed at her friend in amusement for a moment before her smile faded slightly. Deciding to change the subject immediately before it got out of hand she spoke quickly but timidly now “Have you seen Waverly?”

Wynonna’s smile dropped from her face completely. She rolled her eyes and sat back in her chair with a sigh “Wow you sure do know how to kill my buzz.”

“Come on Wynonna” Nicole said gently. Her hand, which was still being held, squeezed against her
friend’s now. “She is your sister. You two need to make up.”

“She is pissed at me and I don’t blame her” Wynonna breathed out heavily and shrugged her shoulders. Her eyes focused on her feet and the way the toes of her shoes tapped together now. She shook her head after a moment and mumbled “I have to give her time. If I push she will pull away and that is the last thing I want.”

Nicole nodded and gave another squeeze to her hand. The two of them fell silent for a few moments. Nicole could feel the pain medication starting to wear off because her face was beginning to throb. So after a minute of that she cleared her throat and looked over at Wynonna “Can you go get a nurse for me? I think I need some more pain medication.”

Worried filled Wynonna’s face as she sat up straighter in her chair. She frowned and looked at her friend with deep concern “Are you alright?”

“Yeah fine I just…” Nicole motioned vaguely with her hand now that Wynonna had released it and shrugged “Can feel it, you know? Maybe just see if I can get something to take the edge off.”

“Yeah sure” Wynonna stood quickly now. She leaned over Nicole in the bed and brushed her hair off her face before placing a very light kiss to her forehead. She gave a smile then motioned to the door “Just gonna step right out here and see if I can flag someone down.”

Nicole nodded and watched Wynonna move toward the door. She waited until the door clicked shut before she quickly rolled to her left and reached for the phone that was near her bed. Pain rushed through her face at the exertion it took to complete the motion but it was worth it. Once she had the phone she quickly dialed a few numbers on it and held it to her face. Her eyes stayed on the door just in case Wynonna’s return was quick. She hoped it wasn’t. She needed to complete this phone call as if her life depended on it.

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Wynonna had successfully found someone to give Nicole more medications. One of the side effects of that was the fact that Nicole had fallen asleep shortly after. So Wynonna had used the quiet time to make a few phone calls herself. She called Rosita to ask how she was handling all the press. She called Jeremy and Dolls. She even called Doc to update him completely and listen to him lecturing her about what he thought her next step should be. He was only her Royal Advisor though so she didn’t have to listen to him if she didn’t want to. She would consider it, though.

When Nicole had woken up again the two friends had fallen back into a playful banter and light conversation. Wynonna made a rule that there was no talking about work allowed. Then she realized that meant Nicole would focus on Waverly so she quickly vetoed that subject too. This led them into a random conversation about Nicole’s time in the Army and the various things she had witnessed. It was actually pretty interesting. Wynonna realized she had never asked her friend about her time in the service before and she wondered why that had been.

Their conversation was interrupted when a soft knock came to the door. Nicole’s heart jumped into her throat because she knew who was on the other side and she was anxious about how Wynonna would react.

“Are you…” Wynonna glanced at the door then back to her friend curiously “…should I let them in?” It was easy to see that she was worried about whether or not Nicole was ready for visitors.

With a little nod and motion to the door, Nicole gave the go ahead to let the visitor in.
“Are you awake?” Waverly’s soft voice broke into the room as the door was pulled open for her by the guard that was standing watch inside Nicole’s room.

Wynonna stood up from where she had been sitting and looked obviously surprised by the arrival of her sister.

Waverly reached down and pulled the brake on her wheelchair to stop the guard who was pushing her from progressing further into the room as soon as she saw Wynonna. Her eyes widened in shock for a moment before she shook her head and looked right past her sister to Nicole in the bed “Seriously? Are you trying to Parent Trap us or something?”

“No, hey” Nicole spoke gently as she scooted herself into a more upright sitting position on the bed. “Please, come in. I would really like to see you.”

“I can go” Wynonna offered softly. Her eyes flickered to her sister then back to the floor. She knew how mad Waverly still was so she did not want to do anything to upset her further.

“Stay” Nicole said firmly. She looked from Wynonna to Waverly and gave her head a single shake. “I just had surgery and I would like the two people who are most important in the world to me by my side. If you can’t be adult enough to sit in the same room with one another than perhaps I don’t want either of you here.”

Wynonna bit her lip. She felt bad. Nicole was right, they needed to put their differences aside for a moment. She smirked and looked up now at her sister and motioned her head toward Nicole “Mom’s mad at you.”

Waverly rolled her eyes before reaching down to take the brake off on her chair so the guard could wheel her forward again. She glanced at him with a nod to indicate he could start pushing again. She made her way to the same side of the bed where Wynonna’s chair was sitting then gave a motion for the guard to go ahead and step back outside the room. She looked at Nicole, completely ignoring her sister, and reached for her hand “How is your nose?”

Wynonna shrugged in defeat. She had tried to be civil by making a joke and she got ignored. So she would just be silent.

“Hurts” Nicole stated plainly. “How are you feeling?”

“Better” Waverly said with a nod. “The doctors cleared me to go home. I’m kind of just waiting for you.”

Nicole smiled and gave Waverly’s hand a soft squeeze “You know I’ll be out of here by the end of today. You could have gone on without me.”

“Actually…” Wynonna interrupted now. She grabbed the chair she had been sitting in and pulled it across the floor. Each inch that the feet on the bottom of the chair slid over the tile on the floor caused a squeaking sound. It was slow and tedious but she squeaked the chair all the way around the bed to the other side. Once it was in place she sat and gave a nod as if that had not been awkward “We aren’t going back to the Palace right away.” Her eyes lifted to Waverly and she spoke firmly “None of us are.”

“What?” Nicole’s eyes widened as much as they could which actually ended up hurting. She winced but didn’t make much more of it as she stared at Wynonna “Why not? And if we aren’t going back to the Palace where are we going?”

“The Earps have had a little vacation cabin for decades” Wynonna said with a little shrug. “It’s
tucked away in a private place in the middle of the countryside. There’s a lake and trees and plenty of fresh air. I figured it would be a great place for you two to get some rest and heal up before having to head back and deal with…” She motioned vaguely around herself and sighed “Everything.”

“I don’t like it” Nicole said with a quick shake of her head. “It’s not safe.”

“No one knows where it’s at” Waverly said calmly and offered a soothing squeeze to Nicole’s hand. “The family has been taking secluded retreats there since the early 1900’s.”

Wynonna nodded in agreement at what Waverly had said. She gave her sister a soft smile then looked quickly at Nicole just in case Waverly decided to frown at her “I’ve set it all up with Dolls. He is going to have troops set up a secure five mile radius with like tanks and shit. Jeremy is hooking us up with secure satellite communications so I can continue to do my shit from there while you two rest. I have your twenty best guardsmen already set up there. We will be completely safe.” She reached now for Nicole’s other hand and gave it a gentle pat “I’ve been paying attention to you. I’ve learned a thing or two.”

“Wow” Nicole let out an impressed sounding laugh. She glanced at Waverly and nodded just once “Sounds like she really knows what she’s doing doesn’t it?”

Waverly just rolled her eyes as her shoulders shrugged. She let her gaze drop to where her hand held Nicole’s and she mumbled under her breath “Too bad she didn’t know what she was doing before I got my ass beat…”

“That’s it” Nicole said sharply as her hands pulled out of the touch of both Earp girls. She folded her arms across her chest and looked back and forth between the two of them. “I am not going to be stranded in a cabin alone with you two if you are going to be like this.”

“She’s the one who-“ Wynonna started but was cut off by Waverly shouting.

“YOU'RE THE ONE-”

“ENOUGH!” Nicole yelled which cause her entire face to give one giant throb of pain. She growled and moved a hand up to cover her nose. She sucked in air through gritted teeth as she tried to breathe away the pain. It subsided quickly and when it did her hand was slapped down to the bed and her eyes lifted again to shift between the sisters. Her stare landed on Waverly first “She messed up and she knows that. I’m not saying you have to forgive her right away but can you at least acknowledge that her intentions were good?”

“But she-”

“No” Nicole pointed at Waverly to stop her rebuttal and gave her head a twitch of a shake because any more movement hurt. “I don’t want to go over it all again. Mistakes were made by everyone involved. We are a family and we are bound to mess up every now and then, alright? But if we can’t get forgiveness from the ones closest to us then we aren’t a very good family now are we?”

Waverly decided not to argue. Instead she just shook her head and dropped her eyes to the bed.

“So just promise me no more bickering about the mistakes that were made. Instead…” Nicole turned to look at Wynonna now and gave a nod “Let’s promise to learn from our mistakes and move forward…” She reached out now and took hold of both of their hands. She nodded at that as she brought all of their hands together in the middle of her lap and held onto them tightly so they couldn’t pull away “….together.”

Waverly let out a heavy sigh. She knew Nicole was right but she was still so hurt by her sister.
Finally she looked up at Wynonna and relented a nod “Fine. But I’m still mad at you.”

“Fine. I don’t blame you for being pissed” Wynonna agreed quickly. Her face was soft as she gazed across the hospital bed at her sister. She wanted nothing more than for Waverly to look at her with that look of wild admiration she always seemed to hold for her bigger sister. But, hey, she wasn’t yelling so she would take what she could get. Baby steps, right?

“Good” Nicole shook their two hands in a weird sort of three way, four handed, agreement then let go. She looked at the two girls one at a time then motioned lazily to her hospital room door “I guess we just have to wait for the doctor to come release me then.” She smiled slightly because, and maybe it was the pain medicine still making her loopy but, she was kind of excited. She loved the wilderness so going to a cabin in the middle of nowhere sounded like Heaven. She honestly couldn’t think of a better place to recover from a broken nose. Wynonna had made a very good call on that one. She would have to remember to tell her such once they arrived. For now she was going to try and rest before the doctor came to release her. Something told her she would have her work cut out for her when it came to playing referee in the battle of the sisters.

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The trip to the secluded cabin had taken a few hours by car which no one seemed to mind. Waverly had taken up residence all the way in the back of the SUV and used the room she had to lay out and take a nap. Sleeping with broken ribs was not easy so she had to take any chance she got to get a little shut eye.

Wynonna and Nicole had crawled in side by side to sit in the middle row of seats. The two of them had talked a little bit. Mostly about all the news articles that had come out since all of this had happened. Nicole grew bored of that quickly and took advantage of the last of the strong hospital drugs to get a little nap in. Wynonna used the silence of the ride to type out some emails to Jeremy and Doc.

Once they had arrived they had all taken some time apart to find a bedroom and settle in with the minimal amount of stuff they had with them. Wynonna had made sure some clothing and other personal items had been brought over from the Palace for both of the girls but it was still not a lot. Just the basics.

The cabin was not really a cabin at all. It looked more like a fortress made of fancy wood and decorated metal. Nicole had made a joke about how she had believed it was an actual cliche log cabin but in reality she was relieved to see such a safe looking structure. Even with Dolls having deployed some of the Army around them she felt much better knowing the cabin looked like it could handle being hit with a bomb and stay standing.

Once Nicole had familiarized herself with the huge layout of the place it was time for dinner. Of course there was a cook on staff, which Nicole immediately commented on, to which Wynonna argued it was just easier. Plus, honestly, none of them really knew how to cook. The sisters had always had staff to cook for them and Nicole had eaten the majority of her meals at the Palace or in the Army so she had never had the time to learn.

Wynonna had tried to get Nicole to agree to let her bring in a nursing staff to help with her recovery but she had refused. Waverly had, too, actually. Both girls, though pretty badly injured, were not critical enough to need a medical staff around. It seemed the two of them were in agreement that they wanted to power through and recover on their own. Together, obviously, but without too much fuss from anyone else.

Waverly had called it a night fairly early after dinner. If she was being honest it was just easier to not
be around Wynonna at the moment. Plus she was physically exhausted. Healing up ribs was a slow and tedious process and she figured she would be pretty tired for the first few days until her body adapted to the pain.

Not long after Waverly had gone to bed Nicole decided to do the same. Wynonna didn’t seem to mind. She had been on the phone a lot of the time dealing with everything that was going on. It made Nicole feel so many negative emotions that she was simply drained of all real strength. She hoped she could get a good night’s sleep and at least try to help Wynonna somehow in the next coming days. But for now she took a few light pain pills and headed to bed.

Now it was the middle of the night and Wynonna was still up. Between dealing with the press, lawyers, political stuff, and constantly communicating with her team back at the Palace she was so stressed she could not sleep. That was the last thing on her mind. The burden of her position was bearing down on her more heavily now than it ever had before. But she would never let the other two know. They needed their strength so they could heal.

She sat at the desk in her room with her eyes glued to a blank piece of paper. The pencil in her hand bounced steadily with the eraser tapping the paper lightly every time her fingers twitched as thoughts raced through her mind. She had so much to do, so many statements to write, so many tasks to handle, but at the very moment her mind was blank.

Deciding to walk away and let it rest while she cleared her mind, Wynonna pushed back from her desk, and let out a yawn. She stood from the chair she had been planted in for hours and made her way to her bedroom door. Maybe a little snack and some fresh air would be good for her. She gave a nod to herself because she thought it was an excellent idea then pulled her door open and headed into the hallway.

She gave the guard standing outside her door a smile then motioned in the direction of the kitchen “Just gonna get me a little snack. No need to call the calvary.”

The man didn’t even crack a smile. This made Wynonna drop her own smile and let out a sigh. Her eyes rolled and she turned her back on him to head down the hall “At least Nicole pretends to like my jokes.”

At the mention of Nicole, Wynonna paused and turned back around to face the other direction in the hallway. That is when she noticed light coming from under Nicole’s bedroom door. Her heart skipped an excited beat. Maybe her friend was up and, if nothing else, could offer a little distraction to help clear her mind. So she gave a skip and headed back down the hallway. When she passed her guard again she pointed at the light “Change of plans. Not getting a snack anymore.”

Again the man didn’t even seem to blink. Wynonna rolled her eyes and quickened her pace so she could get to Nicole’s room. She needed someone friendly to talk to. Everyone around her was way too seriously.

Outside Nicole’s bedroom was another guard. She didn’t even bother to say anything to this one. Instead she just gave him a smile then motioned to the door to indicate she was just going to go inside. It wasn’t as if she needed permission from him, anyway. She was the Queen and this was her family’s home so she could do whatever the Hell she wanted.

The door was cracked open so Wynonna gave it a gentle nudge, just enough to make room for her to step into the room, then stuck her head inside. She saw Nicole out of bed and standing near her window. Curious as to what her friend was doing Wynonna slipped into the room completely before clicking the door shut behind her. She stood there and gave a soft cough as if to clear her throat so she did not scare her friend who was probably not expecting anyone.
Nicole flinched when she heard the cough. She had been deep in thought and hadn’t heard anyone come in. She turned her head slightly and caught sight of who was in the room with her out of the corner of her eye. When she saw it was Wynonna, a soft smile came to her lips, and she turned back to where she had been staring out the window “Can’t sleep?”

Wynonna let out a puff of a laugh and moved toward Nicole now that she was aware of her presence “That is an understatement. I feel like if I doze off the world is going to end.” She stood now next to Nicole and folded her arms. She glanced her friend over quickly before moving her eyes to look out the window as well. “What’s your excuse?”

Nicole lifted one shoulder in a shrug. Her eyes lingered out the window because even in the darkness of the night the moon was lighting the grounds softly and it was rather beautiful. It was peaceful. She couldn’t remember the last time she had seen such a serene portrait. “You know I’m not much of a sleeper.”

Wynonna let out a soft humming sound of agreement. The two of them had always been night owls. They had spent so many countless nights growing up where they stayed up late into the early morning hours just talking about every and any subject that came to mind.

The thought of that fact made Wynonna smile. She reached out now and placed her hand gently against Nicole’s back. She slowly let her fingers run up and down the length of her spine in a touch that was both an attempt at comfort and of simple companionship.

The two of them stayed like that for a few more minutes. Their eyes lingered on the naturescape that was just outside the window. Wynonna rubbed Nicole’s back and Nicole just let her. It felt good. It was such a simple gesture but it brought a sense of peace to her. It was a reminder that she was still alive and there was still a lot of little things to be enjoyed. She had two people who loved her dearly and she knew with them by her side they would all come out of this debacle in one piece.

When Nicole finally blinked and took her eyes away from the window she found Wynonna watching her. This, for a reason she didn’t understand, brought a soft blush to her cheeks. She was glad her face was still pretty bruised so the redness kind of just blended in. She smiled very softly then turned away from the window fully now “So what’s on your mind?”

Wynonna returned the smile just as softly as her hand dropped away from Nicole now that she had turned to face her. At the question she just drew in a deep breath and shook her head before letting it out in a sigh that caused her lips to vibrate and make a soft sputtering type sound. Her hands slapped lightly down against her thighs before both shoulders lifted into a shrug so high they nearly touched her ears “Boy, where do I start unpacking that question?”

Nicole let out a soft laugh then motioned for Wynonna to go ahead and sit on the bed. She moved toward it herself and gently sat on the side of the mattress. She drew in a soft breath to brace herself for the bit of pain that would come as she lifted her legs off the ground and slid more toward the center of the bed. She would have to playfully comment on how high the beds in the cabin were and how they were hard to get into, even for her, but she would do that later. Right now it was time for one of their infamous late night best friend chats.

Wynonna had seen the way Nicole had grunted and grimaced as she moved herself onto her bed and she let out an apologetic laugh “Shit I didn’t even think about the beds. I bet Waverly is having a Hell of a time getting in and out with her sore ribs.” She frowned as the thought came to her and a heavy sigh pushed from her lungs “Maybe I should get her some of those stairs that people get for their dogs to be able to climb onto their beds. Do you think that would work?”

Nicole just rolled her eyes because she knew Wynonna was not being serious about the stairs. She
had always been the sarcastic one, ready with a quick witted joke in every situation, but it seemed to come out most sharply when she was trying to deflect her worry. This made Nicole frown. She couldn’t even begin to imagine what Wynonna had been dealing with the past few days. She wished she could help her. So she patted the bed next to her to say Wynonna should scoot up and make herself more comfortable “I am sure Waverly has managed just fine. I’m more worried about you.”

“Me?” Wynonna motioned to herself and acted surprised before giving a soft grin. She crawled up the bed and settled with her back against the headboard. The two of them sat side by side, shoulder to shoulder, just like old times. Her eyes focused on her feet stretched out along the mattress and after just a few moments of silence she cleared her throat and spoke with a very weighty tone “I feel like I’m in over my head with all of this and the more I try to dig out of it the more I feel like it’s going to keep getting worse.”

“How do you mean?” Nicole asked with concern in her eyes as she looked at Wynonna next to her. She was glad her friend was not going to beat around the bush. Neither of them had the strength to act like everything was peachy keen.

Wynonna’s head slowly moved back and forth in a continuous shake as she spoke now “Champ’s family is pissed and I know they are going to keep coming after us. There are all these rumors about scandal and corruption and what is the Queen doing to stop it all? There’s Waverly…” She sighed out her sister’s name and her head stopped moving. She looked up at Nicole now with a dark sense of agony in her eyes “What if she never forgives me? What if, even after all of this, I still can’t protect her?”

Nicole’s heart was breaking at the look on Wynonna’s face. There wasn’t a single person in the entire world she loved more than her little sister and in that moment it was plain to anyone who might look at her. She wished she could show Waverly the look on her sister’s face in that moment to prove to her just how much Wynonna loved her. But she couldn’t. In fact she wasn’t being much use to anyone at the moment and it frustrated her. She was a helper. She was a protector. She wished she could offer some peace of mind to her friend but she had absolutely zero experience in how to proceed through a political mess like this one.

So she reached out and she did one thing she knew she could. She took Wynonna’s hand in hers. She squeezed it tightly and spoke with her eyes unblinking at her friend “The fact that Waverly is your biggest concern right now shows you are doing everything exactly right. It shows that you have what it takes to make sure she is taken care of and protected. Just because you don’t have all the answers at the moment does not mean you won’t figure it out. The fact that she is your priority speaks volumes to your ability to get her through this. You just have to take your time and let yourself figure out how. It will come to you. It’s part of your very being, Wynonna.”

A lump came to Wynonna’s throat as Nicole spoke to her. There was such a genuine strength and belief behind her words that it made it hard not to believe them herself. The way Nicole stared at her, as if looking right into her soul, touched something deep inside. No one knew her better than Nicole and her support and certainty in that moment helped ease her mind ever so slightly. She was right. Protecting Waverly was something Wynonna was hard wired to do. She would work all of this out somehow. She just had to let herself believe she could do it.

“She will forgive you” Nicole continued when it looked like Wynonna was still processing the first of her words. She hoped what she said was helping. She hated that she had no other advice for her. But the one thing she was an expert on was the Earp Sisters. She believed in her heart they would be just fine. “Give her time. She will come to you once she has worked out all of her emotions for herself. She’s just processing a lot and I know that some of that has nothing to do with you. But it is just easier to take it out on you because she knows you’ll take it and still love her in the end.”
“I will” Wynonna gave a quick nod. “I do. I love that little pain in my ass more than I love myself most days. I just wish she knew that.”

“She does” Nicole said with a confident nod. She lifted Wynonna’s hand that she still held onto and brought it up to her lips. She placed the lightest, comforting kiss against her friend’s knuckles and offered her a smile. “Hang in there, kid.”

“Kid” Wynonna let out a breath of a laugh. She lifted her free hand to her face in order to swipe away a single tear that had fallen. Her head gave a slight shake as she looked at her friend “Okay I get it. Kid sounds like I’m patronizing you or something. Talking down to you because you’re incapable of understanding it in big girl terms.” She rolled her eyes but nodded as well “No more kid.”

“Had I know it was that easy to get you to stop calling me kid…” Nicole grumbled playfully. She let her hand drop back to the bed but did not release Wynonna’s. She held a crooked little smile for a moment more before letting it fade. When she spoke again it was once more in a serious tone “What else is bouncing around that head of yours?”

Wynonna’s own face dropped the last hint of a smile when Nicole pressed for more. She used her free hand to push some of her messy hair back on her head before blinking a few times. Her eyes focused on nothing in particular across from where she was sitting in the bed and her head just shook “Doc has so many opinions on what I should do. He’s been great, honestly he has, but he is also kind of old school and you know that’s not really my jam.”

Nicole gave a nod to that. If anyone hated all of the traditions that came with being royalty it was Wynonna Earp.

“He wants me to use my power as Queen to just…” Wynonna snapped her fingers then shifted her eyes to look at Nicole. “I think he thinks if I just get up on a pedestal and start saying how things are going to be now that everyone will just go along with it. But, like…” Her lip curled up at the corner in a look of disgust because she did not like what Doc was suggesting. She hated using her Mighty Ruler of The Country power to boss people around. It was just gross. She glanced down now to where her free hand picked at the string of the sweats she wore and breathed out a defeated puff of air “I don’t want that. I don’t want anyone to have that kind of power. It’s so fucking barbaric. I say jump and everyone asks me how high?” Her head shook and she looked back up at Nicole “I want it gone.”

“Gone?” Nicole perked an eyebrow in surprise. It wasn’t that what Wynonna had talked about surprised her. She knew exactly how her friend felt about the entire Monarchy and what it stood for. They had engaged in many long conversations about how it just wasn’t practical in the modern world. But all it had ever been was talk. Neither of them had ever really given much thought about how to fix it.

Wynonna nodded very seriously. Her eyes had not left Nicole since looking back to her. They hadn’t even blinked. “Gone” She repeated the word more firmly though with a slight tremble because she knew what she was saying was fairly heavy. It meant a change to the entire way of life for the whole of the country her family had been ruling over for 400 years. She wasn’t sure how they would react. But she had gotten to a point where it didn’t matter. There were more important things to her and that included her family.

“I want to abolish the entire system as it stands now” She continued when Nicole just blinked at her in surprise. She knew if she didn’t get it out now she would probably just swallow the idea and never follow through. “I want to change the entire political landscape. No more Monarchy. I want the people to elect their leaders. I want them to have the freedom of speaking up if they don’t agree with
policies being made.” She bit her lip to fight off a smile. This idea of hers excited her more than anything. She had never wanted anything more than what she was speaking of in that moment “No more titles. No more royalty. No more family lines or arranged marriages.” She nodded just once, firmly, and her face lit up at the last of her words now “I want this country to be a Democracy.”

“Wh-..” Nicole breathed out a laugh of disbelief. She gave one quick shake of her head as her eyes flitted in surprise. She smiled widely as she focused on Wynonna now and let out another laugh “Wait, can you do that?”

“Sure” Wynonna said with a quick shrug and light laugh. She was so glad Nicole had not had a negative reaction to her idea. She knew she was going to need all the support she could get if she was going to be able to pull this off. “I mean I haven’t told anyone else about this but I’m pretty sure it’s something I can do. It might take some time…” She waved that thought off with a grin “…but fuck it. I’ll be Queen a little longer if means my family and I can eventually live a fairly normal life.”

“Wow” Nicole stated with a single nod. A smile spread over her lips slowly as what Wynonna had just laid out to her played out in her head. She liked it. She loved the idea of getting away from this lifestyle for good. A soft laugh pushed through her lips and her head bounced in another single nod “Hell yeah, Wynonna. I say you do it. I know you’ve hated all of this stuff since you were a kid. So why not? Besides, if not now, then when?” She lifted her free hand and motioned it as if waiting for an answer from out of thin air. When it obviously did not come she dropped her hand back to her lap and nodded excitedly “The days of Kings and Queens are long gone. I say we bring this country into the modern world of politics.”

“Exactly!” Wynonna’s excitement was growing by the second now. “I want people to have a say. They vote in the leader of the country and that dude has checks and balances and they all work together to create policies and laws and taxes…” She brushed all that boring nonsense away and let out a laugh “…Let people vote so they feel good about what is going on in the Ghost River Triangle, you know? And if they don’t like it they can say so without fear of being executed.”

Nicole breathed out a chuckle at the last of Wynonna’s words. Death was just such an extreme punishment for speaking out against the Monarchy. Barbaric, as Wynonna had said earlier, was exactly right. There was no place for a single ruler system in the world anymore. Then a thought occurred to her and her smile faded as she looked at Wynonna more solemnly “Wait. What are you going to do? I mean if you abolish the Monarchy what does that make you?”

“Wynonna Earp” She stated plainly but confidently. She locked eyes with Nicole and there wasn’t a single ounce of doubt lingering in her gaze. This is what she wanted. “Waverly has a college degree so I know she will be just fine. You..” She motioned to Nicole with a fond smile “You can do anything you set your mind to. You could probably go back to the military if you wanted. Maybe try your hand at being a cop?”

Nicole shrugged at the idea. She didn’t hate it.

“And I’ll…” Wynonna continued now. She paused as her hand lifted and made small circles like she was trying to conjure an idea out of thin air. When one didn’t come she just dropped her hand back to the bed and gave a nonchalant shrug “I’ll buy a bar with a mechanical bull or something. I don’t know. That isn’t really the point here, Nicole. The point is that I will be able to do whatever the Hell I want without worrying about how it is going to affect an entire country full of people that are minding their own damn business.” She gasped at her own words and delightment filled her features “Ohhh I’ll have my own damn business to mind! No one else will give two shits about me! I will never have to see my face in the papers again!”

Nicole let out the softest laugh at her friend’s excitement. Something told her that Wynonna would
still be in the papers. She was, after all, basically a celebrity and giving up her crown would not
change the fact that people knew who she was and were curious as to what she was doing. But that
was a conversation for another time. She did not want to kill Wynonna’s excitement. So she gave a
few gentle nods and used her hand to squeeze tightly around where she still had hold of Wynonna’s
hand “That sounds incredible.”

“Doesn’t it?” Wynonna let out a dreamy sigh and fluttered her eyes as she stared off to the ceiling as
if daydreaming about it all. That lasted only a moment before she was laughing and turning her head
to look back at Nicole. Her smile held but it was a little more cautious now as she spoke in a steady
tone to her friend “So you’re okay with this? You think I should do it? I only ask because it affects
you too.”

“Absolutely” Nicole answered without a single beat of hesitation. She let go of Wynonna’s hand for
the first time since they had settled in bed and lifted her own hand to her friend’s face. She cupped
very lightly against her cheek and used her touch to hold her there as their eyes locked in a serious
but sincere stare “Will you just promise me one thing?”

The intensity, though still somehow soft, in Nicole’s eyes in that moment and the way she held onto
her cheek made Wynonna’s heart flutter. She drew in a deep breath and held it for just a moment as
she tried to focus on Nicole’s words. She had no idea why but the untainted love and support she
was getting from her friend in that moment was making her feel something she wasn’t sure she had
ever experienced before. She couldn’t even pinpoint it exactly. It was new and that was all she was
sure about.

Then she realized Nicole had asked her something and she quickly released the breath she had been
holding and nodded in a way that was more against Nicole’s hand than anything before answering
with a soft “Anything.”

“No electoral college, please.” Nicole grinned very slowly at her request.

Wynonna let out a loud laugh and nodded enough times that Nicole dropped her hand from her face.
“That thing has done enough damage in the world. I think I would be an absolute buffoon if I
instated one here” Her head shook in amusement at the thought. “No, we are going to do this right.
A hybrid Democracy. Take what has worked in other places and apply it here. Hopefully that helps
make this the most efficient system in the world.”

“Amen to that” Nicole puffed out a soft laugh. She drew in a deep breath and gently settled her back
against the headboard of the bed behind her. She was starting to get tired and her face was sore from
all the laughing and smiling. Plus all the talking. Essentially anything that used any muscle in her
face hurt to do. But it was worth it. She could tell Wynonna was already feeling better. So she slowly
breathed out and with it came a yawn.

Wynonna saw the yawn and frowned. She was keeping Nicole awake. That was the last thing she
wanted to do. So she decided that was enough for the night. Her hand reached out and she patted
gently at Nicole’s leg “I should let you rest.”

“You can crash here if you want” Nicole mumbled very softly. She had closed her eyes in an attempt
to help the pain subside.

“I don’t want to risk rolling over and knocking you in the face” Wynonna gave a shake of her head.

Nicole wanted to argue but she was too tired. Besides it was probably best that she sleep alone for
the first few weeks. At least until her nose splint came off. So instead she opened her eyes and
looked at Wynonna with a soft smile “Is it because I’m so hideous now?”
“That is exactly why I don’t want to sleep with you” Wynonna had a dead serious look on her face. She slipped out of the bed now and her face softened with a laugh as she moved around to the side where Nicole was sitting up. She sat next to her just for a moment. She gave her a tender smile as her hand reached up to brush some of Nicole’s wild hair behind her ear “Try and rest, my friend. You have a long road ahead of you.”

“So do you” Nicole reminded her. What she wanted to do was not going to be easy.

“But I already see the light at the end of the tunnel” Wynonna spoke in a near whisper now. She sat by Nicole for just a minute longer before finally getting up. She moved to the door but paused before she reached to open it. She looked over her shoulder and a warm smile slipped over her lips. Though none of her problems had been solved Nicole had given her the tools she needed to start working on them. She was so grateful for her best friend. She hoped one day she would be able to show Nicole how much she appreciated everything she had ever done for her. Her heart fluttered again at the thought. How would she ever be able to express that? She didn’t think it was possible but she would try anything.

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A few days had passed since Nicole and Wynonna’s late night heart to heart. Wynonna had yet to tell Waverly about her plan and that was mainly because when she told her she wanted to have as much information as possible. She wanted a plan. She wanted to be able to show her sister that she knew exactly what she needed to do. The last thing she wanted was Waverly doubting her again.

Their relationship was still pretty turbulent. They were civil to one another at meals and any time they were in the same room with Nicole but that was about it. Waverly avoided her. This hurt but Wynonna got it. She was the queen of holding grudges. She was pretty sure that grudge holding was a genetic trait in the Earp family. She just hoped Waverly would get over her genetic disposition sometime in the near future because she was really excited by what was coming and she wanted her little sister to be a big part of that entire process.

Around the cabin it seemed like everyone had kind of fallen into some sort of routine. There was breakfast each morning, just like in the Palace, before everyone went off to do their own thing. Wynonna was constantly skyping into her Royal meetings or on the phone with one of the Court members. She rarely had a moment of free time. She had managed to scrape together an hour here or half hour there in order to hang with Nicole. This consisted mostly of her helping her friend out by cleaning her bloody nose gauze or swabbing the crusty blood boogers out of her nose. Yep Wynonna Earp led a glamorous life. But hey at least her and Nicole managed a walk around the grounds every night after dinner so that was nice.

Today she had been tied up longer than expected. There was a lawsuit against Nicole that had come from Champ and she had been dealing with that on top of everything else that was going on. Luckily the press seemed to be dying off. A celebrity somewhere else in the world had finally delivered her baby so people seemed to care more about that than whatever had happened to the Royal Family last week. Small miracles, right?

She hung up the phone then glanced at the time. It was mid-afternoon already. She wondered if Nicole had eaten lunch. So she stood from her desk, organized some of the papers that she had been flipping through during her meeting, then headed for her door. She gave a nod to the guard in the hallway and smiled when he nodded back. They had rotated who was on Queen duty and at least this one responded to her.

She made the short trip down the hallway to Nicole’s room. When she didn’t see a guard outside her door she perked an eyebrow slightly. That wasn’t good. Then she noticed the door was open. Maybe Nicole had told the guard to take a break. She gripped the door frame and used that grip for balance as she swung one leg out wide in a motion that had her landing with a playful thud right in the open doorway.

“Hey, are you-” Her smile faded and she straightened up when she realized Nicole’s room was empty. Nicole hadn’t left her room outside of meals and their nightly walk. This caused her to grow immediately concerned. She wondered where her friend had gone. Was she mad she hadn’t come by for her mid-morning booger check?

Then from behind her and slightly down the hallway she heard a noise that she couldn’t quite describe. It was a mix of a groan and a hum. Maybe a moan and a sigh. Either way it had most definitely come from Nicole. Wynonna blinked just once and turned very slowly toward where she had heard the noise. She took two steps then stopped. She held completely still to see if she would hear the noise again.
This time the noise was definitely more of a light hum that turned into a ragged breath. Wynonna felt her heart drop to her feet. Were those…? She shook her head and laughed it off. No. There was no way. More importantly there was no reason for Nicole to be making these types of noises. These were the noises one made in the midst of a very specific type of pleasure.

A third noise came and Wynonna moved toward it again. She had narrowed down where they were coming from. At the end of the hall was a partially open door. It was Waverly’s room. Now there was certainly no reason at all that those noises should be coming from Nicole in Waverly’s room.

“Wait you have to put it in slow” Nicole’s voice trickled out into the hall now. “Yeah just like that…” She breathed out slowly. There was a pause then she yelped “Ouch! Take it out. Take it out!”

“Oh my god did I hurt you?” Waverly’s voice filled with panic.

“Did you lubricate it?” Nicole’s groaned the words.

“I’m sorry I didn’t know. You didn’t tell me to” Waverly again.

“It’s okay. It’s your first time how could you have known? Just get that little tube right there by the bed. Make sure you cover the whole thing. It goes in a lot easier that way” Nicole’s voice was a bit ragged as she spoke.

“Like this?” Waverly asked.

“Yeah that’s perfect. Now don’t go in too deep at first. Actually…” There was a pause and a shuffle before Nicole spoke again. “Sitting like that will help you get it in better. Just go slowly. It’s your first time I want you to get a feel for it first.”

There was another pause. Then another weird groan hum from Nicole. Then Waverly spoke softly “Does that feel alright?”

Wynonna had paused just outside the door because, frankly, she could not believe her ears. This was not happening. This was a figment of her imagination. There was no way this was really happening. Deciding that she was not actually hearing what she was hearing she peeked her head around the door frame to look into the room so she could see what was actually going on and put her imagination to rest.

But what she saw when she looked in her room went right along with what she had heard. Nicole was sitting on Waverly’s bed. Waverly was sitting right on top of her, straddling her waist. Nicole had her hands gripping Waverly’s hips. Nicole let out a soft moan again before breathing out heavily “I think you have the hang of it.”

“What the flying FUCK STICK IS GOING ON?” Blinded by rage and shock Wynonna stormed into the room. The last of her words squeaked out as her voice reached an octave she didn’t know had existed until that very moment.

“SHIT!” Nicole howled in pain. When Wynonna had burst in it had scared them both and that jump of surprise had sent pain shooting throughout the entirety of her skull.

Waverly whirled around quickly. The motion had caused her to twist her torso in just the right way and her still healing ribs seemed to cease in protest. This caused her to grab with one arm around her midsection as she looked up at her sister in agony and surprise “Wynonna you scared me!”

“And me” Nicole mumbled grumpily from behind where she held both hands over nose. Her eyes
were closed and she was pulling in long breaths to try and soothe the fire hot pain that was radiating through her face.

“I thought you two were…” Wynonna paused and looked at the scene that she had just stormed into. The first thing she noticed was the fact that both girls were completely dressed. She blinked at that before her eyes started to flicker around at all the details. On the table near the bed were the medical supplies the hospital had sent home with Nicole. There were swabs and tubes of ointment. There was gauzes and rolls of white medical tape. Then her eyes flickered up to where Nicole was sitting in the bed. She saw that although Nicole had her nose covered there was clearly a long, thin stick poking out between her hands. Then her heart sank.

“She was cleaning my boogers” Nicole grunted as her hands slowly moved away from her face. She felt like her nose was was on fire. With her nose clearly in view now she motioned very sharply at the stick that was attached to the swab that had been jammed up her nose in surprise when Wynonna had burst in and scared the shit out of the two of them.

“Oh my god” Waverly looked back at Nicole with a frown. She was still sitting on Nicole’s legs. She lifted onto her knees very slowly and, though it hurt to reach up with her arm because of the twist she had just given to her sore ribs, she grabbed the end of the swab. “I am so sorry. Is it stuck?”

“I don’t know” Nicole let out a slow breath. “Pull slowly.”

“Shit” Wynonna moved over to the bed slowly now. She could not express how horrible she felt just then. She had no idea why she assumed what she had heard were the two of them in the middle having sex. There was literally no reason to think that yet that was where her mind had gone. She shook the thought away and brought her hand to rest on Nicole’s forehead “I am so sorry. Can I help?”

“I’ve got it” Waverly hissed and shot Wynonna a sharp glare before focusing back on the swab. “Stop” Nicole said quickly. Waverly ripped her hand away from the swab. Wynonna lifted both hands up like she was being told to freeze by the police. Both girls stared in terror.

“I meant stop acting like that, Waverly” Nicole rolled her eyes. She lifted a hand to touch at the swab stick and gave a little indication with her head for her to pull it out. “Carefully.”

No one else spoke. The sisters were both focused on the stick and easing the swab safely out of Nicole’s nose. It only took a few seconds but they were agonizing seconds. As soon as the swab came free everyone let out a sigh of relief. Then Nicole’s nose started to bleed.

“Shit” Wynonna turned to the table near the bed and quickly grabbed a gauze. She handed it to Waverly without hesitating “Press this just under her nose. Don’t put any pressure on her nose, just the upper lip, okay? Just catch the blood.”

Waverly nodded quickly and did just that. She looked up at Nicole with an apologetic frown “I’m so sorry.”

Nicole let out a breath that held a slight bit of amusement and smiled just barely “That definitely was not your fault.”

“Here” Wynonna had unwrapped another type of gauze, one that was nostril shaped, and she was handing that over now. “Gently slide it in until the bleeding stops. Don’t go too far.”

Waverly again followed instructions. She narrowed her eyes to focus on what she was doing. Again it only took a few seconds before the gauze had stopped the bleeding. She smiled and sat upright
now, rocking back so her butt had come to rest on Nicole’s lap. She looked at Wynonna with an impressed nod of her head “Quick thinking.”

“I read the pamphlet thing…” Wynonna mumbled almost shyly and rolled her eyes. She used her hand to bat at the air as if knocking away the compliment before her eyes focused back on Nicole. “How’s it feel?”

“Like there’s a fire raging right here…” Nicole lifted her hand and motioned around the bridge of her nose, then under both eyes, then drew a circle around her forehead. She let out a sigh and dropped her hand to the mattress. Her eyes shifted to Wynonna and she frowned “Why did you come in here screaming like a banshee?”

“I’m sorry. I heard…” Wynonna motioned to the doorway. She blinked once, shook her head quickly, and dropped her hand. She focused on her sister, then looked at Nicole with a frown, then let her eyes move to look at the ground. She let out a long, deflating breath and lifted her eyes back at the other two girls. She attempted a sheepish but charming grin but it fell flat so she decided to just be honest “It sounded like you two were having sex and it really freaked me out.”

“What?” Both girls yelped in surprise at the exact same time. The exclamation caused pain to shoot through Nicole’s face again. She let out another groan and lifted her hand over her nose.

Waverly blushed. There was no way around it. Her cheeks were bright red. She quickly started shaking her head as she moved off of Nicole’s lap now. Her feet hit the floor and she folded her arms across her chest. Her eyes narrowed at her sister and she breathed out in disbelief “Why in the world would you think that? That Nicole and I…” She motioned back to her friend still in bed and blushed again. She was not innocent, by any means, but being accused of having sex with Nicole was kind of embarrassing. Actually being accused of having sex with someone you definitely are not having sex with was always embarrassing but it was made worse by the fact that it was someone she considered to be family.

“I don’t know!” Wynonna full body shrugged and let out a frustrated grunt. She honestly could not explain herself. None of it made any rational sense. “I heard these noises in the hallway and they sounded like….” She sighed and motioned to Nicole now “Dude your pain noises kind of sounded like sex noises.”

“Fucking Christ” Nicole mumbled to herself.

Waverly was blushing again. She let out a weak grunt of offense and stared in shock at her sister “Are you being serious right now? Where in your warped little mind did you come up with the idea that Nicole and I would ever be intimate? That’s not even I thing!”

“Rude” Wynonna looked offended for her friend then shook it off. “Look, I don’t know why my mind went there, it just did. It has been an insane week and my mind is as fried as beer battered onion rings right now, okay?” She paused and looked between the girls and nodded “I am also really hungry. Do either of you want to laugh about this over onion rings?”
“Wynonna, no” Waverly rolled her eyes and folded her arms over her chest again. There was no doubt just how frustrated, and slightly confused, at her sister she was. “I just need you to explain your line of thinking, please? There is just so much wrong with your thought process!”

Wynonna huffed in defeat. “I can’t explain it, Waves. It’s just what happened.”

“I mean” Waverly continued as if Wynonna hadn’t even spoken. She motioned to herself and then Nicole’s state of being and threw her hands up in aggravation “Neither of us are in any shape to be even attempting to have sex. I can barely move without having a hard time drawing a breath and Nicole…” She frowned at her friend and sighed. “She can barely blink without hurting.”

“I get it” Wynonna lifted a hand for Waverly to stop.

Waverly did not stop. She kept ranting right over her sister. Maybe it was all the hurt and anger stored up coming out but she could not stop talking now “Not that you have any say in who I can and can’t have sex with. It’s frankly none of your business. I am a grown ass woman and if I wanted to rip the clothes off of someone and go at it right in front of you then you would just have to deal with it!”

“Actually I could walk away” Wynonna mumbled but it didn’t matter because Waverly was still going.

“Not to mention the fact that Nicole is like a sister to me!” She put a hand over her heart and gave her friend an adoring little smile. It was fleeting and she was soon scowling and looking at Wynonna again with anger “And your best friend! You really think I would sleep with your best friend?” She paused, thought about what she just said, and before Wynonna could chime in she continued “Actually, you know what? I am so furious with you I probably would do something like that just to piss you off right now.”

“Woah, hey, okay” Nicole butted in now. She had been letting Waverly vent because she knew the girl needed to but she had crossed a line now. “That’s unnecessary, Waves.” She shook her head very gently “Besides I wouldn’t sleep with you if you were doing it just to piss off Wynonna.”

“Thank you” Wynonna gave a nod to Nicole but was cut off once more by Waverly.

“None of that matters because this entire idea if ludicrous” She nearly shouted the words now. “You just wanted me to mess up bad enough to null and void out your screw up. Is that what this is about? Hoping I piss you off enough that it all just evens out?”

“What? Come on” Wynonna looked absolutely pained that her sister would accuse her of that. “It was an honest mistake.”

“Seems to be a lot of those going around lately” Waverly’s tone lowered but her anger still seethed in her words. She stared at her sister for a second and gave a shake of her head “Sorry to break it to you but even if I did screw up just as badly as you did it’s not going to fix what you broke.”

“I know” Wynonna looked wounded. But she would not argue. She just stood there with her eyes locked on her sister.

Waverly drew in a slow breath. She looked between Wynonna and Nicole. She wondered if things would ever get back to normal. She gave a single shake of her head then threw her hands up only to let them fall to her sides heavily in a motion of surrender. The way her arms came down pulled at her ribs and she winced. “I am going to go read outside” She mumbled tiredly. “If you want to accuse me of any other irresponsible acts you know where to find me.” With the last of her words she turned
and stormed out of the room.

Wynonna wanted to call for her sister but knew it was no use. So she watched her go. Once she was
gone Wynonna let out a long sigh and slowly turned back to her friend. She slowly lifted an overly
wide, over exaggerated smile to her lips and batted her eyes as cutely as possible “Hey so...oops?”

“Whatever” Nicole rolled her eyes. She did not have to strength to talk about it. Also the point had
kind of been made by Waverly. Though it had been far less polite than Nicole would have gone
about it she felt that Wynonna knew what she had done wrong. So she would let it go. She sat up
on the bed now, shifting to put her feet on the floor, before setting her eyes on her friend “You were
busy and Waverly offered to help.”

“Got it” Wynonna waved a hand to the side to indicate there was no need to explain.

Nicole nodded just once. She sat there staring at her friend as she thought about what had just
happened again. It was all just so ridiculous. It also told a lot about the state of mind that everyone
was in. They all needed this break from their normal lives. It was just taking a few days to start to
relax and unwind. But they would get there. She nodded in agreement to her own thoughts then
offered Wynonna a soft smile “I wish I could laugh about it over onion rings, because that sounds
out of this world delicious, but…” She stood now from the bed with a sigh and motioned to her face
“I am still on the very succulent soft foods diet so unless you plan on making me an onion ring
milkshake…”

Wynonna smirked and opened her mouth to make a joke.

Nicole lifted her hand to stop her friend. Wynonna was the type to do exactly that and it was both
infuriating and completely amusing. She used her hand now to motion at the door “I will however
join you for lunch. I haven’t eaten since morning mush.”

“Oh my god, thank you” Wynonna let out a sigh of relief. She let out a soft groan as her hand
covered her stomach and she moved toward the door “I thought I was going to starve to death while
Waverly was giving me that tongue lashing.”

Although she knew it was wildly inappropriate, especially considering what had just happened,
Nicole could not stop the joke that tumbled out of her mouth in that moment “If you wouldn’t have
interrupted, Waverly could be giving me a tongue lashing by now.”

“Dude” Wynonna’s groan grew from hunger pain to disgust. She glanced at her friend with an
unadulterated glare of repulsion on her face. She made a ‘tsk’ sound with her tongue against her teeth
and shook her head “I am so not hungry now. Thank you very much for that mental image. It was
bad enough walking in and seeing Waverly on top of you like that!”

Nicole tried not to laugh too hard but failed. She let out a loud chuckle followed immediately by a
painful grunt. Her hand moved over her nose and as the pain subsided her soft chuckle returned. The
pain had been worth the look of utter horror on Wynonna’s face. “I’m sorry but you asked for it. Did
you really think I would have sex with your sister?” Her smile faded and she looked a little offended
now. “Come on.”

“I know” Wynonna let out a heavy breath and shook her head. A hand lifted to run back through her
long, messy hair before dropping back to her side with a soft slap. “Dude something’s got to give
soon or I might actually go bonkers. I can feel my brain disintegrating.”

Nicole frowned at that. Her hand reached out and she gently placed it on her friend’s shoulder to stop
her in her path. When Wynonna paused and looked up at her curiously Nicole spoke with genuine
concern “Turn off your phone tonight. Take one of my pain pills to help take the edge off and get some sleep. You have to take care of yourself, Wynonna.”

Wynonna started to argue but was cut short by Nicole giving her head a firm shake.

“You care so much about Waverly and me and everything else going on that you are forgetting about yourself. What’s going to happen when you’ve worked so hard to make everything in our lives easier only to not have you there with us?” Nicole’s hand dropped from Wynonna’s shoulder and slid down her back. She blinked just once as she stared right into her friend’s eyes “You want to be free to have a normal life? Make sure there’s some of you left to enjoy it, okay?”

“You’re right” Wynonna would not argue because she knew there was no reason for it. If she worked herself into an early grave, or a mental breakdown, then what was the point? She wanted her family to all have a normal life together. Part of her family included herself.

“Now let’s get you some food so you can live a long life of me relentlessly teasing you about what just happened in there” Nicole smirked and gave a slight wink. The best she could with her eyes still slightly swollen.

Wynonna let out a puff of a laugh and nodded. Somehow she believed that Nicole would indeed bring up that awkward encounter randomly for the rest of their lives. It was what she deserved. She had no idea why her mind had gone there. Maybe because she had been dealing with the worst situation she had ever faced so her mind was switched over to worst-case scenario mode at that moment. But that begged the question as to why her mind thought Nicole and Waverly having sex was the worst-case scenario.

Waverly had been right when she said that who she slept with was none of Wynonna’s business. So why did she care so much? Maybe it wasn’t that she cared so much about who Waverly slept with but instead she cared about who Nicole did. That was a thought she was not really ready to deal with so she shook it off and headed for the kitchen. Maybe some food would help untangle the briar patch that currently resided where her brain used to be.

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Nicole drew in a deep breath through her mouth and then let it out very slowly. She wished she could breathe in and smell the fresh countryside air but that had been discouraged by her doctors. At least for the first week or so. Gentle breathing only. So she stood out by the lake near the cabin and filled her lungs through her mouth. It was not the same but at least the air was clean.

“You about ready to go back inside? It’s starting to get a little chilly” Wynonna stood nearby with her arms folded over herself. They both had on light jackets but the early autumn air in the mountains was growing more bitingly cold by the moment.

Nicole let out the last lung full of air and gave a nod. She turned around and walked the few feet away from the lake to where Wynonna stood safely on the path around it. She had wanted to put her feet in but she knew it was already too cold for that so she settled for just standing on the shore and letting the water touch her boots.

Wynonna did not mind waiting for Nicole. The girl deserved to take all the time she wanted to enjoy the serenity around them. She had been through so much Hell lately that a little peace and quiet was the very least she could do for her friend. When Nicole rejoined her on the path she offered her a slight smile “Catch anything?”

Nicole let out a very soft laugh and shook her head. The two of them turned and started back toward
the cabin. Their pace was slow. Neither of them were in any sort of hurry that evening. So a silence surrounded them as they walked. The only sounds to be heard was the nature buzzing around them and the crunching of their feet against the path. It was nice.

Of course Wynonna had to be the one to break the silence. How could she not? They usually used this time to chat about what was going on. Wynonna would update Nicole on anything that had changed and Nicole would offer her opinions. Tonight, though, Wynonna was dreading what she had to tell her friend. She cleared her throat very softly to speak now so she could just get it over with “So the lawyers called this morning…”

Nicole had been looking around at the trees as they were strolling along so when Wynonna spoke her head turned to look at her. She perked an eyebrow very slightly and let out a breath of anticipation “And?”

“Well they’ve been trying really hard to get him to drop the charges but they say he is adamant” Wynonna mumbled with a slight shrug of her shoulders. Her eyes stayed on her feet as she walked “They say unless you reach a plea agreement there is no way to avoid a trial.”

“A plea agreement?” Nicole blinked in confusion. She processed over what Wynonna had just said and when it didn’t really make sense she stopped. She reached out her hand to stop Wynonna as well and turned to face her “In what world am I in any position to be taking a plea agreement? Am I being charged with something?”

Wynonna chewed her bottom lip nervously. Her eyes flickered here and there, anywhere but on Nicole, because she did not want to see her face when she told her. But there was no avoiding it now so she finally let her eyes settle on her friend before answering her “Champ is suing you for aggravated assault and excessive force.”

Nicole’s jaw dropped. She stared at Wynonna blankly for a few long moments while the words swirled around her head. That did not make sense. It was absolutely ridiculous. She processed what had been said then finally blinked and shook her head “Are you kidding me? Is he an actual lunatic?”

Wynonna could see how upset Nicole was at the news. Her hand lifted and she gently placed it against her friend’s arm. “I know it sounds absolutely crazy. But he claims you used excessive force against him.”

Nicole snorted. That caused her to groan in pain. She closed her eyes and let the pain subside before opening them again. “You mean to tell me that his lawyers have heard what happened, what led to what happened, and they are still convinced they have a case?”

“Apparently they are arguing since it wasn’t you he was attacking that it can’t be ruled as self-defense” Wynonna sighed out the words.

“What about the fact that it is my job to protect Waverly from threats?” Nicole’s voice rose as frustration started to build in her. “I was doing my job! He was physically harming her. He was not contained so I did what I needed to in order to ensure she was safe.”

“I know” Wynonna could see Nicole was getting worked up. She spoke calmly and used her hand on Nicole’s arm to give a light squeeze. “Believe me, I argued the Hell out of that point but he is saying that once you threw him off of Waverly she was considered out of harm’s way. So when you got on top of him and started beating him up was when you crossed the line.”

“Unbelievable” Nicole blinked a few times quickly as her head shook. She drew in a slow breath
and held it for a moment. She was completely appalled by this. She breathed out slowly and focused again on Wynonna “So you’re telling me I’m going to have to go to court and fight this when it’s totally obvious he’s lying to protect his wounded ego?”

Wynonna gave a single nod.

“What about the fact that he assaulted Waverly?” Nicole motioned with her hand toward the cabin where Waverly was probably blissfully unaware of all of this.

“Trust me that is something that has been taken care of already. He surprisingly admitted what he did without much fight. But, being who he is…” Wynonna rolled her eyes at that “…He got a slap on the wrist and has to do some community service or some bullshit like that.”

“Are you-” Nicole was shocked. She was furious. She threw her hand to the side and turned away from Wynonna now. She was fuming as she started to pace in front of her friend “That low life scumbag puts his hands on a woman, not just any woman but the Princess, and he gets away with it?” She paused her looked at Wynonna with fire raging behind her stare “I should have killed him.”

“I know. It’s criminal to think he’s walking free after what happened. Trust me” Wynonna pushed some of her hair off her face and frowned “I wish I could order him to be put away for life.”

“Can’t you?” Nicole nearly yelled the words as anger boiled over inside her.

Wynonna did not respond. She knew Nicole did not mean that. She also knew that, technically, yes she had the power to do that. She also had the power to order his head be cut off or he be sent to the firing squad. But both of them knew she would never do that. It was not the person she was. So instead she stayed quiet and let Nicole rant out her frustrations.

“He breaks my nose and gives her a concussion and has the audacity to say I assaulted him?” Nicole threw her arms up out of exasperation before turning in her pacing to head the other way. She was basically just angry ranting now. A million thoughts were flying through her head and forming into pissed off sentences as she walked back and forth against the dirty path.

Then she paused. She turned slowly, her eyes narrowed, and she locked Wynonna with a suspicious glare. She lifted her hand to point at her then spoke firmly “Wait you said you argued my point to the lawyers already? How long have you known about this?”

“Sometime yesterday?” Wynonna offered up the answer though she wasn’t too sure exactly. She had been dealing with a lot that was coming at her from all different sources. It was kind of hard for her to keep it all straight.

“A day?” Nicole’s voice squeaked out when she spoke because her throat had suddenly gone dry. Clearing her throat she tried again “You’ve known about this for at least twenty four hours and you are just now telling me about this?”

“Sometime yesterday?” Wynonna offered up the answer though she wasn’t too sure exactly. She had been dealing with a lot that was coming at her from all different sources. It was kind of hard for her to keep it all straight.

“Wait you said you argued my point to the lawyers already? How long have you known about this?”

“I didn’t want you to worry if you didn’t have to” Wynonna held her hand up now as a silent signal for Nicole to just stay calm. “I thought I could make it all go away and you’d never have to know.”

“Wynonna! Jesus Christ!” Nicole turned away from her friend and stormed away from her. She only got about ten steps away before she turned back around and moved quickly back to her friend. When she was within arms reach of her she stopped “You need to stop hiding shit from people because you think you’re protecting them. It’s what got us into this mess in the first place! It’s why Waverly is so pissed at you. You don’t feel like she can trust you!”

“Nicole, I—”
“I know you are doing the best you can here, Wynonna, but for the love of god would a little honesty kill you?” Nicole nearly growled the words as she spoke. She couldn’t even begin to explain how mad she was. “This directly affects me and I don’t care if you didn’t want to worry me. It’s my business and I need to be involved.” She pointed furiously at her own chest as if to make her point “My life, Wynonna. I can handle it.”

“Okay, okay” Wynonna nodded quickly. She could feel her heart beating quickly in her chest. The way Nicole was looking at her honestly terrified her. It wasn’t because she thought Nicole would hurt her. It was because she had never seen her friend this genuinely mad at her and she did not like the way it felt. It was a look she never wanted to see on Nicole’s face ever again. “I’m sorry. You have so much on your plate and I know you feel guilty for what happened. I just wanted to help.”

“That help” Nicole snapped back at her quickly. The two of them locked eyes in that moment and the intense fire that crackled in Nicole’s eyes told Wynonna exactly what she had meant by her words. She was the Queen of the entire country. They both knew there was something she could do about this to make it go away.

“Nicole” Wynonna’s breath trembled as she spoke her friend’s name. She had never seen Nicole act this way. Nicole thought the power Wynonna held as Queen was just as barbaric and disgusting as Wynonna did. Yet in that moment it looked like she was dead serious about telling Wynonna to use it in order to make this go away. She knew Nicole was upset and scared and would regret it in the long run but with the way she looked right then she didn’t seem to care about that.

Nicole blinked. She drew in a deep breath and straightened herself up completely. She looked away from her friend. She closed her eyes, released the breath, and nodded just once. She looked back at Wynonna and gave a single shake of her head “You should really stop hiding shit from the ones you love.” Her eyes flickered up toward the cabin to once more indicate she was talking about Waverly. She blinked and when her eyes returned to her friend they looked empty “I’m going to call it a night. Don’t follow me.”

Wynonna wanted to call out to her friend. She wanted to give chase and stop her but she knew better. Nicole was the most calm and understanding person she had ever met and to see her genuinely mad at her really hit home. So she let her friend go because what else could she do? Nicole was right. She had a bad habit of hiding things from her loved ones and it had already cost her too much. She had to stop. She needed Waverly and Nicole on her side more than ever right now. So she made a vow to herself right then and there. No more secrets. She would be totally honest with them from now on. She would start with Waverly. Tomorrow, though. Tonight she had something else she had to do.

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Wynonna sat at the desk in her room staring at her phone. She had been going back and forth in her mind about whether or not she really wanted to do it. Could she really bring herself to make the call that would make all of this go away? Was she really willing to make herself look like a dictator who made demands and expected them to be followed without question?

She knew as soon as she made the call that it would be all over the media. Word of the charges against Nicole had been headline news that morning. The fact that Nicole had seemingly disappeared since the skiing trip had everyone theorizing about the validity of the claims. No one knew that Nicole was with Waverly. The media knew Waverly was recovering in a secret family home. No one knew Nicole was there too. Everyone was speculating about where she was and how long she would be gone.

Wynonna let out a heavy sigh and closed her eyes. She hated Nicole’s name being dragged through
the mud. If she made this call, if she used her powers as Queen to make this all go away, how would that look? Would everyone think she was protecting Nicole because they knew she would lose the case and go to jail. Would rumors that she was dangerous start to fly?

She shook the thought away and opened her eyes. She focused back on her phone. Her lawyers were professional. They made too much money from the Royal Family to ever break their non-disclosure agreement. She was sure that, when asked about why the charges were dropped, they would have a very believable story. No one would ever have to know it had been because the Queen had snapped her fingers to make it so.

She let out another sigh and put her phone down. She got out of her chair and started to pace around the room. Her mind was racing back and forth between the two options. She could let Nicole deal with it, like she had said she wanted to, and just be there to support her. It’s not like she would lose the case, right? There were stacks upon stacks of evidence against Champ that would show Nicole’s force was more than warranted.

Then again Champ was widely beloved throughout the country. He was the handsome and charming Duke in the eastern portion of the Ghost River Triangle. His family had helped bring that section out of a recession. People there were thriving. Would the jury convict Nicole just because they felt bad that Champ had gotten his ass beat?

She shook that away as she continued to pace. There didn’t seem to be an easy answer for this. She believed Nicole would be found not guilty. Her best friend was so gentle and caring and as soon as the rest of the world saw that there was no way the would believe her actions had been malicious, right?

What if they had been malicious, though? What if Nicole had purposely gone too far? Was it possible that Nicole had meant to beat Champ up so badly? She had, more than once, admitted to wanting to kill him. Were those just words of anger or did they carry real meaning?

“Don’t be an idiot” She said to herself with a huff. She stopped her pacing and her eyes fell to where her phone sat on her desk. She stared at it for a few moments before reaching a decision in her mind. She gave a nod at herself then moved quickly to the phone. It was now or never. She searched for the number to her lawyer then pressed call.

As she waited for an answer she paced again. It was the middle of the night but he was on call. He told her to call at any time. He was being paid enough by the Palace that it was stupid to think he wouldn’t answer his phone when the Queen called. Who would be that dumb?

Suddenly he answered. Wynonna froze. She didn’t know what she had expected. When she heard the man on the other end repeating the word hello she almost hung up. Then her eyes fell to a picture of herself, Nicole, and Waverly that sat in a frame on her bedside table. She smiled at that. This was what was best for her family. She cleared her throat and finally spoke “Sorry to wake you but this is important.”

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You have no idea how hard I've been advocating for you.

Nicole stared blankly into her bowl of morning mush. To be fair it was oatmeal with a fruit puree but to her it didn't taste like anything but mush. She missed being able to taste. She missed being able to breathe. She was growing very impatient with the healing process and the fight she had gotten into with Wynonna the night before was not helping her mood.

She blinked now as the thought of Wynonna entered her mind. She frowned and looked up from her bowl. Her eyes flickered around the room and when she realized that it was still only herself and Waverly at the table she perked an eyebrow curiously.

“Wynonna hasn't come down for breakfast yet?” She asked softly because she did not want to startle Waverly who was sitting a few chairs down quietly reading.

Waverly just gave a shake of her head before turning the page in her book.

Nicole frowned at that. She wondered if Waverly was ignoring her now. She put her spoon down and got up from the table. She moved over to the closest guard standing watch over the room and gave him a smile “Good morning. Do you know if Wynonna is awake yet?”

Since Nicole was in charge of the Royal Guard still the man did not hesitate to get her an answer. He used the radio on his shoulder to call to whoever was watching over the Queen. There was a pause for only a moment before the answer came back. He nodded and looked at Nicole with no real emotion on his face “She left this morning, ma'am. Special Agent Dolls and five of our men accompanied her. She had business to attend to but is expected back later today.”

Nicole blinked in surprise. She gave a single nod of thanks to the man then moved back to the table. She sat back in front of her breakfast and let out a sigh as concern swept over her. Where had Wynonna gone? Was it just a coincidence she had left right after they had fought the night before?

“What's wrong?” Waverly had looked up from her book when Nicole had plopped back into her chair and immediately noticed the look of worry on her face.

Nicole just shook her head weakly before looking up at Waverly with a shrug “I'm not sure if anything is wrong, per se, but Wynonna left to attend to some sort of business this morning.”

“So?” Waverly perked a curious eyebrow at her friend. She did not think the Queen of an entire country leaving to take care of some sort of duty stood out as particularly alarming.

Nicole let out a little sigh that held a tiny bit of guilt “We had a weird fight last night and then suddenly she's gone?” She lifted her hand to motion as if those details explained her worried state.

Waverly just shrugged and gave a soft shake of her head “If you want to worry every time she goes off after she fights with someone you're always gonna be worried, Nicole. I am sure she is just fine.” She gave a bored flinch of a shrug then looked back to her book “It's probably for the best that you two spend some time apart.”

Nicole immediately scoffed at that “What exactly do you mean by that?”

“You two are always so far up each other's butts that sometimes it gets hard to tell who is who” Waverly gave a bored shrug as her eyes dropped back to her book. “It is pretty annoying” she added in a mumble under her breath.
The room was pretty quiet so Nicole definitely heard the mumble. She was taken back by it slightly because Waverly had never really said anything even remotely cruel to her in the entire time they'd known one another. She let out a weak attempt at a laugh but it fell flat and she sighed instead “I know you're upset with her but you don’t need to take it out on me.”

Waverly rolled her eyes and looked away from her book again. Realizing she probably wasn't going to get much reading done at the moment she decided to fold it closed. “I wasn't taking it out on you. I am just so sick of you two having your exclusive little club. Sometimes I feel like she forgets I am the one actually related to her.”

Nicole clenched her jaw for just a moment to hold back a sharp reply. She knew Waverly just as well as she did Wynonna and she knew this was her way of reaching out. So she tried to push the bit of hurt Waverly's words had caused down and offered a calm response instead “I know you don't believe it right now but everything she's been doing lately has been so you can lead a safe, normal life.”

“So you keep saying but I've yet to see anything good actually happen to me” Waverly let her eyes roll again because she was so sick of hearing the same thing over and over again. “Can't you just once take my side?”

Nicole let out an indignant breath of a laugh as her jaw dropped open slightly. She couldn't believe Waverly was coming at her like this. Feeling a little defensive now she spoke with a bit more firmness in her tone “You have no idea how hard I've been advocating for you. How many times I've spoken up for you when I didn't agree with what Wynonna wanted. In fact, one of the biggest issues between us right now is you.”

This surprised Waverly to hear. She just figured the two of them sat around and made plans without her in mind. Her face softened a bit and she stretched her hand out to place it gently on Nicole's arm “I didn’t know. Is that what caused the fight last night?”

Nicole instantly deflated her defensive posture and slumped a bit where she sat. She drew in a deep breath and released it in a sad sigh “It wasn't the cause but it was a factor.”

Waverly bit her lip. She felt guilty now. The last thing she really wanted to do was upset Nicole too. She had, after all, saved her life. She got up from her chair and moved over so she was sitting next to Nicole now. She pouted slightly as she took the other girl's hand now “Do you want to talk about it?”

“Not really” Nicole mumbled and gave her head a shake. She looked at the worried look on Waverly's face now and felt bad she wasn't sharing. But it would only serve to worry her more considering it was a direct result of what had happened on the trip she had taken for her birthday. So Nicole decided it wasn't going to hurt her to not tell her. Instead she just gave a shake of her head “Wynonna is in a battle between heart and head right now and she thinks she is protecting everyone by taking on every issue by herself.”

Waverly seemed to accept that as a good enough reason for the two of them to argue. She knew how stubborn her sister could be when it came to asking for help. So she sighed and squeezed Nicole's hand gently “She needs to stop making decisions for us and let us live our lives.”

“That is exactly what I told her” Nicole let out a soft laugh in agreement. She let her eyes linger on Waverly for a moment before a smile came to her features “See? I've been trying to tell her you're smart. You're an asset she needs to be using, not hiding.”

“No shit” Waverly mumbled through a soft laugh. Her hand squeezed Nicole's again as she offered a
grateful smile “Thank you for speaking up for me. I had no idea.”

“That's what family does” Nicole’s face softened into a happy little grin. Her eyes remained on Waverly's face and she found herself soaking in her simple beauty. She tried to find the little girl she had grown up with but all she could see now was a gorgeous young woman who she found herself thinking about more than she should.

Realizing she was staring she shook her head and looked away now. She gave her throat a clearing and reached for her spoon again even if she wasn't hungry. “Anyway, she is working really hard for you. Just give her some time.”

Waverly had noticed Nicole's gaze had lingered for a moment but it hadn't really been awkward. What was awkward, though, was how Nicole had so suddenly looked away and now seemed a little uncomfortable. This was not the first time she had noticed Nicole do this, either, and she wondered why it had started happening. Had she said or done something to cross a line? Was there something Nicole was hiding from her? She was getting really sick of people keeping things from her.

She couldn’t quite figure out where to start in trying to figure it out, though, so instead she shifted her focus back to Wynonna. She really wanted to try and understand what her sister was going through. She felt like that would help her be able to forgive her actions lately and move on. So she decided to use the fact that Wynonna wasn’t there to be able to pick Nicole’s brain. Maybe she could give her some insight. Maybe if she asked the right question Nicole would say something Wynonna had not known and it could work to help her unravel the mystery of her sister’s behavior and decision making lately.

Clearing her throat to delicately break the silence that had fallen around them, she finally spoke “Can I ask you something?”

Nicole had been sitting there hoping Waverly had not noticed that she had been staring at her. So when Waverly finally spoke on a subject other than that Nicole silently sighed in relief and looked up from her breakfast. She gave her a smile and a little nod to indicate she was listening “Go for it.”

Waverly eyed Nicole carefully before she asked the question. She wasn’t really sure if Nicole would know the answer but it had been eating at her so she thought she would give it a shot. She gave an almost shy smile and shrugged before finally asking “Do you know why Wynonna flipped her lid when she had the outrageous thought that we were….” She cleared her throat again and perked an eyebrow at the suggestion of her sister’s accusation “….sleeping together?”

Nicole had not been expecting the question to come out of Waverly’s mouth and it showed on her face. She stared at Waverly with a dumbfounded look for a few long moments as she tried to formulate a thought about how to answer the question. She had wondered it herself and she had only come to one viable conclusion. Wynonna had seen the way Nicole had started to look at Waverly lately. That thought alone twisted her gut with guilt. Though she would never act on it, at least she didn’t think she would, it still killed her to think of upsetting Wynonna that way.

All of that swirled around Nicole’s mind in just a heartbeat. She gave a quick shake of her head when she realized she had kind of frozen at the question and finally blinked. Her eyes focused on Waverly who was looking at her expectantly and she gave a slight shrug before attempting to laugh it away unconvincingly “I have no idea what she was thinking.”

Waverly frowned at the answer. She could see it in Nicole’s eyes that she was not being completely honest. Her eyes rolled and a frustrated sigh left her lips “The two of you and your damn secrets I swear to god.” She reached for the book she had shut earlier and ripped it off the table as she stood from her chair in a hurry “Do either of you ever tell the truth?”
“Wait” Nicole reached out to stop Waverly by grabbing a hold of her arm gently. She frowned up at her and when Waverly didn’t even turn to look at her she deflated with a heavy sigh. Her hand slowly slid away from where she had grabbed onto Waverly and her head gave a shake ‘I’m not lying, Waves. I honestly have no idea why your sister would assume that is what was happening.”

“I can tell you’re hiding something” Waverly folded her arms across her chest and glanced to Nicole out of the side of her eyes. Her head shook just slightly and her eyes rolled “You have always been a terrible liar.”

“I’m not lying” Nicole asserted as she turned in her chair to face Waverly now. When she again got a look that showed Waverly still didn’t believe her, she grunted out in frustration now “Waves, I promise I’m not lying. Honestly it caught me just as off guard as it did you, okay? The only thing I can think is-” She stopped herself and her eyes fluttered. She bit at her lip almost nervously because she realized what she was about to say. She realized she had never come out to Waverly. What if, for some reason, it made the girl treat her differently? That was a terrifying thought.

“Unbelievable” Waverly tossed her hands in the air out of frustration and stepped away from Nicole with a quick shake of her head. “When you decide to stop making up stories and just talk to me like the adult I am, I will be outside.”

“I’m gay” Nicole nearly shouted the words in a panic because Waverly was walking away. Her eyes got wide when she realized how loud she had said it. She glanced around and realized the four guards that were stationed at the doors of the room had definitely heard too. Great. Well at least they would all have a fun story to gossip about at shift change. She shook that off because it didn’t really matter and her eyes moved back to look at Waverly now.

“What?” Waverly huffed out an amused laugh that was mixed with surprise and shook her head. “Why would that matter?”

“I…” Nicole stopped and let out a grunt again. She did not feel like any of this was really making sense. How could she say it was probably because Wynonna had noticed the way her best friend had started looking at her grown up little sister? She shook that idea away and mumbled out softly “She keeps making jokes, warning me not to bang you, so maybe she subconsciously is worried I will?”

Waverly puffed out a breath of a laugh. Her head shook just slightly and her arms unfolded. Her face softened and another laugh came out now, one that held a little more delightment because the idea was such a reach, as she moved back toward Nicole slightly “You realize how bonkers that sounds, right? Just because you happen to be gay doesn’t mean the only girl in the vicinity of you is the one you’re going to go after” She giggled now gleefully at the idea “Wow Wynonna is losing her mind.”

“Yeah” A smile flickered to Nicole’s face but died quickly. She bit her lip as she watched Waverly laugh at the idea. It was only slightly offensive at how amused she was at the idea of that ever happening. She shrugged and looked back at her oatmeal now “Yeah where would she get an idea like that.”

Waverly had lost herself to her giggles. Her hand reached out now and she set it gently against Nicole’s shoulder. As her giggle died she let out a long breath and gave her head a shake. She was grinning ear to ear when she looked at Nicole again “Thanks for that. I needed a good laugh.” Her hand patted Nicole’s shoulder a few times before dropping away. “I am going to go outside and read. If Wynonna isn’t back in time to clean out your boogers you’ll know where to find me.” With that she turned and headed toward the door that led to one of the many balconies that adorned the cabin.

Nicole let out a defeated sigh and dropped her eyes to her feet. Well now she just felt like a complete idiot. Not that she was desperately in love with the girl or anything but it was never nice for someone
to laugh so much at the idea of being with you. She was a bit wounded.

“Oh, Nicole?” Waverly paused near the door before she stepped outside. She was at the other end of the dining room now with her eyes focused on the table where her friend still sat.

“Huh?” Nicole looked up with surprise on her face. She had thought Waverly was already gone. She focused on the girl across the room and tried to smile like she hadn’t just been humiliated a moment before “What’s up?”

“I already knew” Waverly smiled warmly at the girl now.

Nicole blinked once. Her brows creased for a moment then both perked as she realized what Waverly meant. She blushed very slightly and bit her bottom lip almost shyly “You did?”

Waverly gave the girl a single nod and a wink. Then in a nonchalant and almost matter-of-fact sounding tone she added “I see the way you look at her.” She shrugged happily then turned and disappeared out of the door that led to the balcony.

Stunned was the only word that could describe Nicole’s state of being in that moment. She was frozen. She wasn’t even sure her heart was beating or her lungs were working. It was like time completely stopped and she ceased to be a living human being for a few moments. That was how absolutely blindsided she was by what Waverly had just said to her.

It took her about thirty seconds to come back to herself. When she did she blinked, shook her head quickly, then let out a laugh. To think that Waverly had just insinuated that Nicole was secretly in love with Wynonna was absurd. That is when she started laughing harder than she should. Her nose shot pain through her with each chuckle but she couldn’t help it. The idea was so out of left field that all she could do was laugh about it.

After a minute or two she finally caught her breath and calmed her laughing. Lifting a finger now to wipe at a few tears that had trickled out during her amusement, she let out a heavy breath, then shook her head. She would be laughing about that for a long time.

As she thought it over, because the statement had rocked her world so suddenly that it was all she could focus on, her amusement started to finally fade. It was quickly being replaced with panic. Her breathing quickened to near hyperventilation. Then her heart dropped into her stomach. Did everyone think she was in love with Wynonna? Her eyes went wide as the worst question popped into her mind now. Did Wynonna think Nicole was in love with her?

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The rest of the day was relatively quiet. Waverly had kept to herself, reading and napping, while Nicole had gone to her bedroom to think. She was also doing a little research to help educate herself on how the Hell she could get out of the lawsuit Champ had filed but mostly she was thinking. She could still not believe what Waverly had said to her. There was no way that anyone who knew these girls could ever think that Nicole was secretly in love with Wynonna, right? Maybe Waverly was just reaching for some sort of explanation as to why Nicole and Wynonna had always been close. Even that didn’t make sense. Nicole had no idea where Waverly could have gathered an idea like that.

Luckily some of Nicole’s pain medicine had kicked in a little more than usual and it had brought her brain a break in the form of a nap. She didn’t sleep well most nights because she had to sleep sitting up and she usually couldn’t breathe too well. So when she did get in a good nap she was more than grateful for it. The fact that this nap had offered rest for her weary mind was more welcome than she could express.
Nicole had just gotten up from her nap and was in the bathroom attached to her bedroom. She was leaned close to her mirror, gently poking around her nose, carefully examining her injury. The bruising was nearly gone now. She was still pretty sore whenever she laughed too hard and sneezing was the worst but aside from that she felt like she was making a pretty quick recovery.

Deciding to stop obsessing over her nose she left the bathroom now and headed for her computer. She figured she would settle back in and start researching how to stay out of jail. She didn’t get far, though, because as soon as she stepped into her room again she froze in her tracks. Her heart jumped into her throat in fright when she saw someone was sitting on her bed.

It was only a split second pause, mostly because she had been startled at the presence of someone else, before she realized who it was sitting on her bed. She breathed out a laugh and put a hand to her heart “Jesus Christ, Wynonna, you scared the Hell out of me.”

“I didn’t mean to” Wynonna looked sorry but her lips flickered into a momentary smirk because any time she got to scare someone it was always funny. “I knocked but I guess…” She motioned to the adjoining bathroom door and shrugged.

“Funny how I can be all alone and still pee with the door closed, huh?” Nicole said with a laugh. Her eyes fell to her friend and for a moment she was just so glad to see her that she had forgotten she was upset with her. Then just like that she was reminded. She was about to unleash a string of questions about where Wynonna had been all day but she noticed the look on her friends face and immediately her anger faded into worry. She moved over to the bed and spoke gently now as she approached “You have your ‘I’m worried but I don’t want anyone to know’ face on. What’s going on?”

Wynonna stood from the bed and gave another shrug. It did not surprise her that Nicole had picked up on the fact that something was wrong. No one in the world knew her better than Nicole did. So instead of denying it she just gave a nod “We need to talk.”

More worry flooded Nicole’s features at the solemn tone that Wynonna spoke with. She gave a single nod to indicate she had heard what was said then motioned to her bed “Sure, of course. Let me just sit-”

“Not here” Wynonna gave her head a shake. She eyed her friend for a moment then motioned to the bedroom door “In that big conference room downstairs. I’m going to go get Waverly and then I will meet you there, alright?”

This surprised Nicole. Why would they need to be in a specific room to talk? Was this more of an official talk and less of a best friend talk? Why did Waverly need to be there? A million questions swirled around her head but she did not ask any. Not yet. Instead she gave Wynonna a soft smile and acknowledged the request with a nod “I will see you there.”

Wynonna didn’t say anything else. She gave Nicole a return nod then turned and left. Once she was alone Nicole let out a sigh. She was confused and worried now. Wynonna had disappeared early that morning without a goodbye, been gone most of the day, and then showed up all serious and needing to talk? This was not a good sign. Her mind raced as she quickly got herself a little more together before heading to the room to meet Wynonna and Waverly.

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Wynonna bit her lip nervously as she stood just outside the door that led onto the balcony where Waverly sat reading. She knew her sister was still mad at her. She just hoped she would take a few minutes to talk to her before yelling at her again.
Shaking the thought away she drew in a deep breath to steady herself then slid the door open. She stepped out onto the balcony as quietly as she could. A smile came to her face almost immediately upon seeing her sister. Waverly was all bundled up in a huge blanket where she sat reading. It reminded her of the many times she had gone to find her sister only to find her buried somewhere in a mound of blankets. Waverly was somehow always chilly, even in the middle of the summer, and it was one of the most endearing things about her.

Wynonna approached slowly because she did not want to scare Waverly. So she cleared her throat when she was a few steps away as if to announce her arrival. When that seemed to get her sister’s attention she smiled in relief and gave a little wave “Good book?”

Waverly shrugged and looked down at the cover of the book. She then turned it to show Wynonna before folding the book shut. She knew her sister had not just come for a friendly chat because they were not currently in a friendly chat zone. So she folded her hands in her lap on top of her book and eyed Wynonna carefully “What is it?”

Wynonna’s brows creased into a bit of a frown at that before shaking her head “Damn my face must have a huge flashing light on it or something that says I have something on my mind because both you and Nicole asked me that right away.”

Waverly’s face softened ever so slightly. She could see Wynonna was being absolutely genuine with her in that moment. There was something on her mind and she needed to get it out. Instead of hiding it she was coming to talk about it. That was a nice change. Waverly liked the thought that Wynonna was changing her habits. “If you thought the two people who know you best in the world wouldn’t pick up on your ‘we need to talk’ face then you don’t really know us very well do you?”

Wynonna laughed very softly and her head dipped once in agreement. Of course her best friend and sister would be able to tell something was going on right away. She had no idea why she had expected anything less. She drew in a big breath and brought her eyes back to her sister. She fixed her with a serious look now “Will you come with me? Nicole is waiting in the conference room downstairs.”

Waverly perked an eyebrow slightly. This was one of the first times Wynonna had come to her with the intention of including her in a meeting between herself and Nicole. To say she was intrigued was an understatement. She set her book now on the table near her chair and gave a single nod “What’s going on?”

Wynonna reached into the inside pocket of the jacket she had been wearing that day. It was early fall so it was chilly out. She had just gotten back from her meeting and had not changed yet. She brought her hand out and when she did it was holding what looked like a book. It was an old tattered book with bent and frayed edges. She looked at it almost like she was about to say goodbye to an old friend before her eyes shifted once more to her sister. She offered the book out toward her now and spoke gently “There is a lot you need to know and I think it’s about time I lay it all out there for you.”

Waverly’s eyes dropped to what Wynonna was handing over to her. She had not expected this. She reached out to take the gift from her sister and as soon as she focused on it she knew what it was. Her heart did a flip in her chest and she quickly blinked up at her sister with surprise on her face “Daddy’s journal?”

Wynonna nodded a few times as her eyes flickered to the old journal then back to Waverly’s face. “You’ll have time to read it later but right now I really need you to come with me.”

Waverly didn’t hesitate now. She unwrapped herself from her blanket and climbed off her chair. She
folded the journal to her chest tightly with both arms and offered Wynonna a soft smile that told her to go ahead and lead the way.

Neither of them spoke as they made their way down a floor toward the conference room together. It was almost as if they were walking toward their collective doom. There was a thickness and a tension in the air. Once they reached the door and it was opened for them they headed inside and only then did they part ways.

Nicole looked up when the door was opened. She was so relieved to see the sisters coming in together. She smiled as Waverly moved to sit across from her at the large table that filled the room. She didn’t say anything to her, though. Instead, after Waverly acknowledged her silent greeting, she moved her eyes back to Wynonna who stood at the head of the table.

Wynonna looked at both girls sitting at the table, nodding at each one in a silent greeting, before she folded her hands together and let them dangle loosely in front of herself. She cleared her throat then spoke in a serious tone “I would like to thank you all for coming. I know you have much more important things you could be doing so I will make this quick.”

Nicole arched an eyebrow and slowly looked around the room. As far as she could tell it was just the three of them. When her eyes came back around the room she looked at Waverly and gave a slightly confused shake of her head as if silently asking her what Wynonna was doing.

Waverly shrugged at Nicole then looked back at her sister. She lifted a hand slightly to silently get Wynonna’s attention. When she was acknowledged she spoke gently so as not to potentially come off as being rude “Um what’s going on? It’s just us…”

Wynonna smirked at her sister. She lifted her finger to her own nose and tapped it once as she winked. She then turned her finger and pointed at Waverly “You’re very observant.” She let out a soft laugh and her entire being relaxed. She brightened up slightly and gave a shrug with just one shoulder “I was just messing around with you two. You both seemed so worried about this meeting so I wanted to really play it up.”

“Oh my god, Wynonna” Nicole let out a groan of displeasure that lightened with a laugh at the end. “I thought there was something really bad happening.”

“Yeah” Waverly chimed in with a firm nod as she scowled in annoyance. “You can’t just come to us all serious face and then goof off. Do you ever take anything seriously?”

“Hey” Wynonna lifted her hands up slightly in a gesture of surrender. “Calm down I was just joking. The truth of the matter is that there is a lot of serious shit going down, alright? Trust me I am taking every single fucking second of my life seriously at the moment but damn…” She puffed out a soft breath and gave a sideways tilt of her head “…if I don’t make a joke every now and then I’m going to spontaneously combust. So just bear with me.”

Nicole bit her lip just slightly and dropped her eyes from Wynonna. She felt so bad that her friend was dealing with everything. She wished she could help.

“I’m sorry” Waverly breathed out softly as guilt filled her features. Her eyes dropped and she looked at the old journal her sister had given her just a few minutes before. Her fingers slid over the leather strap that tied it closed and her head nodded once. She looked back to Wynonna and looked more focused “So why are we here?”

Wynonna cleared her throat again before drawing in a deep breath. It was easy to see she had slipped back into serious mode now. “I want to call a truce” Her eyes shifted between both Nicole and
Waverly for a few seconds to let them absorb what she had said before she continued. “We aren’t going to make it through any of this bullshit if we don’t work together. The truth is…” She let out a defeated sigh and finally sat in the chair that she had been standing near “…I can’t do this without you two.” Her eyes shifted to Waverly and she gave her a firm nod “Both of you. And I’ve been stupid to think that hiding things from you two was going to help in the long run so…” She licked her lips and her eyes once more moved between both girls before she finished her thought “…no more secrets. I promise.”

This came as a surprise to both Waverly and Nicole. Neither of them had expected to hear something like this when they had been asked to this meeting and the looks on both their faces showed exactly that.

Nicole blinked a few times and quickly refocused on Wynonna before being the first to speak up “I agree. Secrets destroy people, destroy families, and we have enough enemies against us right now.”

Wynonna nodded at her friend’s words. She was glad to hear Nicole was on board though she had not really expected anything less.

Waverly looked down at the journal in her hands again as she thought it over. She had trusted her sister so many times before and she had been hurt so many times before. It was only natural that she was hesitant to agree. But after a moment her eyes lifted and found Wynonna watching her. A small smile flickered at the corner of her lips and she agreed with a nod “No more secrets.”

When Waverly agreed Wynonna could not help the wide smile that came to her face. She gave one excited nod and stood up from her chair. She moved now down the table to be closer to the other two since they had taken their places in the middle of the overly long table. She picked a chair right next to her sister and plopped down. She reached out and put a hand over the journal Waverly held and looked her right in the eyes “Daddy knew more than he ever let on. It’s all in here. Read through it, please. Because I need your opinion on a few things in there.”

Waverly gave a quick nod of her head. Her hand turned over where it was resting on the journal and gently took hold of Wynonna’s on top of it. She gave a soft squeeze and offered a gentle smile “Of course. I will do whatever I can to protect this family and its legacy.”

Wynonna let out a long breath as her eyes fell to where her hand was being held by Waverly’s. She thought for just a moment then looked back up. Her gaze was more solemn now as it settled on her sister. “Speaking of our legacy…” She trailed off and her eyes flickered to Nicole. She wasn’t sure how Waverly would take the news she was about to share and wondered if maybe it was a bad idea.

Nicole knew exactly what Wynonna was so nervous about in that moment. When her eyes met with her best friend she could instantly tell. She didn’t blink. Instead she offered an encouraging nod as her hand reached out across the table and gently came to rest on top of Wynonna’s arm. She gave a squeeze to show that she was right there. She wasn’t going anywhere.

Wynonna’s heart fluttered when Nicole grabbed her arm. She wasn’t sure if it was because the gesture had helped her nerves or made them worse. Either way she felt Nicole’s strength and she appreciated it. So she offered her friend a grateful smile then turned back to Waverly. She licked her lips out of nervousness then spoke softly “I have a crazy idea.”

Waverly had watched the quick exchange of glances between Nicole and Wynonna. She knew immediately the two of them had already talked about this. She wanted to feel hurt, and she did for a moment, but the feeling quickly faded because she had to focus on the now. Right now, in that very moment, Wynonna was including her and that was all she had really wanted. So she gave a nod to show she was listening “I’m all ears.”
“I’ve been thinking about a way out of this mess” Wynonna started softly. She couldn’t just bring herself to blurt it out. She thought maybe an explanation might soften the blow. “I’ve racked my brain for ways to get the Hardy family off our backs. How to do so without potentially turning an entire territory against me.” She shook her head at that. “I also want to be able to give you a normal life, Waves.” Her tone was soft now as she spoke directly to her sister “That has always been my main priority. Nothing I have come up with has been a good enough idea, you know? Because it all involves us, our family.” She lifted the hand that wasn’t held by Waverly’s to indicate the three of them “always at the center of attention. I feel like we can never have the freedom to just live because there will always be someone interfering.”

Waverly nodded slightly. This was nothing she didn’t know. She had accepted it a long time ago. It hadn’t stopped her from dreaming of a normal life but she wasn’t naive enough to think she would ever get one.

When Waverly didn’t interrupt Wynonna just kept talking before she lost her nerve “I want to abolish the Monarchy, Waves.”

This surprised Waverly and it showed plainly on her face. Her eyes fluttered in surprise and her mouth dropped open slightly. She stared at Wynonna as if she had just said something in a language she did not understand. She had even stopped breathing. It all lasted just a few long seconds before Waverly was coughing out a soft “What?”

Wynonna nodded and drew in a quick breath “I know it sounds crazy, I told you I had a crazy idea, but babygirl it makes so much sense. Think about it, Waves. There’s no place for a Monarchy in the modern world. Almost every other country has elected officials in charge. They are chosen by the people, they listen to the people, and everyone gets a vote so they feel like they have a say. I want that.”

“Besides” Nicole chimed in now. She could see Wynonna was starting to panic because Waverly still looked completely surprised. “This will allow you to be completely set free of everything you’ve carried your entire life. No more having to watch how you act because it might reflect badly on the Crown. No more biting your tongue because you speak for an entire country and your opinions might not be agreeable.” She shrugged now at that “Not that you’ve ever really said anything that was deplorable enough to cause an outrage but still. You could have a rebellious streak inside you just waiting to come out.”

Waverly glanced at Nicole and let out a huffed breath. Her head shook and she turned to look back at her sister. She stared in disbelief for just a moment longer before finally finding her voice again “You wouldn’t be Queen? I wouldn’t be next in line for the Throne?”

Wynonna shook her head quickly and frowned slightly. She was still unable to read how Waverly felt and she was growing more nervous by the moment.

Waverly’s brows creased together as she processed it all. Then she nodded once “This can be done?”

“Yeah” Wynonna said quickly. “I mean how else did the other countries in the world turn into Democracies? Besides we should do it now, on our own terms, before people decide to rise up and overthrow us.”

“Step down willingly” Waverly mumbled. Her eyes dropped to where her hand was still entangled with Wynonna’s. She nodded a few times while taking a moment to think it all over. It was a lot to take in. There was a lot that this decision carried. It was not something they could just do lightly, or easily. After a moment her eyes lifted once more to Wynonna. A tiny flicker of a smile flashed at the corners of her lips as she spoke “It’s brilliant, Wynonna.”
“Really!?” Wynonna could not hide her surprise at Waverly’s response. She sat up straighter in her chair and a smile spread over her face quickly. Her eyes flickered from Waverly to Nicole and back again before a relieved laugh came out “You’re on board? Because, of course, I wouldn’t go ahead with this idea if you weren’t but I think it’s our best option here.”

“Of course” Waverly laughed out now as if Wynonna had worried over nothing. “I was never sold on the entire thing. But when you’re born into it and you’re instilled with such a strong sense of family duty at a young age you just kind of accept it.” She was shaking her head now at the ideals she had been forced to live up to as a kid but her smile never faded “I love this idea. How fast can we get it done?”

“I fucking love you” Wynonna lunged at her sister now, pulling the hand that was being held free, and wrapped her up in a tight hug. She squeezed excitedly for a few seconds before pulling back. She looked as happy and lighthearted as she might have ever in her life as she beamed down at Waverly “You’re my favorite person in the entire world, babygirl. I hope you know that.”

Waverly laughed at her sister’s excitement while at the same time subtly wincing because the hug had crushed her ribs slightly. She was still very sensitive. But it didn’t matter because the way her sister was looking at her made it all worth it. “You’re my favorite person, too.”

“Aww, I love you guys” Nicole pouted out her lips playfully and batted her eyes as she watched the two of them hug again. She stood now and moved around the long table so she was next to the sisters now. Her hands reached out and gently came to rest on both of the other girls’ shoulders. Her eyes moved between them a few times and she nodded “I’m so happy for you two.”

“You’re just as much a part of this” Wynonna reached up and put her hand over where Nicole’s was resting on her shoulder. She gave her best friend a genuinely happy smile as her head nodded once at her. She knew without a shadow of a doubt she would not make it through this if she did not have Nicole with her every step of the way.

Waverly reached out and put one hand on her sister’s face and the other on Nicole’s hand. She looked at the both of them for a few moments before a smile came over her face. No matter what had happened, or what they were about to go through, she knew that all that mattered in the end of the day was this little family. The three of them. She felt in her heart that nothing could tear them apart.

Wynonna was the first to break from the three way stare down they all had going on. It was just a little too mushy for her liking. She let out a soft laugh as her hands dropped away from both girls. She cleared her throat and folded her hands together to lay on top of the table now. When she spoke it was in a serious tone again “Now that we got that out of the way I think we need to air out all our dirty laundry.”

Waverly perked an eyebrow at that. She glanced between Wynonna and Nicole before shrugging slightly “I don’t really have any secrets.”

Nicole nodded just once as she looked from Waverly to Wynonna with a shrug “The only thing I can think of is that completely bullshit lawsuit.”

Wynonna nodded quickly at Nicole and when Waverly looked confused she spoke before she could ask “Champ is coming after Nicole claiming she used excessive force.”

“Wh-what?” Waverly sputtered. Her eyes moved to look between Nicole and Wynonna a few times as the words set in. She huffed out a sigh of pure disgust as her head shook now “That shit-eating coward. I should have known.”
“It’s okay” Wynonna shook her head quickly and reached out to lay a calming hand over Waverly’s. “I already took care of it.”

“Wait, hold on” Nicole lifted a hand in a stop motion toward Wynonna as anger filled her expression. She blinked at her in anticipation of an explanation “You what?”

Wynonna sucked a quick breath through her teeth as her face scrunched up in a sort of wince motion. “Yeah, look, it was on my list to tell you about as part of the no more secrets thing. So…” She shrugged and relented a sigh of surrender “Okay I guess I am telling you now. I took care of it. Champ agreed to drop the lawsuit.”

“How?” Nicole looked a little less angry that Wynonna had gone behind her back and a little more confused as to what she had done.

Wynonna shook her head and moved her hand from Waverly’s to Nicole’s in a gesture to try and keep her calm. “It’s not what you’re thinking” She eyes locked a firm stare with Nicole’s in a silent reassuring that she had not gone and used her power as Queen to demand the charges be dropped. She did in fact have a little integrity. “I figured out what Champ wanted most and gave it to him.”

“Money?” Waverly perked an eyebrow now. “Did you really pay him for his silence?”

“Ew, no” Wynonna rolled her eyes as annoyance was starting to set in. “Come on do you two really think so little of me that you just assume I’d use my authority to simply demand this go away or throw money at it to make it disappear?” She huffed at that. She was genuinely hurt.

“No” Nicole felt bad. She moved her hand now and gently laid it over Wynonna’s. She gave a soft squeeze as her eyes focused softly on her friend. “I just know you’d do anything to protect your family and sometimes…” She shrugged now and sounded almost ashamed as she continued “…I’m not sure where you would draw the line.”

“I have morals” Wynonna almost growled the words as her arms folded across her chest. She looked appalled by the other two sitting there making such accusations at her. She huffed and her brows creased together in a frown “Sorry to disappoint you two but I actually took the high road this time. In fact, that is where I was this morning. I set up a meeting with Champ to discuss a way out of this.”

“I’m sorry” Waverly pouted and reached her hand out to lay on her sister’s shoulder.

Nicole nodded as both hands reached out and took hold of where Wynonna’s arms were folded. She pulled gently to try and ease them apart “I’m sorry too. I’ve always believed you’d do the right thing when it came down to it. I don’t know what I was thinking. I guess after our fight I got scared you’d-”

“Well I didn’t” Wynonna snapped and gave a roll of her eyes. She unfolded her arms now and let Nicole take her hand like she wanted to. Her eyes moved to look at Waverly now and she was surprisingly calm when she spoke “He thought he was going to weasel his way to the Crown by marrying you. So I played at that.”

“You what?” Waverly’s eyes got wide as panic moved over her. “Wynonna did you really-”

“No! God no” Wynonna stopped her sister from the downward spiral into panic she could see coming. She let out a soft laugh now and shook her head “No I didn’t arrange your marriage to that sackless shit.”

Waverly was visibly relieved. She let out a long sigh before shrugging just once “Then what?”
Wynonna gave a sheepish shrug. An overly large smile, indicating she was about to say something they were not going to like, came to her face as she spoke “I offered to marry him instead.”

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We’re about to lead a revolution. What do you say?

“YOU WHAT?” Waverly stood out of her chair so quickly it tipped over backwards. Her eyes were wide with both shock and anger at her sister for doing something so stupid. “How in the world is that ANY better?”

“Seriously, Wynonna, what were you thinking?” Nicole had stood back from Wynonna and was staring at her with horror on her face. “Why on Earth would you marry him and give his family all of the power? It’s like you’re rewarding them for their bad behavior.”

“Not to mention what he did to me!” Waverly motioned wildly at her ribs and the gash that was still healing under her eye. “I do not support this, Wynonna! I will not have anything to do with this!” She huffed out in anger than pushed away from the table and stormed passed Wynonna.

Surprisingly calmly, Wynonna reached out and took a hold of Waverly’s arm as she marched by. She gave a gentle squeeze and turned to look at her. Her gaze held a softness in it, signalling she was not upset at her sister’s outburst, as her head motioned to the chair that was tipped over. “How about you sit back down and let me explain?”

Nicole was floored. Wynonna had made a lot of terrible and irrational decisions in her life but this one was worst of them all. She could not wrap her head around it.

Waverly stood defiantly next to her sister. Her eyes narrowed in a scowl and her head shook once “You have three seconds to convince me that this isn’t the worst decision you have ever made in your entire life.”

“I am abolishing the Monarchy” Wynonna said plainly. Her hand slid from Waverly’s arm indicating to her that she was free to leave if she wanted.

Waverly shrugged as her arms folded across her chest now “You really think he’s going to let you go through with that once you’re married? He will shut it down as soon as he finds out.”

“He won’t find out” Wynonna said with a slight shrug of her shoulders. Her eyes shifted now to Nicole with a calming glance because she knew her friend was probably freaking out too. She then nodded and looked back to her sister “Our lawyers are the best in the entire world. After my meeting today with Champ I asked the entire legal team to stick around. I made it very clear what my plans were and we thought up a plan to make this both legally binding and null and void at the exact same time.”

“What?” Waverly blinked just once. “That doesn’t make any sense.”

“Besides don’t you think Champ’s family has good lawyers too?” Nicole offered with a toss of her hand in the air as if she was giving up on believing in this idea.

“Of course. That is why the marriage contract will be legit” Wynonna still spoke evenly and confidently. “They will make sure there is absolutely nothing in the contract that raises a red flag. It will be plainly stated and worded in a way that ensures Champ will become King once he is married to me. It will lay it all out. He will be the ruler of the Monarchy and, in turn, the entire country. He will finally have the power his family has sought all these years.”

“I still don’t see how you can get out of it” Waverly huffed in frustration before turning to pick up the chair she had tipped over. She sat once it was upright then folded her arms again.
“The Hardy family is so power hungry they will be blinded by it” Wynonna’s lips started to curl into a slight smile. “They will do anything to be in charge and that includes giving me time to get my affairs in order.”

“What?” Nicole perked an eyebrow slightly as she reached for a chair of her own. She eyed her friend very slowly as she sat because she could tell she had something up her sleeve. She tilted her head to the side curiously before motioning with her hand for Wynonna to explain “What does that mean?”

“It means we have a year from the date we sign the contract” Wynonna’s smile spread fully across her face now. She looked from Nicole to Waverly and nodded just once “Which means we have a year to do whatever it takes to make sure there is no crown for him to have.”

Nicole realized exactly what Wynonna was doing. She had to admit it was a genius plan. She let out a huff of a laugh as amusement filled her face “That’s really sneaky, Wynonna. Even for you.”

Wynonna gave a playful bow toward Nicole “Ah thank you.”

Waverly didn’t look that amused. Her head gave a single shake as she voiced her concern “What if that’s not enough time? What if someone spills the beans and your plan is exposed?” She huffed out another sigh “Wynonna this plan is reckless.”

“I know it is” Wynonna spoke gently toward her sister. She reached out and took hold of Waverly’s hand. She lifted it and kissed very lightly against her fingertips “Babygirl this could go to shit and I could be stuck married to an awful man but if that happens I will figure a way out of it, okay? If there is one thing I am good at it’s scheming my way out of shitty situations. But…” She let out a soft sigh and looked at her little sister in a way that told her how much she absolutely adored her “You have to have some faith in this. I have you and I have Nicole and I have a team of people who support this. With our powers combined I am certain this will work. It has to because…” She shrugged just once and let out a soft laugh that didn’t really sound amused “…I don’t have a back up plan.”

“You’re an idiot” Waverly mumbled as a hand lifted to her face to wipe at a tear that had come from her eye. The thought of her sister marrying Champ terrified her in so many different ways. This was the worst plan she had ever heard and yet it was also the best plan she had ever heard. She rolled her eyes and sniffled softly “I’m scared, Wynonna.”

“So am I” Wynonna admitted as her hand lifted from Waverly’s hand to her cheek to brush away another tear. “But if it fails then it’s all on me. I can’t risk you-” She glanced at Nicole and added “-or you” before looking back at her sister “-getting hurt again. So if I go down I go down alone.”

“I won’t let that happen” Nicole straightened where she sat and puffed out her chest. She reached out and laid her hand over Wynonna’s arm as she spoke firmly “I will not let you fail.”

Waverly just shook her head again. Her eyes closed and she drew in a deep breath. She did not like this at all but she had no other choice. So after a moment of gathering herself she opened her eyes and let out a long breath. “Of course I’ll do whatever I can to make sure this happens. But Wynonna…” She bit her lip almost nervously now and motioned towards Nicole “…what about us? I mean if this fails and you’re stuck being married to Champ what is going to happen to us? I will still be a part of the family, I will still be a part of the Monarchy and I am sure his family will make my life a living Hell.” She motioned to Nicole again before nodding “And I’m absolutely sure they won’t let Nicole live after what happened with her and Champ.”

Wynonna nodded and lifted her hand now between them to silently quiet their fears. She could see worry painting over Nicole’s features. “I thought about that. There is going to be a clause in the
marriage contract that protects you two. I refuse to sign it if he doesn’t agree to it. But like I said they will be so power hungry that I doubt they will care about such a small condition.”

“What’s the condition?” Waverly’s voice trembled as she asked.

“Upon my marriage to Champ you and Nicole are you be stripped of your titles” Wyonna glanced between the two of them. “There is a large chunk of our family’s money in an account he can’t access. You two will be banished from the Palace with a protection order on both of you. So basically…” She sighed heavily as she shrugged “...you’ll be kicked out of the family but it will be illegal for anyone to seek you out and harm you.”

“Wynonna, no” Waverly shook her head just once. Tears started to stream now from her eyes as she stared at her sister in shock. “I won’t leave you with him.”

“You won’t have to” Wynonna assured her with a soft smile. Her hand moved once more to wipe at her sister’s tears as she let out the tiniest laugh “I got this, babygirl. We all got this” She glanced at Nicole now and gave her an assured nod “This is gonna work.”

“What if it-”

“Shhh” Wynonna moved now to hug Waverly again, effectively cutting off another worried ramble. She held her sister gently. Wynonna had guessed that Waverly would be worried about the success of the plan. She was crazy if she wasn’t worried herself. But she had faith. There was something deep inside her that told her this was the right thing to do. It wouldn’t be easy but she knew in the end it was the only thing that made sense. She had to do it. There was no other choice.

Nicole moved from her chair and squatted down next to where the sisters sat in their embrace. Her hands came to rest on each of the girls’ backs and she gave a nod “We can do this. The three of us together are unstoppable. Kind of like the Three Musketeers!”

Wynonna let out a laugh and pulled back from the hug. She smiled at Waverly and nodded toward Nicole “You hear that? I think she just officially made us members of our own Royal Guard.”

Nicole laughed at that and gave a half shrug of agreement. Her hand moved soothingly along Waverly’s back and she spoke gently to her “We’re about to lead a revolution. What do you say?”

“Yeah come on” Wynonna shifted now to bring her hand between the three of them. She held it, palm down, and nodded toward it “One for all…” She glanced at the other two expectantly.

Nicole grinned and quickly moved to put her hand on top of Wynonna’s. She then nodded at Waverly and flickered her eyes to their hands in silent encouragement.

Waverly rolled her eyes because she was looking at the two biggest dorks she had ever known in her life. She was still worried but at this point she had no other options. So she finally gave in and put her hand on top of the other two. She let out a sigh and mumbled “And all for one.”

“Group hug!” Nicole said excitedly and quickly wrapped her arms around both Wynonna and Waverly. She pulled them in so all of their faces were squished together. Then she quickly groaned and let them go in favor of cupping her hands over her nose. She pouted and mumbled from behind her hands “That was stupid.”

“You’re an idiot” Waverly mumbled as an amused smile came to her lips. Her eyes moved between her sister and Nicole and she let out a sigh. She really hoped this plan would work. If not it would destroy their family for good and she was not sure she would be able to handle that.
Wynonna sat at her desk later that night like she had done every night since they had arrived at that cabin. She was staring at yet another briefing from someone back in the Palace informing her of the various goings on. She blinked just once when she realized none of the words were making sense. When she blinked she realized her eyes were burning. She couldn’t remember the last time she had slept. She looked up now and found a clock across the room. It was just past two in the morning. Maybe she should try and rest for a bit.

She moved from her desk to her bed now, letting a yawn out as she moved, and settled on the mattress by dropping onto her back. She stretched her arms and legs out in all directions and slowly let out a long breath as she went loose and let herself relax. She was exhausted. She felt like she had been going non-stop for years. The idea of a coma was sounding better and better as each sleepless moment in her life passed by.

She laid sprawled out on her bed for a few minutes before she decided to shift around and lay on it like a normal person. She sat up so her back was against the headboard at the top of the bed and stretched her legs out along the mattress. She pulled the blankets up her legs and a slight smile came to her lips. There was nothing quite like crawling into bed for the night.

Just then there was a soft knock at her door. She was surprised by the sound because it was the middle of the night and she figured everyone else was asleep. It had been a pretty emotional day all around. But apparently she was not the only one unable to sleep. So she cleared her throat and called out softly “Come in.”

Waverly, looking a little timid, poked her head into the room first. When she saw that Wynonna was in bed she frowned a little “I’m sorry I didn’t wake you up did I? I saw the light on and I-”

“It’s fine. I am awake” Wynonna gave the girl a gentle nod and motioned with her hand for her to go ahead and enter the room fully.

Waverly took a few more steps into the room before pausing. She carefully eyed her sister in her bed before she smiled shyly at her “Do you remember when I was younger and I used to come into your room in the middle of the night and crawl in bed with you? Most nights you wouldn’t even realize I was there until you woke up in the morning.”

A soft smile came to her lips as the memory played through Wynonna’s mind. She let out a soft laugh at that and nodded “You used to wait for me to wake up so you could talk to me about whatever was on your mind. Except you were pretty impatient so you usually ended up not so subtly moving around a lot then pretending it was an accident when I woke up.”

Waverly laughed as well as a coy smirk came to her lips. “You never complained.”

“What can I say? I love you more than I hate mornings” Wynonna gave her sister a very warm smile before she shifted in her bed to make some room next to her. It was a huge bed that could probably sleep five people but Wynonna liked to spread out right in the middle. So she scooted over to one side then folded back the blankets and gave a pat to the mattress “So what’s on your mind?”

Waverly had to bite back her excited smile when Wynonna invited her into her bed. She quickly rushed over and crawled up beside her sister. She mimicked Wynonna’s position, sitting with her back to the headboard and her legs stretched out, before pulling the blankets over herself. Once she was all set she glanced at her sister with a little nod “I can’t even remember the last time I crawled into bed with you.”
“It has definitely been a while” Wynonna agreed with a nod. Her arm moved now and she wrapped it around Waverly’s shoulders. She pulled until her sister leaned into her then gave her a soft, one armed side hug. She touched a very soft kiss to the side of Waverly’s head then released her sister but kept her arm around her loosely. “So why are you up wondering the halls instead of sleeping peacefully?”

Waverly bit her lip and looked down to her lap. She had carried her father’s journal into the room with her and she held it up now to show Wynonna. “I’ve almost read the entire thing already.” She shook her head and let out a heavy sigh “I guess I just have a lot of questions.”

Wynonna eyed the journal as her head nodded. She reached out to take it from Waverly gently and opened it to thumb through it. She was quiet as she flipped a few pages before her eyes lifted and she looked back to her sister “Yeah I know what you mean. I was pretty surprised at what I read in this.”

“I guess I always imagined him as a strong leader. He was kind of my hero, you know?” Waverly shrugged and glanced at the tattered pages of the journal. “But some of the stuff in here has really opened my eyes. It makes me wonder….” She trailed off as her eyes lifted now to Wynonna. She was almost afraid to voice her question but she remembered earlier that day that they had all promised there would be no more secrets so she was confident her sister would be honest with her. “Have you ever done anything as shady as the stuff daddy did?”

Wynonna just gave her head a flick of a shake. She closed the book but her eyes lingered on the cover. She thought it over for a moment before she spoke in a soft tone that almost sounded scared “I haven’t had the chance to be shady. So much shit has happened so quickly that I’ve been in survival mode the entire time I’ve been in charge. But…” She looked up at her sister now with a hint of guilt hanging in her eyes “I think if I had to deal with what daddy did for so long I would probably have no other choice but to do some shady shit.”

Waverly wasn’t surprised to hear that. From what she had read it seemed like her dad had been ruling with his back against the wall for a long time. Before she could say as much, though, Wynonna continued her thoughts.

“Which honestly makes me sick to my stomach because I’ve always hated how gross the idea of a single ruler system is” She huffed and gave a quick shake of her head. “The last thing I ever wanted was to be put in this situation because I never thought I could do it. Yet here I am and I’m dealing with an absolute shit storm and the more time that passes the more tempted I am to just get on my Queen soapbox and start making demands. Like do you know how easily I could have Champ’s entire family put into jail?” She looked at Waverly now with a motion of her hand as if she had just made a fantastic point. “Or make it illegal to write anything about us in the papers? I could literally just start pointing at people and having their heads cut off for pissing me off and that’s just gross, you know?” She breathed out with a grunt like noise and slumped her shoulders in defeat “But damn it would definitely make all of this bullshit go away and that is very tempting on the hard days.”

“Hey” Waverly spoke gently, shifting in bed next to her sister to face her a little better, as her hand reached around to her back. She rubbed softly, soothingly, as she focused on Wynonna with a tender gaze. “The fact that you know it’s a gross abuse of power and you haven’t done that yet? I think that speaks volumes about who you really are. You are strong and stubborn and smarter than those who have come before you.” She offered a very slight smile to her sister now “Wynonna, what you have had to deal with is not easy but you haven’t broken yet and now you have a plan to end it all. If you ask me you’ve already outdone daddy’s greatness.”

A crooked little half smile rose in one corner of Wynonna’s face. She rolled her eyes at her sister and gave her head a little shake “You came in here with something on your mind and ended up making
me feel better instead. How did I get so lucky?”

Waverly let out the soft giggle and nodded her head “The same way I did. Good genes.”

“Great genes. I mean…” Wynonna reached out now and ran her hand back through Waverly’s hair with a wide grin on her lips “It’s the middle of the night and your hair looks this good? Please. The rest of the world doesn’t stand a chance against you.”

“Us” Waverly corrected as her own hand now brushed gently through Wynonna’s hair. She let out a laugh and relaxed against the bed again with a single nod. Her eyes dropped to the journal sitting in her lap again. Her smile faded and a heavy sigh came from her lips “I never doubted that he loved us but it was nice to read over and over again how highly he thought of us.”

“You, mostly” Wynonna shrugged as her eyes fell to the journal as well. “He mostly just bitches about me squandering my potential and being too abrasive for the Royal life.”

Waverly let out a soft laugh as her eyes lifted to her sister again “He admired that about you. He knew it was your greatest strength and that one day it would be the thing you called on most to get you through.” Her eyes dropped back to the book as her brows creased together in thought. She was quiet just a moment as she recalled something she had read. She then looked back to Wynonna as she lifted the journal and gave it a little wave “It was like he knew he was going to die sooner rather than later.”

“He did” Wynonna said plainly. She reached for the journal and flipped through it. She didn’t stop until she was near the end. When she found what she was looking for she held the book open and turned it to show Waverly. “He knew about the Hardy family. He was terrified. He had almost made a deal with a neighboring country to wage war on their territory just to kill them off without him having to do it himself. But in the end he thought better of it…” She turned another page. Her eyes dropped and she read a few lines. A nod of her head was seen as if she were affirming what she remembered matched what she read. She looked back to Wynonna with a frown “That’s when he agreed to marry you to Champ if they agreed to stop killing us.”

Waverly’s face turned down into a full frown and her eyes dropped to the journal. She reached for it slowly and took it from her sister. Her eyes focused on what Wynonna had just been reading and after a moment her head shook “I hadn’t gotten this far. I had no idea…” She looked up now with a mix of hurt and fear in her eyes “I can’t believe he would offer to marry me to the family that hates us.”

“I don’t think he would have ever let it actually happen” Wynonna whispered tenderly as her hand came out and pushed the journal down. She then moved her hand to grab Waverly’s chin lightly and direct her eyes upward to meet her gaze. When they did she gave a slight nod and a smile “I think he was working on a way to screw them over and that is why they killed him.”

Waverly just closed her eyes because she could not bear to think of that being true. She couldn’t think about her father being sneaky enough to do something like that. She took in a few deep breaths to calm herself because she felt her emotions started to swell over. She did not want to cry. After calming herself her eyes came open and when she saw Wynonna was still looking at her tenderly she spoke in a whisper “Aren’t you afraid that’s going to happen again? That somehow Champ will find out about your plan and kill you? Because I’m terrified of that.”

“I know, babygirl” Wynonna moved now to wrap her arms around Waverly and pull her into a tight embrace. She held her against her in order to comfort her younger sister. She also did it because she needed to be reminded what she was doing all of this for. She needed to feel the genuine love of her sister to remind her why she was taking such a big risk. She closed her eyes and drew in a breath to
steady her racing heart before she breathed out in a whisper “I’m scared too. But if there is one lesson I’ve learned in being Queen its that there is no time to be afraid when you’re the one in charge.”

Waverly could not remember a single instant in her life that Wynonna had admitted to being afraid. Hearing it now shook her to her absolute core. Even when it seemed like Wynonna didn’t care or was uninterested she had always been able to pull it together to be there for Waverly to lean on if she ever needed it. So for her to admit her fear now meant it was a very serious situation, one that could change their entire lives in the worst possible way, and yet she was still willing to go through with it. All in the name of protecting Waverly.

A tear finally fell from Waverly’s eye as the emotion overcame her. She pulled back from the hug that Wynonha had been holding her in. She lifted her eyes to find her sister’s and when they met she gave a single nod of determination “I won’t let you fail. This will work and all of this anguish will be worth it in the end.” She moved now to cup her hands on Wynonna’s cheeks. She stared deeply into her eyes and spoke with a firm conviction “I am all in.”

Wynonna rolled her eyes at her sister cause she felt herself getting emotional. She breathed out a choked laugh and tried to smile instead of letting herself cry. “Stop being a blubbering mess” She smirked then leaned in and pressed a firm kiss to her sister’s forehead. Once she pulled back she pulled out of Waverly’s touch on her face. She wiped at a tear before it could escape then sniffled “We should get some sleep now. The real work begins tomorrow.”

Waverly knew that was about as emotional as her sister got and she just accepted it. She nodded in agreement to her words before reaching up to wipe a few lingering tears from her own face. “I’m not sure I will be able to sleep much. You know how I get when I worry” She gave a sheepish smile as she scooted back to return to how she had been sitting against the headboard.

“Me too” Wynonna admitted with a sigh as she too settled back against the bed. A moment of silence fell between the sisters as they returned to their own thoughts. The truth was Wynonna had not been able to stop worrying since this entire thing had started. She knew there were a lot more sleepless nights on the horizon before they would all be able to truly relax.

The two sisters sat in silence for a few minutes. It wasn’t awkward. They were both deep in thought, their minds running over everything that they would have to go through, while at the same time worrying about the other. It was clear to see that neither of them were sleeping any time soon.

That’s why when a soft knock came to the door it startled both of them. When you were sitting in silence any unexpected noise could cause you to jump. Waverly had gasped and put a hand to her heart. Wynonna, on the other hand, looked at the door curiously. Unless there was an emergency there was no reason someone should be knocking. She eyed the door for a moment before finally deciding to see who it was “What is it?”

Nicole stepped into the room with an apologetic look on her face. She had her bottom lip pulled in with her teeth. It was obvious she had been uncertain she had even wanted to knock. But when she realized Wynonna was in fact awake and had company she straightened up a little and a smile took over her features “I’m sorry I didn’t want to interrupt. I saw your light on and…” She trailed off as her eyes flickered between the sisters before landing on Waverly. Her smile grew slightly before she lifted one shoulder in a shrug “You two are having a moment. I can leave.”

“Don’t be silly” Wynonna waved the notion off with a flick of her hand to the side. She scooted on the bed now so that she was right up against Waverly. This made room for Nicole on her right side. She looked at her friend and patted the mattress that she had just exposed “It is apparently family snuggle time. Get over here.”
Nicole’s face softened and she moved from the doorway toward the bed. She paused with one knee on the mattress and looked over the scene of the two sisters in bed. She realized now that Waverly had slightly pinked eyes and a frown immediately filled her face “What’s wrong?”

“Oh nothing” Waverly quickly shook her head and gave a dismissive wave much like Wynonna had just a moment earlier. She motioned down to the journal she had in her lap before picking it up and turning to set it on the bedside table nearest her before turning to look back at Nicole “We were talking about daddy.”

“Oh” Nicole’s frown held. She eyed the two girls looking at her expectantly for a moment as if she wasn’t sure she should join even if they insisted. After assessing the situation she decided to slowly slide into the bed next to Wynonna because they had all agreed on no more secrets so they definitely were not lying when they said she wasn’t interrupting something. So she climbed in and settled so her back was to the headboard as well. The three of them now sat in the bed, shoulder to shoulder, legs and hips covered by the blanket. That is when another silence set in. This one was just a little awkward because, well, the three of them had never shared a bed together.

Each one of the girls sat there trying to decide what to say next. Nicole pulled at the top of the blanket and tried to avoid looking at the other two. Waverly tapped her fingers against the top of her legs as her eyes shifted side to side. Wynonna sat in the middle, her head turning back and forth, until she couldn’t handle it anymore. She let out a puff of a laugh and fixed her eyes on Nicole now “What the Hell are you doing awake?”

“Same thing you two are” Nicole shrugged and motioned with her hand toward the other two. “I have a lot bouncing around my brain and it makes it a little hard to sleep.”

Waverly smiled softly and nodded in agreement.

Wynonna eyed her friend up and down once before she finally gave her a nod. She let out a sigh and settled herself back against the headboard. She patted her hands at the top of her thighs a few times then let out a puff of a breath “Okay well what are we going to do then?”

“Watch a movie until we fall asleep?” Nicole offered with a motion to the tv in the corner of the room.

“Why did you come here?” Waverly leaned forward to look across her sister at Nicole. Realizing how sudden that sounded she bit her lip and laughed softly “I just meant why come here instead of watching a movie in your room?”

“Okay well what are we going to do then?” Nicole offered with a motion to the tv in the corner of the room.

“Only took me twenty-one years” Waverly mumbled before giving her sister and friend a playful wink.

Wynonna smiled at the fact her sister didn’t seem upset that she had not been privy to her and Nicole’s late night moments together. She then looked back at Nicole and gave her a little nudge
with her elbow “Well now you have to spill whatever it is you came in here to talk about. Waverly already shared so it’s your turn now.” She looked between the two girls she was seated in the middle of before adding quickly “I am also expecting payment in full before your next sessions.”

Both Waverly and Nicole laughed at that. Waverly gave her sister a playful push against her shoulder then motioned to the bed they sat in “Don’t therapists usually have couches?”

Wynonna took a moment to look at the bed and how the three of them were tucked under the blankets. She then gave a dismissive shrug before turning her attention back to Nicole “Anyway, what’s up, sugar tits?”

Nicole groaned at the new nickname Wynonna had decided to use.

Waverly, on the other hand, perked an eyebrow. She looked at the smirk of amusement on her sister’s face and couldn’t help but ask “Sugar tits? Did I miss something here?”

Wynonna just laughed softly and motioned to Nicole with a roll of her eyes “She hated when I called her kid so I gave her a few different options. This was the one she liked least so of course it’s the one I settled on.”

“Of course” Nicole grumbled in annoyance. Her best friend was one of the most obnoxious people she had ever met.

Waverly let out a puff of a laugh at the explanation. As her head nodded to show she understood she tucked some hair behind her ear and motioned now between the other two “Ah that makes sense. There was a split second there where I thought you had seen her naked or something and decided she had really nice…” She motioned now to her own chest. When she did so her eyes caught Nicole staring at her in pure embarrassed shock and it caused her to blush. She shook her head and dropped her hands. “Nevermind.”

Nicole’s face lit up a bright red. She closed her eyes and put a hand over her face gently. Waverly had just thought about her boobs. Waverly had also just thought that Wynonna had seen her boobs. This was literally the most uncomfortable she had ever been in her entire life.

Wynonna laughed out loudly. When she realized she had just done so she quickly slapped a hand over her mouth. Her eyes went wide in surprise at herself and she turned to look at Nicole. She slowly dropped her hand from her mouth to fight off the amusement that was still painted on her face. When she saw her friend blushing she turned now to look at Waverly and perked an eyebrow as the smile won out and took over her features “You must think Nicole has quite a set of knockers if you believed, even for a second, that I would dedicate myself to honoring them every time I addressed her. That begs the question how many times you’ve thought about Nicole’s rack!”

“What!?” Waverly gasped at the accusation. She could not stop the blush that filled her cheeks and her eyes dropped to avoid Nicole immediately. “No I’ve never…” She motioned toward Nicole and let out a huff now. “I should have guessed it was a joke. I guess I just thought maybe I had missed something and wondered if that fell under the no secrets pact we made.”

Nicole wanted to die. She wanted to melt into the sheets and be washed away with the laundry. The implication that Waverly had ever thought of her boobs was causing such a myriad of confused emotions. Mostly, the fact that she was very gay and Waverly was very attractive was causing her anxiety. The idea of the suggestion that there was any scenario in any universe where they had any sort of even minimally gay interaction was too much for her to fathom.
“That’s rude” Wynonna pointed at her sister firmly though with amusement still sparkling in her eyes. She then motioned to Nicole but kept her eyes trained on Waverly so she had no idea Nicole was burning bright red beside her “Nicole is a hottie and the fact that you haven’t ever thought about her rack is insulting. Although…” She paused now and glanced at Nicole. She looked her over once, saw her blush, which made her smirk even more, then turned back to look at Waverly with a nod “I have not seen her boobs I have seen her in her undies several times and had a very confusing moment where her abs were like right in my face while she yelled at me and those were very nice too. So…” She laughed out and reached out to pat a hand blindly against Nicole’s leg “Will you at least give sugar tits a consideration every now and then?”

“Oh my god” Nicole groaned out in pure agony. She could take some teasing, Wynonna was her best friend after all, but this was just too much. She dropped back against the headboard and started to lightly bang her head against the wall behind her “Please. Shut. Up.”

“Wynonna, please!” Waverly yelped out as her own blush grew. She motioned over to Nicole and let out a weak sigh “Just stop, okay? You’re making her miserable. How she’s put up with you for this long I will never know.”

“Oh come on” Wynonna frowned now and turned from Waverly to Nicole. She lifted her hand that had patted at Nicole’s leg and put it on her shoulder. “You know I’m teasing. You just get so…” She thought about the word for a moment before shrugging it off. “Hey I’m sorry, man.”

Nicole rolled her eyes as they opened to focus on her friend. Her blush had faded and her face held nothing but annoyance at her friend. “I know you’re only teasing me but it makes me uncomfortable, okay?”

“I didn’t know” Wynonna whispered more seriously as her body turned to face Nicole more fully. Her eyes filled with a genuine guilt and her hand dropped away from her shoulder now “Honestly Nicole, you have to know the last thing I want to do is make you uncomfortable. I just…” She let out a soft sigh now because she did not know what to say. She wasn’t sure where the line was drawn now. This had never been an issue before. She finally just reached for Nicole’s hand and gave it a soft squeeze “I love you so damn much and part of that love includes teasing. I never wanted it to go too far and if this subject is off limits I will totally go back to making fun of how uptight you are.”

Nicole let out a heavy sigh as her eyes dropped to where Wynonna’s hand held her own. “It’s not off limits. I guess I just…” She trailed off as her eyes lifted and she caught Waverly watching the two of them. Her heart flipped a little bit. How did she tell her best friend that it only made her uncomfortable when she teased her about her younger sister? That was not something she wanted to admit. So she relented with a shrug and focused back on Wynonna “I guess I’m just tired and sensitive about it.” There, that was a pretty good reason, right?

“I get it” Wynonna nodded firmly. She lifted her hand that held Nicole’s and gently touched a kiss to her knuckles. She then let it go and offered her a smile “Just so we’re clear, you know in the name of no more secrets, I am like 110% down with you loving the ladies. In fact…” She motioned now toward Nicole’s stomach “I complimented your abs, remember? So admiring the female form is something I totally support.”

Nicole rolled her eyes at Wynonna’s words. She was trying so hard to make her feel better and that was all she could really ask. So she gave a nod and laughed very softly “Well thank you. I’ve known you long enough to know how much you like abs so that’s actually a really good compliment.”

“They gave me a funny feeling, actually” Wynonna admitted with a light hearted shrug. She looked at Waverly now and when she saw her sister’s curious look she just let out a soft laugh. “Seriously, you should check them out they are pretty sweet. Also,” She looked between the two women now
and gave a single shoulder shrug “I’ve totally made out with a girl before. So, hey, who knows, maybe I’ll end up swinging that way one day. Who cares, right?” She looked back at her best friend and gave her a soft wink “It’s all love, right?”

Nicole couldn’t help but blush again. It was light and quick but it happened. Maybe it was the gesture that Wynonna was bending over backwards to make her feel better. Maybe it was Waverly’s suggestion from earlier that she thought Nicole was in love with Wynonna. Either way she blushed. She ignored it as best she could and laughed softly “Yeah, exactly, it’s all love.”

“Good” Wynonna scooped her arm around Nicole’s shoulders and pulled her against her quickly. She touched a kiss to the side of her head then let her go. She then turned to her sister and gave her a nod “You’d be so lucky to snag someone like Nicole so maybe you should show her some respect and think about her boobs just once.”

“WYNONNA!” Both Waverly and Nicole shouted at her now.

Wynonna held up her hands in surrender as she laughed out. Her head bobbed up and down in slow nods and she relented with an amused sighed because she thought she was hilarious “Fine, fine! No more boob jokes. You two are no fun.”

Without warning Waverly yawned. This caused a chain reaction. Nicole was next to yawn before she passed it over to Wynonna. As the last yawn passed Wynonna let out a soft breath of a laugh and glanced at the other two “Maybe we really should get some rest now.”

“We can try” Nicole mumbled in agreement though she didn’t sound too convinced it would work.

“Maybe we should go back to our own beds?” Waverly suggested before looking around the bed they sat in. It had plenty of room for all of them to sleep comfortably and then some.

“Eh stay” Wynonna dismissed Waverly’s idea and motioned at the bed. “We could sleep with an entire Army in here and still be fine.”

“Let’s at least turn off the lights” Nicole turned now to reach for the lamp on the table next to her side of the bed.

“Darkness might help” Waverly agreed and did the same. As the room was plunged into darkness it was also plunged into silence. The only sound for a long few minutes were the girls shuffling in bed. Nicole still had to sleep upright, which was totally uncomfortable, so she was trying to find a spot on the headboard that didn’t hurt her back. Wynonna had slid to lay down. Waverly had rolled on her side so she was facing the other two in bed.

As darkness sat over them and their eyes all adjusted to the low light of the moon coming in the window it was obvious that none of them were asleep. Wynonna looked back and forth at the two on either side of her then let out a soft sigh “You guys suck at sleeping.”

“Shut up Wynonna” Nicole mumbled. She had her eyes closed and she was trying her hardest to sleep. She was tired and she could feel herself wanting to sleep but her brain would not shut off.

“Just be quiet for five minutes. That usually helps” Waverly whispered as she tried to relax against the mattress.

Wynonna rolled her eyes before closing them. She laid still on her back and let her mind start to wonder. This was so dumb. She had so much to do and take care of she felt like sleeping was just throwing away valuable time. She had to figure out how to abolish the Monarchy in under a year. She had to plan a stupid speech for the Peace Summit coming up. She had to worry about Nicole and
Waverly getting better. Then she thought about her sister and how brave she was being. She smiled at the thought. All of this strife would be worth it if she could just give her sister a life removed from this madness.

Then she thought about Nicole and how she had not been born into royalty and yet had basically lived her life as if she had been. She deserved to know life outside the Palace walls as well. She deserved to find a real job and make other friends. She deserved to find love.

The thought of her best friend in love made her smile. Then it made her stomach twist. That was weird. Wynonna had never really thought about Nicole being a person totally removed from herself. Of course she realized once this was all over that Nicole would go and find her own life and wouldn’t have to be around her all the time. She understood that. But now that she was thinking about it she didn’t like it. How in the world was she going to live in a world where her best friend wasn’t just down the hall? It had been hard enough when she had gone away to serve in the Army and they still talked every day. What would it be like when Nicole fell in love and Wynonna simply was not the most important person in her life anymore?

Wynonna sighed and rolled over now. Her eyes came open and she looked up at where Nicole sat up in bed next to her. Her eyes were closed and she wondered if she had fallen asleep yet. She had no idea how long she had been lying there thinking about Nicole’s life of freedom. She frowned and her hand gently reached out. She placed it against Nicole’s leg. When there was no reaction she breathed out softly in relief. For some reason Wynonna was suddenly terrified to lose Nicole. The idea that there would be a day where Nicole wouldn’t need her as much absolutely killed her.

Or maybe it was the idea that Nicole would find someone who meant more to her than Wynonna. That was the real thought that haunted her. It bounced around her head and twisted her stomach in knots. Wynonna wanted to be the most important person in Nicole’s life forever.

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I came back here after seven years away and you were all grown up and it, I don’t know, surprised me.

With Waverly and Nicole both on board with Wynonna’s plans now the real work had finally began. Alongside the others on Wynonna’s team, the three of them had hunkered down and started working the steps toward abolishing the Monarchy once and for all. There was a sense of determination and urgency about it now that they knew there was a deadline. They had just over a year to figure out how to make it all happen, legally, and before Champ and Wynonna had to be married.

It had been a week since Wynonna had called the little meeting and promised the other two that there would be no more secrets. Since that time the tensions in the cabin had dissipated. The three of them were all getting along without arguing or hurt feelings lingering about. It had been nice. It was what Wynonna had envisioned when she had thought this plan up in her head. The three of them working as a well-oiled machine toward one common goal. It just showed what they could accomplish when they were all on the same page. As a trio they were definitely unstoppable.

Wynonna had yet another meeting to attend to away from the cabin. This one was a big one. It was a meeting with Champ and his lawyers. They had been going back and forth over the marriage contract and finally reached one that everyone could agree on. With a few signatures it would be solidified. Wynonna would have a year to prepare for her marriage. That meant they would have less than a year to end the Monarchy and, hopefully, free Wynonna and the other two from the Hardys and the lifestyle of being a Royal forever.

Nicole was currently sprawled out in the middle of her bed. The doctor that had been brought in by Wynonna to check on Nicole and Waverly had just left the cabin. During his check up he had decided that the nasal splints could be removed. He had also given her the all clear to lie on her back. She still had to be careful when she sneezed and strenuous activity was still out of the question but she didn’t care. She could lie on her back. That is what mattered to her most in that moment.

She had her eyes closed and she was pulling in long, deep breaths through her nose. It hurt a little but she didn’t care. The feeling of laying flat and breathing in full breaths was something she couldn’t explain. It sounded kind of silly. People did this every day and yet here she was enjoying it as if it were a vacation getaway or something. It was so exhilarating and relaxing all at the same time.

Waverly stood now in the open doorway of Nicole’s room watching. She was trying to decide if Nicole was asleep or not. She did not want to wake her up if she was resting because she knew how hard it had been for Nicole to get good sleep lately. So she stood by, chewing her lip, trying to figure out if she was awake or not.

Sensing herself being watched Nicole opened her eyes. She lifted her head just enough to be able to look toward the door where the sensation was coming from. When she saw Waverly standing there she let out a soft laugh and gently laid her head back against the mattress “Why are you standing there being a creep?”

Waverly bit her lip to fight a smile as she took a step into the room now that she knew Nicole was awake “I wasn’t being creepy. I just couldn’t tell if you were awake.”

“So standing there just staring at me isn’t considered creepy?” Nicole perked an eyebrow and lifted her head once more to look at Waverly with a smirk before nodding at her “I will remember that.”

Waverly rolled her eyes as a soft laugh slipped through her lips “Are you going to get into the habit of just staring at me now?”
Nicole shrugged and dropped her head to the bed again. She moved her hand across her sheets before patting a spot next to her “What do you have on your mind?”

Waverly perked an eyebrow at the offer from Nicole for her to join her on the bed. Not that it was odd, they all shared couches and beds daily in some varying degrees, but because she had done it in a way that seemed to say she knew Waverly had come to talk. She smiled very slightly at that thought. She liked the idea that Nicole knew her that well “How do you two always do that?”

“Do what?” Nicole didn’t even lift her head now as she spoke.

“Know when I want to talk?” Waverly said with a shrug before she moved to the side of the bed. She remained standing as she looked down at Nicole and offered a smile when their eyes met “You and Wynonna both always know.”

Nicole returned Waverly’s smile. She rolled onto her side now, facing Waverly, and propped her head up on her hand. She shrugged the shoulder not supporting her weight as her smile held “We’ve both known you for your entire life. I think at this point you should worry if I couldn’t tell when you had something on your mind.”

Waverly’s head bounced in an agreeing nod before she finally shifted to sit on the bed. She sat even with Nicole’s hips and turned to stretch her legs out toward Nicole’s head. This way they could face one another as they sat side by side. “I suppose that’s true.” She reached out and gave Nicole’s hip a little playful push “It doesn’t mean you know everything about me though so don’t go getting a big head about it.”

“You have me confused with Wynonna” Nicole mumbled with a laugh as she rolled off her side and back to lie flat on her back. She drew in a deep breath through her nose again as her eyes focused on the ceiling. She smiled at the ability to breathe in through her nose again before she glanced to Waverly sitting next to her and nodded “Although I like to think I know you pretty well.”

The corners of Waverly’s lips twitched into a soft smile. Her eyes shifted from where she had been picking at the hem of her shirt to Nicole’s face. She perked an eyebrow as she asked “Well if you’re so smart then tell me what I’m thinking.”

Nicole’s head turned to the side to look at Waverly now. A soft smile moved over her lips for just a moment before her head nodded just once “You’re worried about Wynonna.” She saw the look of surprise on Waverly’s face and couldn’t help the soft laugh that pushed through her lips. Her hand lifted and she laid it on Waverly’s knee gently “But I think you would have pretended to ask me how I was feeling first before you got into the heavier stuff.”

Waverly breathed out a sort of indignant huff. She pulled her bottom lip into her teeth to fight the guilty little smirk that wanted to come over her features. She eventually just shook her head and gave a roll of her eyes before finally laughing softly “Okay fine you know me pretty well.”

Nicole patted Waverly’s knee as she gave a knowing nod before her eyes moved to look back at the ceiling. She drew in a slow breath through her nose then slowly let it out. She smiled slightly at the sensation before speaking softly “It’s actually what I would have done, too. Ask you how you were feeling first before breaching a more serious subject. It’s the polite thing to do.” Her head rolled and she looked at Waverly again. This time her tone was a little more serious when she spoke “How are you feeling, by the way?”

“Sore” Waverly answered with a crinkle of her nose as her arm moved to draw across her ribcage. “The doctor says I’m in the window where the pain will be the worst but it should only be a few days before it starts to get better. He wants me to cough or breath in really deeply at least once an
hour to help my ribs adjust to moving while healing or something like that.” She lifted one shoulder in a shrug and her arm dropped back to her lap “Other than that he says everything looks good.”

Nicole nodded just once as a gentle smile came to her lips. Her hand that was laying against Waverly’s knee gave one more pat before she finally removed it and brought it to rest on the bed beside her. “I’m happy to hear that. I’m hoping we will both be able to get out of here in time for the peace summit.”

Waverly frowned slightly at that. The last thing she wanted to do was return to her duties as Princess, especially since it was a title she would hopefully be shedding in the near future, but she didn’t want to say as much. She felt like it sounded selfish. So instead she just shrugged and changed the subject “How’s your nose?”

“Great” Nicole said with a quick nod. She closed her eyes and drew in a deep breath as if to show Waverly just how great her nose was doing. As she released it she opened her eyes and looked back to Waverly with a smile “Glad to have the splints out of my nose. They were really killing my game.”

This made Waverly laugh out loud. When she realized she had done as such she quickly slapped a hand over her mouth. She looked down at Nicole with wide eyes before slowly dropping her hand and revealing her still wide smile. “I’m sorry I laughed. I’m just surprised your charm alone doesn’t rope the ladies in. I had no idea you relied on your nose so much.”

Nicole grinned at Waverly’s amusement. She was glad she could distract her at least a little bit from her worry about her sister. She nodded just once and motioned now to her nose “I mean asking a girl to clean my bloody boogers out was a real game changer, certainly, but I’m pretty old school and like to think a decent looking face works well enough.”

Still grinning in amusement Waverly rolled her eyes at her friend. “I am sure your surgically repaired nose will only help. It looks…” She paused and shifted now to lean over Nicole. She reached one hand across where Nicole was laying, holding her weight over the girl as she drew her face close enough to inspect it carefully. She lifted her other hand now and gently traced over the line of Nicole’s nose. She nodded in approval then quickly sat back upright “It’s perfect.”

Waverly leaning over her made Nicole’s stomach tie up in knots so quickly she felt she might pass out. The way she was so close, her face within inches of her own, and the gentle touch to her nose was almost too much. It had sent a shiver down her spine. So when Waverly sat up and complimented her nose all Nicole could manage was a slight nod. Her eyelashes fluttered and she closed her eyes. Trying to push down the stirring in her stomach she drew in a deep breath again. She held it a moment then let it out. As her eyes opened and she found Waverly watching her she tried to play it off casually as if the breath through her nose had been an example “And it works perfectly too.”

Waverly noticed that Nicole seemed to have been unnerved by her actions. She felt bad for a moment. The last thing she wanted to do was make her uncomfortable. She bit nervously at her bottom lip again and decided to try and change the subject yet again. Her eyes shifted from Nicole’s face to her own hands that were laying in her lap. She was quiet for a moment before she finally spoke “Do you think Wynonna will end up having to marry Champ?”

Nicole frowned at the change of subject. She had been trying to distract Waverly and she seemed to have failed. The knots in her stomach untwisted now as her hand once more reached out to offer a comforting pat to Waverly’s leg “I’m going to let the optimist inside me take the reigns here and say no. I’m going to keep believing that we will pull this off in time. I mean…” She let out a heavy sigh now and shrugged one shoulder “I have to. Because if I have any doubt about it I feel like that opens
the doors to failure and that is just not an option.”

Waverly nodded just once as her eyes dropped to where Nicole’s hand laid on her leg. She smiled very softly and reached out to wrap her hand around it gently. She gave a soft squeeze before speaking gently “I like that. I like how you always look at things with optimism. I think it’s the exact thing Wynonna needs to hear.” She tightened her grip around Nicole’s hand and added “You balance her out.”

“She balances me out” Nicole added to the sentiment as her eyes focused on Waverly. “She reminds me not to be so serious all the time. She pushes me to the point of annoyance as a way of getting me to laugh at myself.” A little smile came to her lips as she thought about her best friend. “I guess that’s why we’ve always been close. It’s a sort of opposites attract type situation.”

The way that Nicole spoke about Wynonna warmed Waverly’s heart. She smiled very tenderly, her gaze unblinking as she looked at Nicole, her hand giving one more squeeze “I’ve always kind of figured you two would figure out you’re perfect for one another. Sounds like you might be getting there.”

“What?” Nicole laughed the word out. Her eyes widened a bit at Waverly and, try as she might not to, she felt herself blush softly. The idea that Waverly thought the two of them should be together was so ridiculous to her. She gave a roll of her eyes as her head shook in denial “It’s not like that, Waves. It’s never been like that.”

Waverly perked an eyebrow curiously at Nicole’s denial. Part of her believed Nicole was sincere. The other part of her that had watched Nicole and her sister together her entire life could not fathom the words she was hearing. She just kept her eyes locked on Nicole and asked delicately “Are you sure?”

“I’m not in love with Wynonna” Nicole spoke in a tone that was dismissive with a hint of irritation.

Sensing she had upset Nicole, Waverly let out a sigh and just nodded her head. She looked down to where she held onto Nicole’s hand and slowly started to let it go. There was a bit of awkwardness growing now between them and Waverly felt bad about it. So she decided to attempt to shift away from it with a half hearted breath of a laugh and a shrug “Well have you ever been in love?”

Nicole was surprised that Waverly dropped the subject of Wynonna so quickly. She glanced at her curiously before a smile took over her face and her eyes closed. She drew in another deep breath through her nose before she cleared her throat to speak “Once, I think.” She laughed soft at her own words and opened her eyes to look back to Waverly “Maybe. I don’t really know.”

“How can you not know?” Waverly’s amusement was evident as the smile took over her features.

“I guess because love has such a broad definition” Nicole said with a shrug as she finally pushed herself up from the mattress. She slid along the bed until her back was resting against the headboard. She focused her eyes on Waverly before she began softly “I had just entered into Special Ops training in the Army. I was still young, barely twenty, and she was a few years older than me. She was my superior. I admired her because she was the only girl in the entire squadron up until I joined. You could tell she didn’t take shit from the boys, though. People respected her. She was confident and smart and strict. I…” She shook her head once before a smile of fondness moved over her lips “…I was pretty enamored with her.”

The look on Nicole’s face made Waverly’s heart flutter. She had never seen her look so delicate. The way her face lit slightly as she recalled this woman really touched her. Nicole had only ever showed emotion for her father, Wynonna, and Waverly so seeing her expression of admiration for someone
else was refreshing.

“She was a hard ass and she didn’t take any excuses” Nicole continued with a soft laugh. “She could yell obscenities harsh enough to make the toughest man in the squad feel insecure. But it was part of the training and she was good at it.” Her smile stuck at the corners of her mouth as she recalled the memory “But she had this soft side to her. She didn’t like to show it because it was hard enough to command respect from the men, being a woman and all, but there was a definite soft side. I got to see it. It was like a secret for her and I only, you know? I felt special.”

Waverly nodded when Nicole’s eyes came back to her. She wanted to show that she was listening but had no intention of interrupting her.

Nicole paused. Her eyes flickered back and forth as she tried to decide on her next words. Her brows knitted together in a sort of frown before a single shoulder flinched in a failed shrug “I was never brave enough to tell her how much I admired her. I guess because she always preached strength over compassion. Maybe there was a part of me that didn’t believe she would respect me or like me if I admitted I cared for her. Like if I showed any sort of weakness toward her she wouldn’t see me as a soldier anymore and back then that was all that mattered to me. I had lived my entire life with the purpose of serving in the Army and I guess I was scared that I couldn’t have both. So I chose to serve silently instead of maybe having a chance at love?”

“That’s sad” Waverly whispered with a frown. She reached out to place her hand on Nicole’s knee which was the closest thing to her. She gave a soft, comforting squeeze as her sad gaze settled on her friend. “Did you ever tell her? I mean after you were done in the Army or after you left training or whatever?”

Nicole just shook her head. Her eyes dropped away from Waverly’s gaze and looked to where her hand was against her knee. She drew in a slow breath that warmed her body. As she exhaled it she felt a knot in her stomach start to tense up again before she whispered “She’s married now. Seems to be happy and all that. So I guess…” She gave an almost defeated shrug and looked back to Waverly “Even if I had said something it wouldn’t have mattered in the end anyway.”

“You have no way of knowing that” Waverly could see the disappointment that still lingered in Nicole’s eyes even after all these years. It nearly broke her heart to see. She scooted along the bed now until she drew her hips even to where Nicole’s sat. She reached out and slid her arms around her gently, pulling her into a gentle hug, and letting out a sigh “I think putting duty first is honorable.”

Nicole let out a soft breath of a laugh as she gave into Waverly’s hug. Her eyes closed and she let herself just melt into the smaller girl’s arms. She drew in a few soft breaths to try and steady her beating heart that was racing against her ribs. She couldn’t explain how good it felt to be held. Maybe it was because of all she had been through, emotionally, or maybe it was because it was Waverly. Either way it felt better than she wanted to admit.

The two of them stayed like that for a few long moments. In all honesty Nicole could have stayed there in Waverly’s arms all day. But she didn’t want to make it weird so she eventually pulled back out of the embrace. She offered Waverly an almost shy smile as she straightened up and their eyes met. “I don’t really prioritize anything over duty. I’ve always been that way so the idea of finding love is just kind of a distant thought to me.”

“Well” Waverly lifted a hand to gently brush against Nicole’s cheek before she let her hand drop away. Her eyes were watching her carefully, holding a delicate gaze, and she offered her a tender smile “Soon you won’t have the duty of protecting the Queen and Princess anymore so maybe that can open the door?”
Nicole tilted her head to the side in a sort of dismissive motion “I guess I’ll have to cross that bridge when I come to it.”

“Or maybe” Waverly straightened up where she sat now and offered a sort of hopeful grin “Love has been in front of your face the entire time?”

“Oh my god. Give it a rest” Nicole said with a roll of her eyes. She was trying to be annoyed but honestly Waverly was so much like Wynonna sometimes that it was more amusing than anything. Her head shook and she used her hand to push gently at Waverly’s side so as not too hurt her “Enough of this. Between you and your sister I swear…” She shook her head as a smirk rose on her lips “I can’t wait to meet someone completely new and get out of this circle of accusation.”

Nicole’s words seemed to spark a new interest in Waverly. She perked up a bit and cocked her head to the side as she eyed Nicole curiously “Accusation?”

Nicole motioned with her hand like she was swatting the subject away casually “You thinking I’m secretly in love with your sister. Your sister assuming I want to bang you. It’s ridiculous.”

“Woah, woah, woah. What?” Waverly gasped through a surprised laugh. “She thinks you want to bang me?”

“I believe her exact words were” Nicole trailed off and cleared her throat before she took on the best Wynonna tone she could to quote her “I’m serious. Don’t bang my sister.”

“Why would she say that?” Waverly’s jaw dropped open.

“I have no idea” Nicole lied as her gut twisted. Maybe it was because she had been looking at Waverly differently since the night she had seen her at her knighting ceremony. Maybe it was the way Nicole was fiercely protective of Waverly. Perhaps it was the fact that Nicole could have killed Champ for laying his hands on Waverly. But Nicole didn’t want to admit any of that so she brushed it off with a sideways flick of her hand “I think she was just being a smart ass.”

Waverly still looked surprised. Her head gave a slight shake and she huffed out in amusement. Her eyes rolled at her sister because it sounded exactly like something Wynonna would say just to be obnoxious. “Well I’m sorry she’s been saying that to you. I’m sure it has made being around me a little awkward.”

Nicole was surprised at how cool Waverly was being. She didn’t show a hint of being uncomfortable at the idea. This relaxed her immediately. She nodded at Waverly’s words and let out a snorted chuckle “A little bit, yeah.”

“Well for what it’s worth” Waverly grinned and nudged Nicole playfully in the side “I know you don’t want to bang me. That would be weird for both of us.”

Nicole’s heart dropped to her toes. She couldn’t control the flicker of a frown that flashed over her features. Not that she had really had her heart set on banging Waverly but hearing the girl say it would be weird was like a cruel form of preemptive rejection and that was never fun to experience. She tried to play it off with a weak laugh and roll of her eyes “Totally.”

Seeing the subtle glimpse of a frown play over Nicole’s face made Waverly’s smile fade. She blinked once and a little bit of confusion took over her features. She had thought this was a light hearted subject but apparently it wasn’t for Nicole. She arched an eyebrow slightly and gave a half shake of her head “Wouldn’t it?”

“Yeah” Nicole pushed out a dry titter of a laugh and dropped her eyes away from Waverly.
“Nicole” Waverly spoke delicately now. Her hand reached out and she gently tucked her fingers under Nicole’s chin. She used her touch to carefully guide her friend’s eyes back up to her own. When they met she could see a hint of disappointment and suddenly she felt bad again. She stared into her eyes for a few moment to try and find the answer she wanted before she had to speak the question. When it did not come her voice trembled slightly as the question rose from her lips “You’ve never thought about it have you? With me, I mean?”

“No” Nicole turned her head out of Waverly’s touch and closed her eyes. She felt her body shiver and she quickly shifted to pull herself out of contact with Waverly. She slowly let out a heavy sigh and opened her eyes. She blinked them once but kept her gaze on something across the room instead. “Like you said it would be weird.”

“Don’t lie to me, Nicole” Waverly said sharply.

Nicole shook her head fiercely in denial as she pushed herself off the bed. She got to her feet and walked across the room. She pretended to busy herself with the brush on her dresser. She lifted it to her hair and lazily started to pull it through her long, unbraided locks. “I think I’m going to go for a walk and see if I can actually smell the fresh mountain air now that I have-”

“No secrets, remember?” Waverly turned off the bed and put her feet on the ground now too. She stood in the direct path between Nicole and the door to the room and folded her arms firmly.

Nicole paused. She clenched her jaw out of frustration. Stupid Wynonna. This was all her fault. Her stupid joke about banging Waverly. Her stupid pact where they all promised not to keep secrets any longer. She gave a quick shake of her head then set her brush down. She turned around to look at Waverly. She opened her mouth to lie again but decided not to. Instead she lifted both arms out to her sides in a full body shrug motion then dropped them with a slap against her thighs “I don’t know what I’ve thought about, okay? I came back here after seven years away and you were all grown up and it, I don’t know, surprised me.”

Waverly blinked just once in surprise. She hadn’t expected Nicole to come clean that easily.

“It’s been confusing, to say the very least, but I’ve been trying to ignore it because it’s just not right. Like you said it would be weird” Nicole motioned to Waverly then let out a sigh that sounded like she was giving up on a fight. “You’re my best friend’s sister. Hell you’re practically my little sister, too. So, I don’t know Waverly” She lifted a hand to rub at the side of her head as if she were trying to rub away a headache. She huffed out in defeat and let her eyes drop away from Waverly now “I would never act on it and I never intended for you or Wynonna to find out. I am sure it’s just a passing thing. Like, oh look, a pretty girl in my vicinity. Let me form a crush on her for a while and entertain myself until it fades because I know there’s no chance.”

“You have a crush on me?” Waverly perked an eyebrow in a mix of surprise and flattery.

“I don’t know” Nicole shook her head. She let out a distressed breath now “Maybe. I haven’t really given much thought about it because of everything that has been going on, alright? But sometimes when I see you I find myself staring. Sometimes when you walk in the room you take my breath away. But, look, it doesn’t matter” She motioned to the side, vaguely in the direction of where Wynonna’s room was in the cabin, and shrugged “It will fade. You’re Wynonna’s sister. You’re straight and uninterested and…” She puffed out in slight frustration that any of this had come out “....we have far more important things to focus on anyway.”

Waverly lifted her hand toward Nicole in a gesture to slow down her rapid babbling. She shook her head a few times and as her hand dropped she focused on Nicole with a tender gaze. She could see her friend was distressed over this subject. She was uncomfortable and agitated. That was the last
Waverly wanted for her. So she spoke in an even and calm tone “You don’t have to be so defensive. I’m not offended or grossed out or anything. Surprised, is all.” A smile lifted at the corner of her lips and she gave a single shrug “Flattered, too.”

Nicole had been about to snap with a frustrated and sarcastic growl in response to Waverly saying she wasn’t grossed out but that faded as soon as she heard that her friend was flattered. She immediately relaxed her stance and perked her eyebrows up slightly “Flattered?”

“Of course, Nicole” Waverly looked at her friend as if she shouldn’t have doubted that at all. She took a step toward Nicole now but kept her distance still so she could block the path in case Nicole decided to flee. Her face held a humble softness as she spoke now “You said some very lovely things about me. How could I not be flattered?”

Nicole blushed slightly as she bit onto her bottom lip. She wanted to look away from Waverly but she fought it and kept her eyes up. She offered an almost shy shrug now “I meant them. I am not sure if you’re aware of just how stunningly beautiful you are.”

It was Waverly who blushed now. She let out a shy laugh and tried to wave off the compliment with a swipe of her hand through the air “You’re just saying that.”

“I wouldn’t just say that” Nicole said with a roll of her eyes. “You’re beautiful, Waves. I also get the very unique privilege of knowing you on a personal level which I think only serves to amplify your beauty.” She was a little nervous to be this honest but it was all out now so there was no going back “I think that might have been one of the factors that added to the depth of my very confusing feelings. I’ve known you for so long then suddenly you were an attractive adult woman…” She licked her lips and gave a bashful laugh “Deep personal connection mixed with a sudden physical attraction and…” She motioned with her hands as if she were combining two things together then shrugged “Confusion.”

Waverly’s head bobbed up and down in a few slow nods in a gesture to show she was listening and absorbing what was being said. She took another step forward but still kept some distance between them. Nicole was bigger than her and if she wanted to overpower her to get out of the room she totally could. All she would have to do was lift her up and move her to the side. Not that Waverly thought she ever would but desperation to escape was an unpredictable thing. So she kept space between them as her only advantage in hopes that the urge to get as far away from this conversation she could see in Nicole’s eyes would finally dissipate.

“Firstly” Waverly still spoke calmly with a tone that told Nicole she was being very sincere in all she was saying “I really am flattered you think I’m beautiful. Honestly…” She bit her lip as an honored smirk lifted on her mouth “...No one has ever spoken so highly of me in a way that makes me actually believe they think I’m beautiful and aren’t just talking about physically. So thank you for that.”

Nicole laughed bashfully but nodded at her “Of course. You’re an incredible human being, Waverly. I’ve always known that.”

“See?” Waverly motioned now to Nicole as if she had just proved her point. “A guy would have totally been like..” She cleared her throat and deepened her voice to mimic the sound of a guy now “Like you’re totally a hot babe who is smart, I guess, so like I would totally bone you.”

Nicole couldn’t help but laugh very softly at the impression from Waverly. Her head gave an amused shake and she breathed out a sigh “Guys are the worst.”

Waverly giggled lightly in agreement “Secondly, I really hope this doesn’t make our bond
awkward.” She frowned now and took another step toward Nicole. She was going to risk the girl fleeing now if she still wanted to escape. But they were being open and honest and she felt like Nicole’s uncomfortableness had faded to a manageable level by now. So she moved to sit on the edge of the bed before looking up at Nicole. She offered her a bit of a wide eyed puppy dog look, batting her eyelashes as cutely as possible, as her hand patted the spot beside her to indicate she wanted Nicole to join her.

Nicole let out a heavy sigh when Waverly motioned for her to join. She could tell that this conversation was about to get a little more serious and she wasn’t sure she was ready for it. But Waverly was staring at her with her large brown eyes and smiling widely and Nicole was just too weak to say no. So she rolled her eyes and tried to act annoyed as she sat down next to Waverly on the edge of the bed “You can’t use this to get what you want out of me.” She gave her a warning point of her finger.

Waverly gasped in full on offense and put a hand over her heart. She stared at Nicole in disbelief of her accusation for a moment before her face lightened and she let out a gentle chuckle. Her head shook and she reached over to set her hand on Nicole’s leg “Manipulation is not one of my strong suits so no worries there, my friend.”

Nicole nodded as a sort of relieved smile came to her lips. Not that she ever really thought Waverly would use a sort of maybe crush against her but it was nice to hear. If she was being honest with herself, though, she would have a hard time saying no to Waverly anyway, crush or not. She just couldn’t say no to a pretty girl. Perhaps she just couldn’t say no to the Earp girls because she had a hard time believing she wouldn’t give into Wynonna’s wishes as well.

Realizing she had been sitting there quietly next to Waverly she shook her thoughts away and offered her friend a bit of a sheepish smile “I’m really sorry all of this came out like it did. I honestly never wanted anyone to know. Mostly because I hadn’t figured it out yet and partially because, well, like you said, I didn’t want it to make things awkward between us.”

“It won’t” Waverly said now softly but firmly. Her hand moved from Nicole’s leg in search of her hand. When she found it she took it lightly between the two of hers and gave a gentle squeeze. She shifted now to face Nicole a little better and waited until her friend looked up to her so she could catch her gaze. When their eyes met she smiled very softly before she spoke “I know it won’t because you and I have been friends for my entire life. We’ve been through ups and downs, tragedy and loss, and a whole bunch of really amazing times too. The things we’ve experienced, both good and bad, outweigh a confusing crush that has been around for like five seconds. So this will just be a little blip on the radar.”

She looked around the room and let out a heavy sigh as one of her hands motioned in a large circle as if indicating a larger thing than themselves before her eyes returned back to Nicole. “When all of this madness is over with and we get to live normal lives it’s not going to matter that we had this conversation. What’s going to matter is you and me..” She grinned and gave another tight squeeze to Nicole’s hand “...and Wynonna, too. That the three of us got through this all together, as a team, as a family. As long as that is the end result I think I can handle a little awkwardness.” She laughed now and lifted Nicole’s hand to her mouth. She touched a very soft kiss against her knuckles then gently released her hold “Although it’s not awkward for me, at all, so if you are worried about that, don’t be.”

Nicole was relieved to hear that Waverly was so confident that this would not be an issue. In all honesty she had never really been in a situation where her own sexuality had really come into play. She had always been around boys. The Army was full of men and their main focus was training to be soldiers. Nicole had always been focused on that. Then she had been focused on becoming a
member of the Royal Guard. Then all of the sudden the plane crash happened and she was thrust into this important position and all Hell had broken loose. So she had never been in this situation. She had always dreaded how the people she cared about would react when they found out she was gay but she had never thought it would interfere with her job.

It was all new to her and maybe that was what she was having the hardest time dealing with. So much had happened in such a small time frame and it was difficult enough to handle. A few unexpected emotions and a physical attraction had only served to complicate it all. So although there was a part of her that was mortified that Waverly had found out there was also a part of her that was relieved because now she at least had an outlet for it all. She could talk to Waverly about it. With Waverly being so cavalier about it all it was definitely helping it feel like a lot less of a big deal.

Seeing that Nicole was obviously deep in thought about everything concerned Waverly just a bit. She frowned and moved to slide her arm around Nicole’s waist. She pulled her close for a sideways hug before she laid her head on her friend’s shoulder “You alright over there? You have your thinking face on. You don’t have to tell me what you have going on in your mind but I want you to know I’m here to listen if you wanna talk about it.”

Nicole looked over to where Waverly’s head was laying on her shoulder. She offered just a slight shake of her head as a smile came to her lips “I guess I’m just relieved. I hadn’t really realized the weight I was carrying around about this. So much other stuff has been going on that I guess I didn’t feel this was a big thing in comparison. But just sitting here like this with you, talking honestly about it, I think I’ve realized it was really dragging me down.”

Waverly nodded in understanding as her head lifted from Nicole’s shoulder. Her hand that was around Nicole moved now to gently and soothingly start rubbing up and down her back. She was doing everything she could to offer a comforting and safe place for Nicole to open up to her. “I had no idea so I think you did a pretty good job of hiding it.”

Nicole let out a huffed laugh at that “Maybe you’re just so used to people acting weird around you because of who you are that you didn’t notice. Wynonna did, though.” Her head nodded at that “Why do you think she told me not to bang you. Twice.”

Waverly rolled her eyes at her sister. “You and I both know Wynonna loves to find the smallest thing about someone that shows any sort of weakness and pick at it.” Her hand paused in rubbing Nicole’s back and the words she just said echoed in her head. She quickly shook her head and gave an apologetic frown at her friend “Not that you having a crush on anyone is weak. I just meant that she could probably tell you were confused or uncomfortable about it so she pointed it out.” She let out a sigh and her hand started to rub again lightly “In her own Wynonna kind of way she was probably trying to help you out.”

“You’re probably right” Nicole agreed. She had not been offended at all when Waverly had used the word weakness. She knew what she had been getting at. “She doesn’t always go about it in the best way but Wynonna is definitely always trying to help the people she loves. I mean we both know she doesn’t handle emotions very well…” She trailed off and glanced at Waverly. They shared a knowing smirk at that before Nicole laughed very lightly “She was probably just trying to point it out so I would deal with it and move on so I wouldn’t be living in fear of it being discovered.”

“Probably” Waverly moved her hand off of Nicole’s back now. She shifted on the bed, turning and bringing a leg up between them, so she was fully facing Nicole. She gave her a smile as her eyes moved over her being. She was taking her in and trying to read her body language. The last thing she wanted was Nicole to pretend to be alright. After a moment her head nodded and she breathed out lightly “Are you okay now? You seemed pretty upset when this all came out. I mean you were
yelling and I’ve never heard you yell before.”

Nicole bit her lip in guilt. The last thing she had wanted to do was upset Waverly by yelling. She sighed out as her head nodded slightly “Sorry about that. Self-preservation is a funny thing.”

“Don’t you dare apologize. I am just glad we got it out of you and you don’t have to walk on eggshells around me anymore” Waverly patted Nicole’s knee and offered her a cheerful smile.

“Yeah me too” Nicole mumbled. She was relieved about it, she truly was, but there was a part of her that was sad. It was always fun to have a crush, no matter how silly the idea was, and now she was kind of disappointed to know it would never pan out. Probably for the best but that didn’t stop her from feeling that disappointment in the moment. She looked at Waverly smiling at her and she couldn’t help but to smile back slightly “Thank you for making this as less awkward as possible.”

Waverly let out a soft laugh and dipped her head in a single nod “I much prefer talking stuff out than having it boil over into something dramatic and stupid. I mean can you imagine how crazy awkward this could have been if you would have tried to kiss me or something?”

Nicole blushed at the idea of kissing Waverly but it was covered by her loud scoff of a laugh. Her head shook and amusement moved over her face “That is where you are dead wrong about me, Waves. I probably would have gone to my grave secretly pining for you rather than take a risk like making a move on you.” She let out a playfully dramatic sigh and shrugged “It’s the lesbian way.”

Waverly laughed out in disbelief because she thought Nicole was just being goofy now. But when she caught the hint of honesty in her eyes her jaw dropped open a bit. She blinked and tilted her head to the side curiously before asking through a soft laugh “Are you serious?”

Nicole nodded and lifted one shoulder into a casual shrug. It was just a fact.

Waverly shook her head now because she just could not believe what Nicole had just said. She stared at her as if trying to decide whether or not Nicole was just messing with her. When it looked like her friend held nothing but complete honesty behind her words she breathed out a weak laugh “Why not?”

“Too scary” Nicole stated in matter-of-fact tone. “Like the thought of you rejecting me pretty much makes me want to die from embarrassment and that’s just the thought of it. If it actually happened?” Her head shook back and forth slowly as a look of dread filled her eyes “I’d literally die. I’d screech in agony and wither into a shell of my former self and blow away in the breeze caused by your laughter.”

“Wow I had no idea you were such a drama queen” Waverly’s tone was a mix of amusement and disbelief. She rolled her eyes at her friend as her head shook “Have you ever taken a risk in your entire life?”

“Like kissing the girl I want to kiss?” Nicole’s eyes went wide like she had been caught in the headlights of an oncoming car. She puffed her cheeks out and slowly deflated them through her lips before laughing just slightly and shaking her head “Nope I’d rather die. Dying is safer.”

“I’m being serious, Nicole” Waverly frowned a bit and folded her arms across her chest now. “You’re sitting here telling me you’ve never done anything selfish in your entire life?”

Nicole felt bad that she had upset Waverly. She had been deflecting with humor but she could tell that was not the right way to approach this at the moment. She frowned and got a more serious look on her face “Not really. My entire life has been about honoring my duty. I mean, as a kid I had to
behave so I could be allowed to stay in the Palace with my dad. Then my dad told me one day I would take his place so I had to behave so the King would know I could take the job seriously.” As she spoke her truth the realization that she had lived a pretty selfless life was starting to dawn on her. She had never thought about it before but she had, very much, lived for everyone else in her life. Never had she put her own wants and needs first.

She blinked just once and her eyes lifted to focus on Waverly. A new sort of determination moved over her features as if she had just made a decision in her head. A decision to do something selfishly for her alone. “You’re absolutely right, Waves. I should totally do something risky and stupid for no other reason than I wanted to. Because I had the urge to do it and see what happens.”

“I agree” Waverly said with a soft laugh. She liked the sudden newfound determination she was seeing. “That’s what I did when I went to college. I told my dad it was what I wanted to do and I was going to do it whether he agreed or not. I wanted to just get away from this life, you know? Experience being someone who didn’t have their family watching their every move to make sure they were acting suitably. So I went for it and…” She nodded proudly at herself “…it was worth it. I succeeded and I failed but I did it all on my own terms and I learned a lot about who I am in the process.”

“Will you help me?” Nicole’s face was lit with excitement now.

“Of course!” Waverly let out a gleeful laugh and nodded quickly. “Absolutely. What do you want to do? Oh do you want to call up that girl you might have been in love with in the Army and tell her how you feel?” She perked an eyebrow at her own suggestion as if that would convince Nicole to do it.

“No” Nicole’s smile faded. Her hand lifted to halt Waverly’s bubbling excitement and her head shook. “I don’t want to be a homewrecker. Also the idea of rejection is still far too terrifying. Plus it’s been years.”

“Okay, okay” Waverly held her hands up in a sort of surrendering motion and laughed gently. “I really need to help you get over this fear of rejection. I think once that goes away you’ll be a lot more willing to take risks in your everyday life.” She reached out now and put her hand on Nicole’s shoulder as she focused her eyes on her friend “So how can I help? What do you want to do? Get a tattoo?” She lit up at her own idea and brought her hands together in a happy clap “I think you should get a tattoo. OH! Get Wynonna’s face on your ass, please. It will not only be a risk but hilarious when she sees it!”

Nicole couldn’t help but laugh at Waverly because her excitement was contagious. She gave her head an amused shake and reached out to grab Waverly’s hand in a gesture of bringing her attention back to her. “Tattoos are not scary. The thought of Wynonna’s face when she sees it is pretty tempting but…” She shook her head again “No.”

“Buzzkill” Waverly pouted for a second before her smile returned. “Okay how about skydiving?”

“Not scary” Nicole said plainly.

“Rock climbing?” Waverly offered now.

“That’s part of my Army training” Nicole waved that idea off.

Waverly deflated in an exhale of defeat. She gave her head a shake and an exasperated shrug “What scares you then?”
“Kissing pretty girls” Nicole quipped with a half-hearted laugh.

Waverly rolled her eyes “You’re impossible.”

Nicole just shrugged “I guess putting myself out there in that way is the only thing I’ve never really gotten to do. Fear of the unknown? Plus emotional pain is immeasurable and hard to cure so there’s that.”

“Well fine” Waverly flailed her arms to the side in exasperation before letting them fall heavily to her sides. She stared seriously at Nicole and without blinking she spoke firmly “Kiss me.”

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“Let’s hope you’re better at securing a building than you are your hair”

“What?” Nicole’s eyes fluttered in surprise and her head shook. She huffed out a short laugh that fell flat and a frown took over her face “I’m not going to do that.”

“Come on” Waverly shrugged casually now. “It’s safe because you know me and we have already talked about everything so it’s not like I’ll be surprised by it. It’s a good way to get over your fear of rejection. It’s definitely stupid because Wynonna would totally flip if she found out.” She paused and pointed at Nicole firmly “Which she won’t.” She gave her friend a smile now “It’s a risk that you already see the outcome of and, thus, kind of removes the risk altogether.”

“I’m not going to-”

“And you’re terrified by the idea” Waverly cut Nicole off gently. She motioned to the way Nicole had stiffened where she sat and the panicked look in her eyes. “So just do it. Face your fears, figure out your feelings, and piss off Wynonna all in one swoop.” She laughed softly now. “Sounds risky to me.”

“Waverly, I-” Nicole huffed and gave her head a shake. She stared at her friend and when she saw that look of determination glowing in her eyes she felt her heart twist. This was definitely not how she had ever envisioned kissing Waverly. She let out a heavy sigh and let her eyes roll slightly “I can see that you’re not going to drop this any time soon.”

“Nope” Waverly bounced on the edge of the bed as she shrugged.

Nicole let out another sigh. She thought about it for a second and decided it was absolutely a terrible idea. She gave her head a shake and motioned vaguely toward Waverly “I want to go on record that I think this is the worst idea you’ve ever had and if things get awkward it is totally your fault.”

“I take full responsibility” Waverly nodded sincerely. “But I want to make a counter-point that all the reasons that make this a horrible idea are the exact reasons you should do this. Experience is the easiest way to learn about yourself.”

“Fine” Nicole grumbled and threw her hands up in defeat. She focused on Waverly and though she was annoyed at all of this she felt her heart twist. She was about to kiss the girl that had been giving her confusing feelings for months and she couldn’t help but be a little nervous. She licked her lips and tried to ignore the feelings boiling in her stomach “Ready?”

“Absolutely” Waverly grinned happily. She scooted a little bit closer to Nicole then puckered up overdramatically.

“Okay” Nicole’s voice trembled just a little. She almost immediately missed the goofy approach to this kiss because now it seemed too serious. Too real. She felt herself getting nervous again. But she
had to push through. She reached out now and gently let her hand brush against Waverly’s cheek as she pushed her hair back behind her ear. She gave her friend a smile as their eyes met “Are you sure?”

“Just kiss me, Nicole. Stop thinking about it and do it” Waverly spoke softly but very directly to help whatever doubt lingered in Nicole to disappear. It was just a kiss. It didn’t have to mean anything.

Nicole nodded again. She licked her lips and her eyes flickered from Waverly’s anticipating gaze to her lips. She felt another warmth of nerves swell in her but she had to push through it. She drew in a sharp breath to help calm her nerves. She could do this. It was just a kiss. It didn’t matter that this was one of her best friends and one of the most beautiful women she had ever seen in her entire life. No. She had to leave all of that out of this and just do it. She could do it.

Waverly could see Nicole hesitating. She could see the look in her eyes that showed she was overthinking and analyzing everything. She rolled her eyes now and lifted her hand up under Nicole’s chin. She gently pulled up until Nicole’s eyes found hers again. She gave her a very calm smile and a single nod “Stop thinking. It’s just me.”

Waverly’s touch and soothing tone caused a shiver to dance through Nicole’s spine. It was too much. The way she could sense how much Waverly cared for her in that moment just served to flair up the confusing feelings she had been battling. She knew she couldn’t go through with this. It might not affect Waverly but it would definitely affect herself and she knew it. She cleared her throat and pulled back just slightly to put more space between them “I’m sorry, I can’t. I just feel like it’s going to change things and it’s going to ruin our relationship and I can’t risk th-”

Waverly had taken it upon herself to end the internal struggle Nicole was having. She leaned forward and pressed her lips firmly against her friend’s mouth. It effectively stopped her worried babble and took away Nicole’s fear of taking a risk. She took the responsibility completely off Nicole and put it on herself. She could deal with the consequences.

The two of them sat there pressed together in a kiss now. Nicole had stiffened in surprise and kind of froze on the spot. She did not really know what to do next. So she sat frozen. But it lasted only a few seconds before her natural instincts kicked in. She melted into the kiss now. Her hand lifted to cup at Waverly’s cheek, her head tilted to the side so their noses weren’t mashed together, and she moved her lips in an action of returning the kiss.

Waverly was a little surprised that she had actually done it. But she didn’t regret it. Instead she decided to just enjoy it as much as she could because, well, why the Hell not? She had nothing at stake here. So when Nicole started to finally return the kiss she smiled against her lips. She let out the softest giggle to let Nicole know what she had done was absolutely acceptable. She then parted her lips just slightly in a silent gesture to let Nicole know if she really wanted to she could further the kiss.

Nicole wanted to think about her actions and stop herself but her reflexes took over before her brain synapses could fire. Her tongue swept through her lips and into Waverly’s mouth slowly. The motion was tender and when it was met with no resistance she parted her own lips further and the kiss just seemed to naturally deepen on both sides.

It lasted maybe ten seconds but it had felt like a lot longer for Nicole. Waverly, too. It was a weird thing how time could slow down when you were engaged in a kiss, be it a playful one or not, and this kiss was no exception. When they finally pulled from the kiss it was a mutual action. Nicole licked over her lips to sweep in the remaining taste of the kiss before she let out a sort of shy laugh. Her head was swirling as she processed what had just happened.
Waverly smiled very softly and brought her fingertips to her lips. She watched the way Nicole shied away but she didn’t call her out on it just yet. Instead she stayed quiet and let herself just kind of sit there and absorb it all. It had been a good kiss. It hadn’t been weird, surprisingly. It had definitely been interesting, though. So she let her mind wrap around it all and analyze the data that was swirling around inside her now.

Nicole hadn’t stopped smiling. The feeling of Waverly’s lips lingered on her own and it was pleasant. It was also different. It had been a good kiss but it had also been different from any kiss she had had before. She finally brought her eyes up to look at Waverly as her hand pushed back through her loosely hanging wavy strands of red hair. She was really considering cutting it. When she brought her eyes up and saw Waverly was smiling too she let out a sort of awkward laugh and shrugged “What’s on your mind?”

Waverly let out a laugh and gave her head a quick shake “No, you do not get to deflect right now. This was not about me at all this was about you. So how do you feel? Do you want to shrivel up and die?”

“No” Nicole laughed out the word. Her eyes focused on Waverly’s features and something strange happened. It was like she was looking at her in a different way. She took a moment to take it all in before letting out a soft sigh and another breath of a laugh “Well it wasn’t weird. The most awkward thing about it is this exchange right now so that’s a relief.”

Waverly laughed gently and nodded in agreement.

“It was a good kiss” Nicole continued with a little sideways tilt of her head. “Oddly enough I think it helped.”

“See?” Waverly motioned to Nicole as if she had made a good point. “Got over your fear of rejection?”

Nicole chuckled gently at that and gave one shake of her head “I think that will always be around. But I think it helped clear things up for me…” She motioned to Waverly now “…as far as you’re concerned, I mean.”

“What does that mean?” Waverly perked a curious eyebrow now.

“No offense but I didn’t really feel anything” Nicole looked a little surprised at her own confession. She blinked a few times and laughed out again as if she couldn’t believe she had just said that. “I mean, who doesn’t love to kiss an attractive person? There was definite excitement for me there but as far as having feelings for you?” She shrugged and breathed out in a sort of defeated breath “There was nothing there.”

“Really?” Waverly looked completely surprised by that. She eyed Nicole suspiciously as if she were lying just so they could move on from this. But when she saw that Nicole seemed genuine she let out a soft laugh “Okay then. All that worrying you did for nothing!”

Nicole agreed with a little nod. “I feel stupid but….” She waved her hand to the side in a gesture to say that wasn’t important. She smiled very softly at Waverly now and shrugged just once “I think it boils down to the fact that, yes, you are a very gorgeous woman and I confused that physical attraction for something more. But now what we’ve kissed…” She ran her hand through her hair again and lifted her shoulder to her ear “....my mind remembers you’re like a sister to me.”

“Thank you. I think?” Waverly tried to laugh but it fell flat. She eyed Nicole curiously again then just gave her head a single shake. “So I’m your attractive little sister?”
“Come on, Waves” Nicole let out a soft sigh and shook her head. “That makes it sound weird.” She reached out now and took Waverly’s hand in her own. “But I think I forgot how deep our bond goes. I am so deeply connected to you as a friend and it’s that connection with you that is overriding anything sexual between us? At least…” She put a hand to her chest now and nodded “For me, I mean. I love you and we are close and I would dare say we have a more intimately deep connection than some couples who have been together for years. I guess that connection is more important to me than my physical attraction toward you?”

She perked an eyebrow at herself and wondered if she made sense. She felt like she was just babbling now and she was growing frustrated. She shook her head at herself and breathed out heavily through her nose “I think I just got confused because when I saw you after seven years I was very much in tune with my own sexuality and you were very much the type of physical beauty I am attracted to so…” She huffed and turned her eyes away from Waverly now. “I feel like I am not making any sense and offending you all at the same time.”

“It’s fine” Waverly said with a little sigh. Her hand reached out and she gently touched Nicole’s arm. She could see her friend was distressed about it all. “I think I understand. You’re trying to be polite about it but essentially it boils down to the fact that you had the initial reaction of sexual desire toward me.” She shrugged and motioned to herself “I’m sexy and you think I’m sexy. There’s a natural reaction to attraction that leads us to want to have sex with someone we find sexy.”

“Yeah” Nicole gestured with her hand in agreement at what Waverly had said. “I guess it just confused me but now that we’ve kissed I realize I don’t feel like that toward you.”

“Gotcha” Waverly gave her a wink. “You can stop saying that though because even though I did not have my hopes up about this it still stings the ego just a little bit to hear.” She laughed sheepishly “No one likes to hear someone tell them they don’t want to have sex with them.”

“No, hey, woah” Nicole reached out and took hold of Waverly’s hand tightly. “You are sexy. You are beautiful. I can most certainly guarantee that if you weren’t like my sister I would totally want to bang you, as Wynonna would say.”

“You don’t have to baby me” Waverly said with amusement. Her hand lifted and came to rest on Nicole’s cheek. She ran her thumb along the side of her still slightly bruised nose and gave a nod “I will survive your rejection but only out of spite. I want to prove to you no one has ever died from rejection.”

“Now you’re just being a smartass” Nicole rolled her eyes but let out a laugh.

“I am” Waverly agreed with a nod. Her hand dropped away from Nicole’s face now and she straightened up. Her eyes focused on her friend and she spoke in a sincere tone “But seriously I am not offended. I am glad we got this all cleared up and now you don’t have to worry about it. We can focus on the bigger picture and, well, if we really want to piss off Wynonna one day for fun we can tell her we kissed.”

Nicole breathed out a soft chuckle. Her head bounced in a few nods at that statement “She would be so pissed. But I guess she can be relieved now that she doesn’t have to worry about me trying to bang you.”

At Nicole’s words, Waverly’s face lit up like a Christmas tree. Her entire body lightened and she was immediately glowing with delight. A soft sort of wicked giggle rose from her lips and she pointed at Nicole with sheer glee “We should totally tell her we’re dating just to see her squirm.”

“Waverly, no. She’s got so much going on and that will just push her over the edge. She would
“Come on!” Waverly cut Nicole off from what she was sure would be a long rambling of excuse after excuse as to why that was a bad idea. “It will be funny. Besides, we don’t have to tell her right away. We can just kind of giggle and steal glances and like…” She reached out and brushed Nicole’s arm slowly and winked at her “…make her start to suspect something. Then in a few weeks we can come clean. We can watch her freak out and then immediately tell her we were messing with her.”

“Waverly, no” Nicole shook her head firmly.

“Come on. Where is your sense of fun?” Waverly pouted now. “Besides I still never got back at her for the prank she pulled at my fourteenth birthday.”

Nicole had been in the Army when Waverly turned fourteen but she still knew what she was referring to. Wynonna had written her a letter to tell her all about it. She had been dropping hints for weeks that Waverly was getting a puppy for her birthday so when the huge box was wheeled out at her party Waverly had been so excited to pull it open and meet her new friend. When she did, though, she had been greeted with a box full of snakes. They weren’t poisonous but they were terrifying. Waverly hadn’t been able to sleep for weeks afterwards and Wynonna had gotten in a lot of trouble. It had all been worth it, though. At least that is what Wynonna had said in her letter.

Finally Nicole rolled her eyes and let out a sigh. She lifted her hand in a preemptive attempt to keep Waverly calm as she gave in “Fine. But only two weeks. If she figures it out before that we come clean.”

“Deal!” Waverly squealed happily. She bounced on the bed a few times then lunged at Nicole. She wrapped her arms around her friend excitedly and gave her a tight squeeze. She pulled back and let out a soft laugh as her arms now moved to wrap around her own torso “Ouch that hurt but I don’t care. This is going to be hilarious.”

“If she wants to retaliate it is not on me” Nicole pointed firmly. “I am removing myself from this stupid prank war after this.”

“Fair” Waverly said with a serious nod that didn’t play as sincere because of the huge smile on her lips.

Nicole chuckled very softly as her head shook back and forth. She could not believe she was going along with this. But what was a little harmless fun between sisters? Hopefully Wynonna would see it that way too. The last thing she needed was her best friend pissed at her especially since they had all just gotten over the tension that had been lingering in the cabin. Maybe it would all be okay and Wynonna would think it was hilarious. Everyone liked a good prank, especially Wynonna, so maybe it would be a fun story to tell in a few years over holiday dinner. At least Nicole hoped so.

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It had been just over a week since Nicole and Waverly had decided to prank Wynonna. Nicole had to admit it had been kind of hilarious watching Wynonna look super confused every time they interacted. It was also a huge relief knowing that all of her actions were completely platonic toward Waverly now. The anguish of what exactly Waverly had been making her feel had lifted completely and she was definitely walking around a lot lighter than she had been. Besides, being trapped in that cabin was starting to make her a little stir crazy so having this secret with Waverly was helping keep her mind occupied.
Wynonna, on the other hand, literally thought she was going nuts. She would leave every couple of
days to attend secret meetings with the Royal Court as she still worked diligently on abolishing the
Monarchy. Every time she returned it seemed like Nicole and Waverly were giggling. They were in
their own little bubble most of the time. She tried to excuse it with the fact that they had drawn closer
in her own absence but she realized it was starting to get out of hand.

She had caught them sharing blankets on the couch while they sat and did research. She had caught
them sharing food at the table. Every single time Waverly left the room she would kiss Nicole on the
forehead. Worst of all Nicole had stopped coming into her room at night for late night chats and
sleepovers. Maybe she was looking too much into it but it really seemed like something was going
on.

It only added to stress Wynonna out more. She walked around feeling like a rock was sitting in the
pit of her stomach. Every single time Nicole smiled at Waverly or they not-so-subtly brushed hands
as they walked by one another Wynonna felt her blood boil. It wasn’t out of anger, though. She
couldn’t be sure, or maybe she didn’t want to admit it, but she thought it was spawning from
jealousy. Why be jealous of her sister and best friend dating? She didn’t have an answer for that. So
she pretended it was anger and not jealousy because the latter option was far too confusing to focus
on at the moment.

It was a few days before the Peace Summit that the country of The Ghost River Triangle held every
year and Wynonna had agreed to let Nicole run point on security again. They had argued that Nicole
was still a week away from being fully healed but Nicole had insisted she was fine. Besides the only
thing the doctor really frowned upon was excessive physical exertion to which Nicole had made the
point that all she would be doing was standing near Wynonna while she made her speech. So after a
hot debate over the issue Nicole had won.

Waverly rushed into Nicole’s bedroom quickly, giving a glance over her shoulder, before greeting
her friend with a smile. “Quick, Wynonna is coming” She said breathlessly as she started to pull her
shirt up her torso and off her head.

Nicole, who had been standing in front of her closet mirror brushing her wild bed hair, looked over
at Waverly and immediately widened her eyes at the girl. “Woah, what the Hell are you doing?”

“Hey, hey, woah” Nicole’s hands batted at Waverly’s eager fingers working at her buttons. When
the girl stopped what she was doing with a pout Nicole just shook her head “This is getting out of
hand.”

“Come on it’s going to freak her out so bad” Waverly said with a cute grin as she looked up at
Nicole. She batted her eyelashes at the girl a few times quickly in an attempt to kind of flirt her way
into getting what she wanted.

“Fine” Nicole hissed then reached for her buttons to continuing undoing them. “But only because I
agreed on two weeks. Seriously, though..” She trailed off and gave her head a shake. She focused on
what she was doing and when the blue button up she wore finally came completely open she looked
back to Waverly with a sigh “If she starts yelling I am telling her.”

“Whatever” Waverly looked back at the door. She heard Wynonna greet the guard standing watch at
Waverly’s door and she quickly rushed to peek out of Nicole’s bedroom. She smirked and waited until Wynonna was just a few feet away before she grabbed her shirt and started to pull it back over her head. Once her head was through the top she took a few steps out of the bedroom.

It was perfect timing and she ran right into her sister. She gave a grunt as the jolt hurt her still tender ribs. Then she went wide eyed as if Wynonna had surprised her and quickly shoved her shirt down to cover the rest of her torso. “Sorry I didn’t see you there.”

Wynonna was stunned. She had back pedaled when Waverly had run into her. This had afforded her a very clear look at her sister coming out of Nicole’s room half dressed. She blinked a few times as if she was hallucinating. When that did not erase the almost shy look on her sister’s face she gave a shake of her head and coughed out “What’s going on?”

“Oh nothing” Waverly bit her lip and pointed back into the room she had just left. She was fighting a smile at the moment because she could see just how confused Wynonna was. “Nicole was looking at my ribs to check for any new bruising or discoloration.” She bounced on her toes and gave Wynonna an overly happy grin “All good to go.”

Before Wynonna could ask anything more Waverly was skipping passed her down the hallway. She turned and again her eyelids blinked rapidly a few times. Were her eyes really working properly? She was beginning to think they weren’t. She just stared in disbelief as her sister bounced away around a corner and out of sight.

She drew in a sharp breath and shook her head once. “Pull it together, Earp” She mumbled to herself as she pushed onward into Nicole’s room now. It all had to be a coincidence, right? She was taking every interaction between Nicole and Waverly and twisting it into something it was not. Her mind was in worst case scenario overdrive and this was one of the symptoms. It had to be.

She had just convinced herself she was imagining it when she stepped into Nicole’s room. Her eyes found her friend standing in front of her closet, shirt dangling open, and she stopped midstep. Her jaw dropped and she just stared. She looked Nicole up and down slowly. Shirt open like she had just pulled it back on. Her hair was definitely still a mess. That was because Nicole had never finished brushing it for the morning but Wynonna didn’t know that. This was too much. Something was going on.

She motioned to where she had just run into Waverly in the hallway and breathed out a discontented grunt “What the Hell is going on? Why did Waverly just walk out of here half dressed?” She motioned to the state of Nicole now fiercely “Why are your abs showing?”

“Oh” Nicole could see Wynonna was upset and it was really hard for her not to break. But she had to keep her cool because it was just a joke. She knew the more upset Wynonna got the funnier it would be. So she looked down at herself and just shrugged as she finally started to re-button her shirt “I got a bloody nose so I had to change shirts.”

Wynonna’s defenses immediately melted and she felt sympathy for her friend. Her heart rate started to slow and she drew in a deep breath to calm herself down. She watched Nicole do a few buttons up and a part of her was sad to see her friend’s abs disappear behind the clothing. Then she had to blink and shake that thought away because why the Hell did she even think that?

She breathed out a laugh then moved to the end of the bed. She sat with a puff and shook her head again “You were just checking her ribs for bruising?”

Nicole looked up at Wynonna a little surprised. Waverly had not told her that part of the lie but, hey, if that’s what she said she would go with it. So she shrugged at the words and looked back to finish
with her buttons “Yeah, totally. Just doing my due diligence as a good friend would.”

Wynonna perked an eyebrow at Nicole’s response. It seemed like she had just agreed with what she had said because, well, it was what Waverly had told her. Her eyes narrowed and she watched now as Nicole turned her back and reached for her brush. Nicole was avoiding eye contact now which was a sure fire sign she was up to something. She folded her arms now and spoke in a tone that left no doubt about how serious she was “Nicole I want the truth. Why was Waverly leaving your room half dressed?”

“I told you” Nicole mumbled and motioned toward the door with her brush before bringing it back to pull through her long hair. “Daily bruise check up. We’ve been doing it for about a week now. The doctor said it’s important to check daily because it could indicate the ribs weren’t healing in the right place.” All of that was true. Nicole had been checking Waverly for bruising every day just as the doctor had instructed her to do.

Wynonna eyed her friend up and down. This time she could tell Nicole was being truthful. Again she felt like she was losing her mind. She had no idea what was real from one minute to the next. She let out a sigh and her head shook again as she tried to push away the idea that Nicole and Waverly were sneaking around behind her back. She felt a pang in her gut at the thought. She wasn’t sure why the idea bothered her so much. It just did.

She breathed out a sigh then focused back on why she had come to Nicole’s room in the first place. She looked at the folder in her hands then up at her friend with a little shrug “Here are the blueprints and all that stuff you requested for the Peace Summit venue. They said you could send a team in two days before to secure the building if you wanted to.”

Nicole finished with her brush and set it back on her dresser. She then turned back to her mirror and lifted both hands to her hair as she started on working her hair into its usual french braid. She glanced at Wynonna briefly and gave her a nod “I want to go, too. Walk around and familiarize myself with the place. If there is any point of weakness I want to make sure to double up security at that point.”

“Don’t you think you’re being a little over cautious?” Wynonna asked with a roll of her eyes as a smirk came to her lips. She had to admit she had missed Nicole in work mode. She was always so damn serious. It was comforting. Especially when everything else seemed so up in the air.

“There is no such thing when you are protecting the ruler of an entire country” Nicole mumbled around the bobby pins she had put in her mouth so she could grab them easily when she needed them for her hair.

Wynonna let out a sigh and stood from the bed now. She moved closer to her friend, deciding to lean herself against her dresser, and focused on the way Nicole was leaning into the mirror. She smirked slightly and just as Nicole had finished tying up her hair Wynonna pointed “You missed a huge strand.”

“What?” Nicole turned her head to the side Wynonna had pointed at and let out a groan. She reached back and grabbed the strand that was sticking out. “Damn it. You’d think after braiding my hair this way almost every day since I was eighteen I’d be better at it.” She huffed and pulled all of the things in her hair that were securing it in place out so she could restart.

“Let’s hope you’re better at securing a building than you are your hair” Wynonna quipped as amusement danced over her lips.

Nicole could see Wynonna behind her through her mirror and she gave her an annoyed glare. She then shook her head, gathered all of her hair, and started from the beginning in braiding it all. “I’m
really thinking about cutting it short. It’s such a pain in the ass. I never realized it until now. It’s been nice being able to wear it down or just in a loose bun while I’ve been stuck here healing."

“How short?” Wynonna asked with interest perking in her eyebrow. She had never seen her best friend with anything but the long red strands she had now.

Nicole just shrugged. She was quiet as she focused on what she was doing. It took another minute, and thankfully Wynonna didn’t distract her this time, but she finally got it all secured up in the braid. She turned her head back and forth to make sure there were no loose pieces before she turned to look at Wynonna now. She lifted her hand and touched at her neck just below her jaw and nodded “About there?”

Wynonna eyed Nicole carefully because she was trying to picture it. She took a few moments to really just imagine how her friend would look before she finally gave a single nod and pushed off of the dresser “I think you’d look hot. You should do it.”

“Hot?” Nicole asked with a laugh as she moved to the bed now. She scooped up the folder of paperwork that Wynonna had brought her and started to thumb through it. “You know that is the exact reaction I wanted. I needed you to think my haircut would be hot before I went ahead with it.” She smirked and glanced at Wynonna out of the side of her eyes before nodding “Thank you so much for your permission, Your Majesty.”

“You’re welcome, peasant” Wynonna snarked with a roll of her eyes. She moved passed Nicole toward the doorway. She paused then motioned behind her to the hallway “I have a call to make but I will see you downstairs for breakfast?”

Nicole lifted one hand and gave a sloppy salute to Wynonna in a gesture of acknowledgment. She waited until her friend left before she looked up from her papers. She smirked very slightly to herself. She had to admit that seeing Wynonna all flustered at the idea of Waverly and herself hooking up was pretty amusing. She wondered now just how far she could push it.

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It was the morning of the Peace Summit and the cabin was buzzing with excitement. It would be the first time that Nicole or Waverly had left the cabin since arriving there weeks prior in order to heal. It was a relief, actually. Both of them had started to feel like caged animals so even though it was a business trip they were both more than ready to get the Hell out of there for a while.

Waverly had talked Wynonna into letting her go even though her doctor had not cleared her for physical activity quite yet. She had argued a similar point to Nicole’s saying she would just go, make an appearance, sit behind Wynonna in the booth where the Royal Family sat during the conference, and then go back to the motorcade to be escorted back to the cabin. All she had to do was walk a little, sit, and wave. It would be good for the people of their country to see their Princess looking healthy.

Wynonna gave in only because Nicole had chimed in with full support of Waverly. She promised she would assign her best men to protecting Waverly the entire time she was there. Plus neither of them were going to be too far away from Wynonna throughout the whole event so it wasn’t really risky. There would be so much security there it would be hard to fart without someone taking notice.

So the three of them got all dressed up then made their way to the motorcade. Dolls had secured the roads, gotten armored trucks, and even sent a few decoy vehicles out ahead of them just in case someone tried anything while they were on their way. To say that this public appearance was the most important so far in Wynonna’s reign would be an understatement. It was everything.
Nicole was in her official Royal Guard uniform again and she had to admit she had missed it. It felt like home. It was such a safe feeling being in those particular clothes again. It was like a second skin almost. Comfortable, warm, like a hug from a loved one.

Waverly and Nicole had situated themselves in the back row of the large armored SUV truck they were traveling in. Wynonna was in the row ahead of them. She was looking over her cards that she had written her speech on. This was the first speech she would give since her father had died. It was the biggest speech of the year.

All the countries around The Ghost River Triangle all gathered once a year to discuss peace treaties, border control, and any other issues with other countries or between their own territories. It was by far the biggest event throughout the world and Wynonna was nervous. She knew with all the things that had happened that year all eyes would be especially focused on her.

So she read and re-read the speech she had written. She made changes and corrected errors and triple checked that it made sense. She had never been good with words and yet she had managed to put together a pretty moving speech. Maybe it was because peace and non-violence had been on her mind now more than ever.

Suddenly her focus was broken when she heard a giggle come from behind her. She perked an eyebrow and turned ever so slightly to look at the other two passengers out of the corner of her eye. They had been especially giggly that morning and it looked like it had carried over. She still could not shake the feeling that something was going on between them no matter how many times both Nicole and Waverly assured her it was nothing. She just had this ache in her stomach. It panicked her, honestly. She wasn’t sure why but that was the emotion she had decided on to place what she felt when she thought of those two together. Panic.

Waverly smirked when she noticed she had gotten her sister’s attention. She turned to Nicole and gave her a wink to signal she should play along with what she was about to do. She then cleared her throat and reached for one of the many pins that adorned Nicole’s uniform “This one is crooked, silly. We can’t have you going out there looking like a mess. Let me straighten it.” She started to wiggle the ribbon back and forth as if she were fixing it.

Nicole just looked at Wynonna then down to what Waverly was doing. She wasn’t sure this was the best time to be messing with her. She cleared her throat and reached up to stop Waverly’s hands “Its okay I can do it. Just tell me when it’s straight.”

Waverly perked an eyebrow at Nicole’s tone. She was definitely not playing along. She pouted slightly and dropped her hand away in favor of letting Nicole fix her own ribbon on her chest. She watched for a moment before she decided to try again. She smirked and spoke up again to ensure Wynonna could hear “You’re right you are much better at fixing it than I am. I was too distracted by your sexy boob.”

Wynonna scoffed.

Nicole’s eyes went wide and she blushed. Even though it was clear to her now that she had no feelings for Waverly that did not mean hearing her talk about her boob didn’t affect her still. She bit her lip and cast a glance at Waverly that told her to knock it off.

Waverly smirked in delight. She had heard Wynonna’s reaction and that was all she cared about. She turned back to Nicole and gave her a sweet smile “You have some toothpaste on your chin. Here let me get it...” She licked her thumb then reached out in an attempt to swipe at Nicole’s chin.

“Waverly” Nicole flinched out of the girl’s touch and scowled at her. Her eyes flickered forward and
As soon as they had arrived at the Peace Summit they had been greeted by flashbulbs. The media presence seemed extra heavy this year and it was probably because of everything that had happened since Wynonna had become Queen. It was really inconvenient but luckily Nicole had anticipated as much. She had put extra security at the doorway they would use to enter the building so even though there were cameras everywhere the security managed to form a pretty good barrier for the three of them to move through and into the building without too much trouble.

They had been greeted inside by one of the dignitaries that were hosting the event. They exchanged pleasantries, took the opportunity to shake hands and pose for the cameras, then parted ways until later in the day when the conference was set to start. Wynonna and Waverly were showed to the large meeting room that they were to stay in until the events started. It had been converted to be more comfortable for them. There were couches, televisions, computers, and even a table full of food. Anything they needed they just had to ask and it would be brought to them.

One of the doors off of the meeting room led to their own private bathroom. Before they had arrived all of Nicole’s guards had been put into position so wherever Wynonna or Waverly ended up wandering there was at least one guard there to watch over them. Nicole had taken her position back as Wynonna’s main bodyguard so she would accompany her everywhere just like before. Although Waverly was not expected to be separated from her sister so Nicole was kind of acting as the main guard for the both of them.

As soon as they had arrived to their holding room Wynonna had moved over to Nicole and grabbed onto her wrist sharply. She gave a tug and looked at her with a wide, stern look that told her friend they needed to have a very serious talk “Can I borrow you for a second?”

“Wynonna, I-” Nicole looked down at the grip her friend had on her wrist and nodded. She had tried to pull free but to no avail. She knew she was in trouble. So she looked up and nodded to two of the guards that had come in with them “Watch the Princess, please.”

“I don’t need a babysitter. I’m just going to sit on the couch and eat” Waverly mumbled with a roll of her eyes as she motioned to the exact spot where she would be sitting.

“Still” Nicole said to Waverly firmly. Her gaze then shifted to the guards and she gave a nod that told them to not let her out of their sight. It was obvious they were back in the real world which meant
they had to go back to acting like the Royal Family again.

Nicole had barely gotten her nod off to the guards before Wynonna was pulling her away. She pulled so hard Nicole nearly tripped over her own feet. She let out a soft laugh as she caught her balance and followed behind Wynonna quickly “You don’t have to manhandle me. I’m technically supposed to follow you everywhere.”

Wynonna looked back at Nicole with a scowl and let her go. She didn’t stop walking though and after pushing a few doors open before closing them again because they led to rooms with other people in them she finally found a joining room that was empty. She motioned for Nicole to make her way through the door.

“That room isn’t secure” Nicole stopped and motioned to the door Wynonna held open.

“That’s why you’re going in first” Wynonna said with a matter-of-fact tone. “Do your damn job, secure the room, call some guards in, and then I’ll follow.”

Nicole wanted to say something mean back to Wynonna but she bit her tongue. She knew her friend was upset with her so she was using her Queen tone to show she was not kidding around. Instead of arguing, Nicole pulled out her gun and walked into the room slowly. She looked every which way before motioning behind her for two of her guards to follow her in. The three of them swept through the room quickly to make sure there was nothing harmful in there. Once it was clear that it was just another empty office meeting room Nicole motioned for the guards to go stand at each of the doors then put her gun away. She turned now and called back to Wynonna “All clear, Your Majesty.”

“Alright cut the shit” Wynonna slammed the door behind her with a strength that surprised even her. She stormed over to where Nicole was standing in the middle of the room. She lifted her finger and pointed it right in her friend’s face before nearly exploding at her “I swear to god if you lie to me one more time, Haught, I will have you stripped of your title and banned from the Palace for life. Now look me in the eyes and tell me what the Hell is going on between you and my sister.”

Nicole had never in her life seen anger inside Wynonna like she was seeing in this moment. It scared her. She took a step back from her friend as her hands raised in a gesture of surrender. Her head shook once and her face held a genuine fear as she quickly mumbled out “No-nothing, Wynonna. I swear to god there’s nothing goin-”

“Don’t you lie to me!” Wynonna yelled and threw her hands out to her sides in frustration. She stiffened where she stood, puffed out her chest in an attempt to intimidate Nicole, and gritted her teeth. “Are you banging Waverly?”

“No!” Nicole’s head shook back and forth feverishly now. Her eyes stayed locked on Wynonna to try and show her she was being honest. “There is nothing going on with Waverly and myself. Trust me. I have no desire to have sex with her.”

Wynonna blinked just once and though her anger was spilling out of her it did not stop her from seeing the look in Nicole’s eyes. She saw honesty. She saw a look of panic that told her that her friend was genuinely scared right now. In that split second where she saw right into Nicole’s soul she felt her anger die. Her stance eased and she motioned behind her toward the door that led to the room that held Waverly “You have been acting all sorts of sneaky coupley the past two weeks. Am I just imagining that?”

“Well, no” Nicole breathed out now. Her body looked like it deflated and her eyes dropped away from Wynonna. She gave her head a shake and she drew in a slow breath before she dared look up again. When she did she saw a very confused looking Wynonna and she sighed out softly “You’re
right we have been acting kind of coupley but it’s not-

“So there is something going on?” Wynonna’s voice cracked in distress and her eyes went wide again.

“No!” Nicole quickly shook her head again and put her hands back up between herself and Wynonna. “Trust me there’s a perfectly good explanation for this.”

Wynonna nearly spit out the laugh that came through her lips. The laugh was dead, holding no amusement, and her arms folded across her chest firmly. She once more stiffened where she stood and gave Nicole a fierce glare “This better be fucking hilarious.”

“Actually” Nicole breathed out and attempted a smile. When she saw Wynonna’s firm glare not flinching on her face her own smile faded. She motioned to the door behind Wynonna where Waverly was at and shrugged “Okay so it all started a couple weeks ago. We had this really deep heart to heart and decided to just kiss and then-

“YOU WHAT!” Wynonna’s rage came back in a blink. She took three steps and was right up in Nicole’s personal space again.

“Woah, hey, no” Nicole back pedalled a few steps and shook her head. “Not like that. It wasn’t a real kiss it was just-”

Before Wynonna knew what she was doing her fist was swinging forward and striking Nicole with a fierce jab. She had been so mad, so utterly infuriated, that she had blacked out for a split second and her hand had acted on it’s own accord.

Nicole stumbled backwards with the force of the blow. She immediately reached both hands up to her face, cupping at her nose which had started gushing blood, and let out a loud groan. Her eyes closed for a few seconds as the pain settled in. Her entire head was on fire, the heat radiating out from her nose, as pain consumed her every nerve.

When her eyes came open they were full of tears and she focused on Wynonna just a few feet away. She yelled at her from behind her hands because she felt her nose might fall off if she pulled her hands away “God damn it Wynonna! My nose!”

Wynonna’s eyes went wide as she seemed to come back from her rage blackout and realize what just happened. She gritted her teeth and hurried over to Nicole “Fuck. Shit. God damn it.” She motioned to the guard standing watch near the door that led to their holding room and snapped at him with her fingers “You! Get some towels!”

“Wynonna you broke my nose” Nicole dropped down to her knees now slowly. She leaned forward as the blood she had been containing in her hands started to drop through her fingers. Luckily she had moved fast enough that it had not dropped on her uniform and instead was falling in huge drops on the carpet. She slowly brought her hands away from her nose now and was greeted by a small pool of blood in both palms.

“God damn it, Nicole” Wynonna growled as she moved to put a hand on her friend’s shoulder. She couldn’t kneel beside her. She was in her best fancy Queen dress that was adorned with all the flags of her country and the territories within. So she stood to the side and watched the blood drop on the carpet from above Nicole’s head.

The guard returned with towels and Nicole quickly grabbed them and pressed them to her face. She felt like she was going to faint. She was trying to pull in deep breaths to keep herself conscious.
“What the Hell happened?” Waverly was standing at the adjoining door, having followed the guard back in, and her eyes widened in horror when she saw Nicole hunched over with blood pouring from her face.

“Get the Hell out of here” Wynonna barked at her sister.

“No. What is going on in he-”

“Do it now or so help me god” Wynonna growled. She then motioned to the guard still standing next to the door. “Physically remove her if she refuses to leave.”

“Fine!” Waverly raised her hands to indicate she was leaving. She looked at the scene in the room and shook her head before turning and leaving. The guard closed the door behind her then stood right in front of it to block any attempts of anyone else opening it.

Wynonna looked back down at Nicole now. Even though she was more angry than she had ever been in her entire life she still felt bad. She never thought she would ever physically hurt her best friend and yet the mere mention of Nicole having kissed Waverly had sent her flying over the edge. She let out a sigh and reached for the towels “Here, let me see.”

Nicole flinched out of Wynonna’s attempt to help her. She closed her eyes because she could feel her face already swelling. She let out a heavy sigh and mumbled around the towel pressed to her face “Why the Hell did you punch me?”

Wynonna frowned when Nicole moved out of her reach. She was offended that her friend would not let her see. This just served to keep her anger boiling right below the surface. She pulled her hand back and folded her arms across her chest “Dude, you just fucking told me you kissed my sister.”

“It wasn’t a real kiss” Nicole groaned. She pulled the towel away from her face. It was soaked through with blood. She threw it onto the floor out of frustration and put both hands on the carpet. She held herself up on all fours as she let her nose just bleed freely now. They could pay to replace the carpets so it didn’t matter.

“Oh, please, tell me how a kiss isn’t real?” Wynonna huffed out a laugh of disbelief. She walked around to where Nicole’s head was and looked down at her. She shook her head and spoke firmly now “I’m going to ask you once more and you better not lie to me. Did you and Waverly kiss?”

“Yes, but-”

“You’re dead to me” Wynonna hissed out sharply. She turned and stormed away from Nicole now. She was trembling. Her entire body was aching and she felt like she was going to be sick. She felt tears forming in her eyes but she would not cry. She couldn’t. She had to get up in front of a room full of all the World’s leaders and give a speech about non-violent conflict resolution. The irony had not escaped her. Not that she cared. At this moment all she wanted to do was curl up in a ball and cry until she withered away into a shell of her old self. She had never hurt this much in her life. Somehow the one person she had always been able to depend on had just become the person to break her heart in the most irreparable way. She wasn’t sure she could ever get over it.

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Nicole and Waverly sat in the armored SUV waiting for Wynonna to finish with the conference. Waverly had decided to forgo the ceremonies and speech in favor of taking care of Nicole. She had gotten the story from Nicole because Wynonna had refused to talk to her when she came out of the room. She felt horrible. This was all her fault. She was going to make sure she sat Wynonna down
and explained it all once they got back to the cabin.

That would have to wait, though. Because suddenly the Earth gave a shutter as an explosion lit up the building they sat waiting in front of. The building that still held Wynonna.

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“No let me in!” Nicole was fighting off the gaggle of policemen and other first responders that were trying to bring order to the scene in the lobby of the building. “I am the Head of the Royal Guard and the Queen is in there!”

It was madness. People were screaming and crying. Policemen were yelling. There were sirens and smoke alarms going off everywhere. The lobby was filled with a thin smoke that had billowed down the stairs and out of the elevator of the building. The floor was littered with debris and the bodies of the injured that had already been pulled out of the area where the explosion had gone off.

As soon as the explosion had gone off both Nicole and Waverly had rushed out of the SUV they had been waiting in. They had turned their heads upwards to see flames and smoke coming from the floor that they knew the Peace Summit conference had been held on. Panic had taken over immediately at that point. Nicole had ordered the guards she had with her to get Waverly into the SUV and out of the area immediately. Waverly had wanted to stay but Nicole had demanded she get to safety.

Then Nicole’s instincts and training kicked in. She had immediately grabbed for her radio and called to Dolls for backup. She had then made a call to all emergency responders in the area to come to the building. It was an all hands on deck call. Luckily there was already a large amount of safety personnel on site and they had immediately started working on organizing the madness that was unfolding.

It had only taken a minute or two for the police and emergency crew on the ground floor to surround the entrances and barricade people from entering the premises. That is where Nicole was stuck now. She was yelling and trying to muscle her way through the barricaded border to get inside.

“Look at my uniform!” Nicole barked loudly with a few sharp gestures at what she was wearing. There was a pretty decent size blood stain near the collar of her uniform in the middle just under her chin where some blood had escaped her hands but other than that it was pretty clear she was donning the Queen’s Guard official garment.

“Let her pass” A man yelled from a few feet behind the barricade. Judging by the ribbons adorning his chest he was a higher ranking police official.

“Thank you” Nicole breathed out heavily and waited for the man standing guard to pull the barricade open to let her through.

Once she was by she rushed into the lobby and over to the man that looked like he was running the main communications point for the whole crisis operation. Her hands grabbed at the top of the podium he stood at and her eyes were wide and wild with worry “The Queen of The Ghost River Triangle. Have you heard anything about her?”

The man quickly shook his head before holding up his finger to indicate she needed to be quiet. A radio was going off. He picked it up and listened to what the person on the other end of it was saying. He quickly responded back with something before looking back to Nicole with another shake of her head “No word. All we know was it was localized in a room set away from where the conference was actually being held. Most injuries are people who were in the hallways or surrounding rooms. No word on any dignitaries yet, ma’am.”

That was good news. Nicole let out a soft breath of relief and looked around. She wondered which
staircase would get her to that floor the quickest. Maybe everyone who was in the conference was safe and they were just being held in a lock down until the coast was clear. It was possible. She turned back to look at the man after she scanned her surroundings “Do you know which room it was in?”

“Southwest quarter of the building is all I know” The man said quickly before picking up another radio. He made a call with a few orders then set it back down. “Conference was held in—”

“Northern part” Nicole said with a nod. Thank god Wynonna had given her the blueprints of the building to look over. She was so glad she had a layout of the building in her mind and the more she thought it over the more she was confident the dignitaries in the conference were unharmed.

Then it dawned on her. The meeting room that had been turned into their holding room for them to relax in before the conference had been in the southwest part of the building. Her heart dropped to her toes. She felt herself go numb. She blinked a few times to keep her eyes focused which was hard considering her face was so swollen. She wasn’t in pain anymore, at least. The pain had been overridden by adrenaline and panic when the explosion had happened.

“How do I get up there?” Nicole almost yelled at the man. When she realized she had done so she shook her head and tried again “I’m sorry. I need to get to that floor. Which is the fastest way?”

“All the stairways are locked down to all traffic going up” The man said with an apologetic shrug. “It’s protocol in emergencies. Only people coming down can open the doors.”

“I need to get up there!” Nicole shouted now without even feeling bad about it.

“I’m sorry ma’am there is no—”

Just then the fire department rushed through the lobby in their full fire gear. That meant they were heading toward flames. That meant they knew how to get up to the higher floors. Nicole quickly moved to follow them. Nothing was going to stop her from getting to that floor and making sure Wynonna was safe. Nothing. She should have been with her in the first place. She should have been keeping her safe.

“Hey you can’t go in there” One of the firemen stopped Nicole as soon as she had tried to move through the emergency stairwell they had just opened to access the fires.

“I damm well can and will” Nicole barked and narrowed her eyes in a heated glare. She pointed at the golden badge that was attached to her uniform on the left side of her chest and nodded “Royal Guard overrides you. Move.” She nearly growled the last word before shoving him out of the way and rushing ahead of them toward the stairs.

The stairwell was surprisingly devoid of smoke. It was a good sign. The stairs were on the northern part of the building, same as the conference room, so it served to assume there was no fire threatening that room. Every step that Nicole took upwards brought new hope to her. Maybe Wynonna was safe. Maybe it was all going to be alright.

“Haught, state your position” Dolls’ voice came from the radio on Nicole’s left shoulder.

“Ascending northern stairwell en route to Summit level” She radioed back while still taking three stairs at a time.

“Fall back. Repeat fall back. We’ve got her. Meet us in the back alley for immediate departure.”

Nicole nearly cried on the spot. They had Wynonna. Somehow in all of this madness the men she
had assigned to her had found a way to get her out. She was safe. Nicole stopped dead in her tracks and spun around on her heels. She started to leap down the steps now, taking big chunks at a time, landing with a heavy thud every time she hit a landing and the stairwell turned in a new direction.

“Move! Make a path!” She yelled down to the firemen she now saw approaching. She had sprinted so far ahead of them that she was barely running into them now. She waved her hand wildly in a motion for them to get to one side. “Move move move!”

The men froze and moved as far to the side as they could. It was hard considering the stairwell was narrow and they all had their oxygen tanks on their backs but they managed to make enough room for Nicole to skirt by as quickly as possible.

As soon as she hit the bottom floor she took off like a shot. She navigated through some of the back corridors that were removed from the main hallways of the lobby. She was growing more thankful of those blueprints by the second. She knew exactly how to get where she was going without having to fight a crowd.

She burst out into the back alley and her head turned back and forth in a frantic search for Dolls. At the end of the alley near the street she saw one of the armored SUVs that had come with the Royal motorcade. Her feet pounded the pavement with each rapid, sprinted step she took toward the vehicle. It wasn’t until she was within about twenty feet that she realized the back hatch was open and a mix of her guards and Doll’s Army men were surrounding it. Her heart dropped again. Someone was hurt.

She pushed her way through the few men and that’s when she felt her heart stop. They had laid the last row of seats flat to make room in the back of the vehicle to allow them to lay Wynonna out flat. She was bloodied, covered in black ash, and unresponsive.

“Get in, Haught!” Dolls, who had Wynonna’s head in his lap, yelled as soon as he realized she was there.

Nicole blinked and quickly climbed in beside Wynonna. The hatch was slammed shut behind her. Just like that the world disappeared into a whirlwind. The vehicle suddenly started to move and the streets around them streaked by in shapeless and colorless blobs.

“What happened?” Nicole was finally able to ask. She had been just staring in shock at the lifeless Wynonna as she shook and bumped along with the movements of the vehicle.

“The bomb was in her room” Dolls said with a shake of his head. He looked down at Wynonna and a heavy sigh left his lips. “She left the conference early because she had forgotten her speech cards in the room. She went back to get them. She was at the end of the hall when it went off.” He licked his lips and his eyes lifted to look back to Nicole now “If she would have lingered at all she would be dead.”

It was like Dolls’ words clamped a vice around her heart. She reached for the pain that twisted in her chest as tears filled her eyes. She gave her head a shake as she began to cry. She should have been there. She had been tasked with holding Wynonna’s speech cards. If they hadn’t gotten into their fight, if she wouldn’t have gone along with Waverly’s stupid joke, none of this would have happened.

She swallowed the lump in her throat and reached out to take Wynonna’s hand. She could barely see through her tears so she just closed her eyes. She leaned down now to lay her head on Wynonna’s shoulder and as she whispered against her ear her words trembled “I’m so sorry, Wynonna. I will make sure whoever did this pays for it.”
As soon as they had arrived at the hospital there was a swarm of doctors and nurses that put Wynonna on a gurney and whisked her away. There were questions being asked that Nicole had no answer for. Luckily the guard that had been nearby had sustained very minimal injuries and was able to answer the questions that the hospital staff were asking.

Nicole was ushered away with Dolls and the others. They were led through a few hallways before being shown to a private room. As soon as they stepped into the room the people already waiting there turned their attention to the new arrivals. Dolls was greeted by a group of his men. Nicole was greeted with a sobbing Waverly who ran straight into her arms.

“What happened?” Waverly sobbed into Nicole’s shoulder as she clung to her.

Nicole just shook her head as her arms wrapped around the girl and held her close. She was fighting off a new wave of tears now. The shock of it all was starting to wear off and reality was setting in. A bomb had actually exploded. Wynonna was really in the hospital fighting for her life. This was all really happening.

“I don’t know” Nicole finally mumbled down to Waverly. She closed her arms around her more tightly and drew in a deep breath which hurt because her nose was definitely broken again. She touched a soft kiss to the top of Waverly’s head and slowly started to rub her back in an attempt to soothe her. “There was a bomb in that room. She was nearby. That’s all I know.”

“A bomb?” Waverly looked up at Nicole in surprise. Her face was soaked with tears. Some of her hair that had fallen free from her updo in the shuffle of being swept away to safety stuck to her cheeks. Her eyes were red, indicating she had been crying for a long time.

Nicole just nodded once. Her eyes shifted and she saw Dolls across the room talking to his men. She motioned now to him and spoke softly “That’s all we know right now.”

Waverly frowned and a new wave of tears spilled from her eyes. She buried her face against Nicole’s chest again and let herself give into the sobs. She was so scared. She was so worried. Everything had been so chaotic and it didn’t seem to be getting any better. She just wanted a calm, quiet life. This just didn’t seem fair.

It was as if Nicole knew what Waverly had been thinking. She just nodded her head when the girl leaned back into her and started to cry again. She drew in a deep breath to fight off her own tears and pulled her arms around her more tightly “I know, Waves. I know.”

Nicole sat on one of the large couches that had been brought into their private waiting room. She had no idea what time it was. Her face hurt. She had been seen by a doctor a few hours ago and he had ensured her that she would not need to reset her nose again. It had been a straight break that had not shifted her nose to either side. At least that was good news. That hadn’t stopped the pain, though. The doctor had offered her pain medicine but she had refused.

She sat with her eyes closed, her fingers pressed against her closed eyelids, and her back pressed to the arm of the couch. She was stretched out with her legs along the cushions. Waverly was propped up against her, head against her shoulder, body stretched out laying along the length of Nicole, who had her arm around the smaller girl, holding her tightly as she slept. She couldn’t sleep herself. She was in too much pain and her mind was racing with worry. There were so many unanswered questions. She couldn’t rest until she knew more.
Just then the doctors that had been caring for Wynonna entered the room. Though there had not been much noise since it was early in the morning the room went immediately silent. Nicole sat up a little straighter and focused on the doctors. She would have stood but Waverly was asleep and she knew the girl would need as much rest as she could possibly get.

“We managed to stop all the internal bleeding. She lost a lot of blood and we had to remove part of her liver but we are confident she will pull through” One of the doctors stated with a nod.

There was an audible sigh of relief that rushed through the room as everyone seemed to exhale at the same time.

“She is, however, still unconscious. Though the scans were clean initially that does not mean there was not any head trauma. We are going to run new scans every couple of hours for the next day to make sure we did not miss anything.”

Nicole felt her ears start to tingle as the second part of what the doctor had to say came to her. It was like no other sound existed but the words and the sound of her own blood rushing through her ears. She knew doctors had to speak with a sense of realism so as not to give too much hope but that did not mean they weren’t right. They could have missed something. Wynonna could have a head injury that they were unaware of at the moment. So this could get worse.

She had been so lost in thought that she had not realized the doctors were gone and the room had filled with chatter. She wasn’t even sure how much time had passed from the moment she heard the news to the moment she realized she had been sitting there stunned. When she finally blinked, her eyes first focused on Waverly. Then she looked up. She saw Dolls hunched over something at one of the counters across the room and she wondered what he was up to. So as gently as she could she slid out from under Waverly, tucked the blanket tightly around her, then moved slowly to the other side of the room.

She cleared her throat so as not to startle him then looked down at what he was looking at. It was the blueprints of the building and the security orders she had drawn up for the Royal Guard. She frowned slightly and looked up at him “What are you thinking?”

Dolls just gave a shake of his head. He looked up at Nicole and it was obvious he was as exhausted as she felt. He motioned to the papers he was looking at and shrugged “Just trying to piece together when the bomb could have been placed. I know you did a full building sweep ahead of her arrival.”

“Oh course” Nicole confirmed. She pointed at a few doorways on the blueprints with a nod “Men at each of these points without leave for a full twenty-four hours before the summit as well. No one should have been able to get in to place a bomb undetected. Not unless-”

“It was an inside job” Dolls agreed to the point Nicole was just getting to. He gave his head another shake and lifted a hand to rub firmly at the back of his head. He breathed out heavily then looked back up to Nicole “Who was it?”

Nicole shook her head and gave a shrug with her entire left arm in a gesture of complete defeat “None of my men would do this.”

“Mine either” Dolls said with a shake of his own head now. He straightened up and turned to face Nicole now. He folded his arms across his chest and spoke gently with a serious look in his eyes “Which means someone infiltrated our operations without us knowing.”

Nicole looked down at the papers he had been looking at. She scanned over them for a moment and when she didn’t immediately see any clues she looked back up to Dolls with another shrug “How? I
trust these men with my own life. I just can’t believe any of them would leak details to allow for someone to be able to infiltrate.”

Dolls nodded and looked back at the papers. He sighed out heavily again as his eyes scanned over everything. It just didn’t make sense. He reached for the security orders and lifted the paper. He read over it carefully before he straightened and turned it to show Nicole “Who did you send the orders to?”

“All essential members of the guard” Nicole started with a hint of annoyance in her tone because it seemed like Dolls was accusing her of being at fault “You and Doc as per protocol.” She gave her head a half shake and spoke firmly “All on the up and up. Our email server is secure. It can’t be hacked. So-”

“Someone is a mole” Dolls cut her off again. It was obvious he was not about beating around the bush. He shook his head and tossed the security orders back onto the countertop out of frustration. “It doesn’t make sense. No one with the clearance level required to pull this off would ever want to hurt Wynonna.”

Nicole felt useless. She honestly had no idea where to start. She breathed out a long sigh before motioning vaguely at some of the men that were lingering around the room “Maybe we investigate everyone that was there today or yesterday. See if we can get one of them to crack.”

Dolls’ eyes shifted up and around the room. He took a moment to consider the suggestion. He finally shrugged and looked back to Nicole. His voice lowered now as he spoke “I don’t want to scare whoever it was off by launching an investigation. That could give whoever it was the time to cover it up.”

Nicole nodded because it made sense. Her eyes shifted around the room for a moment then slowly returned back to Dolls “So what do we do?”

“I’ll take care of it” Dolls said calmly. He reached out now and put a hand on Nicole’s shoulder “Until then get some rest. You look like Hell.” He slowly smiled at that showing he was trying to lighten the mood just a bit.

Nicole couldn’t help but smile just slightly. She was sure she looked terrible with her blood stained uniform and swollen face. She motioned to her broken nose and gave a nod “Is it that noticeable?”

Dolls lifted his hand from her shoulder and held it up with two fingers pinched together so there was just a little bit of space between them. He gave her a wink and laughed very softly “Get you some ice because you are starting to look like the elephant man.”

“You know that’s really rude” Nicole gasped and pointed at him with a soft laugh. She shook her head in amusement then turned to leave him where he stood. She moved back to the couch and was glad to see that Waverly was still asleep. That was a little bit of good news in the middle of this shitstorm. She knew Waverly would need all the rest she could get. If Wynonna was out of commission for any length of time Waverly would become acting Head of the Monarchy. So she would let her rest.

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A few hours had passed and the doctors had run the head scans again. They had once more come back clean but Wynonna had yet to wake up. Her brain was functioning perfectly normally and the anesthetic had worn off but she was still asleep. The doctors weren’t too worried. Sometimes the body just knew when it needed rest.
They had allowed Waverly and Nicole into the room to visit Wynonna once she was out of surgery and had passed the second round of scans. Waverly had immediately broken down crying at her sister’s bedside. Nicole had fought it for as long as she could but it hadn’t lasted long. She had taken hold of Wynonna’s hand opposite of where Waverly was hunched over crying against her and that was when her own tears had come. She still felt awful. She should have been there with her.

The two of them had stayed in the room for hours. No one had wanted to bother them. But it was time for the staff to check Wynonna’s vitals and take her for her next round of scans. So one of the nurses knocked on the door, apologized for the interruption, then moved quickly to wheel her bed out of the room and toward where the scans were. Nicole had tried to go with her but the staff had told her the guards standing at every single hospital door in their secluded wing was enough security.

Nicole still didn’t trust anyone but she had no other choice. So she just watched them take Wynonna away. She let out a sigh then lifted her arm to accept Waverly who was already moving toward her in tears. The girl wrapped her arms around her tightly and Nicole nodded as her arm looped around her waist to hold her close. They had barely spoken and Nicole was almost certain it was because they both felt so guilty about what had happened.

“Haught” Dolls poked his head into the empty room. He saw Waverly crying against Nicole and he frowned slightly. He cleared his throat and motioned with his head “Can I steal you for a second?”

“No” Waverly looked up now and gave a firm shake of her head. She wiped at her eyes then straightened up out of Nicole’s embrace. She looked between the other two then cleared her throat “I’m in charge now so I need to be brought in on everything.”

Dolls looked surprised at the firmness of Waverly’s tone. He stared at her for a second then shrugged and gave her a smile “Alright then.”

Nicole nodded in agreement. Waverly was right. If she had to take control while Wynonna was out then she should know everything that was going on.

Dolls stepped into the room fully now and closed the door behind them. He looked around as if someone might be listening then cleared his throat and spoke softly “Jeremy has been working all night on tracing that email. Anyone that was copied onto it, anyone who opened it, or anyone who copy and pasted it into a new template. Basically anything resembling that email in any form he has been tracking down.”

“He can do that?” Nicole looked impressed at that.

“What email?” Waverly asked softly.

“The security order for the Summit” Nicole said with a nod. “Standard operating procedure for all events The Guard attends.”

Waverly gave a quick nod. She had more questions but she had the basic information so she felt she understood, at least.

“Anyway” Dolls looked back at Nicole and gave a single dip of his head as a smile moved over his lips. “He thinks he knows who did it.”

“Did what?” Waverly looked between the other two now with a shrug.

“Leaked our security information. We think it was an inside job.” Nicole carified.

“What was an inside job?” Waverly asked again feeling a little stupid.
“The bomb. It appeared after the entire building was secure so it had to be someone that knew our security layout and could get their hands on one of our uniforms to bring it in” Nicole said softly then looked up to Dolls and perked an eyebrow “That’s what we are thinking, right?”

Dolls nodded just once. He offered a soft smile to Waverly then reached out to put a hand on her shoulder “Jeremy is pretty sure it was Doc.”

“Doc?” Waverly’s mouth dropped open.

“Pretty sure?” Nicole perked a skeptical eyebrow.

“It couldn’t have been Doc. His family has been the Advisor to the Crown for generations. They are as loyal to us as you are, Nicole” Waverly motioned at Nicole then looked back at Dolls with a shake of her head “His great grandpa was best friends with my great grandpa. They’ve supported the Crown forever.”

“Jeremy says he uncovered a lot of deleted emails from Doc to someone he can’t trace yet. He is not very happy that Wynonna wants to abolish the Monarchy so he’s been working with that person to do something to stop her” Dolls gave Waverly’s shoulder a soft attempt at a comforting squeeze then shrugged. “Apparently if the Monarchy is gone his family’s wealth is at stake.”

“That selfish prick” Nicole growled.

“No” Waverly frowned and shook her head quickly. “He’s been so supportive. He’s been like an uncle to me for so long. It can’t be.”

Dolls let his hand drop away from Waverly and he gave her a sad looking nod “People do stupid stuff in the name of money.” He sighed then looked over to Nicole now “Jeremy is decoding the other emails to see who he was talking with. If he can break through we might be able to take whoever it was down before they even know we are aware of what happened.”

“Good” Nicole gave a single nod. “Keep me posted. And hey, get some rest” She motioned now at Dolls and offered his a soft smile “I’m going to need you sharp.”

Dolls just smiled at her and waved her off with a dismissive flick of his hand to the side. He moved now out of the room and left the girls alone again.

“I can’t believe it” Waverly was still stunned at the news. She looked over to Nicole and her head shook just once “I thought Doc was on our side. You know Wynonna would never let the people who worked hardest for her be screwed over by this. I am sure she would have made sure they were all taken care of once the Monarchy was gone.”

“I’m sure” Nicole agreed. She reached out and took Waverly’s hand. She gave it a soft squeeze as she let out a sigh “But people panic sometimes.” She didn’t want to justify or defend Doc’s actions so she just shrugged. She let go of Waverly’s hand now and pointed to the door “I am going to go get some coffee while we wait for Wynonna to come back. Do you want anything?”

Waverly smiled very softly. Nicole was somehow still as calm and caring as ever. She gave a little nod at the offer “You know what I like.”

Nicole nodded in agreement then moved to the door. She paused and looked back, giving Waverly a soft smile, before she pushed the door open and she made her way to find some coffee. Maybe she could find a change of clothes, too. Walking around with a blood stained uniform was starting to get uncomfortable. Plus people stared at her in horror every time she walked into a room.
Waverly sighed once Nicole left. She wrapped her arms around herself and slowly turned to look around the room. She had been so naive about all of this. She had thought Wynonna had it easy. She had people she could trust that did most of the hard work for her. All she had to do was agree or disagree on certain decisions. But now? She was beginning to see being in charge was not all that great. The only people she could really trust was her sister. And Nicole. Always Nicole. It was nice to still have that consistent source of strength through all this madness. She wasn’t sure she would survive what she knew she was about to face if she did not have Nicole by her side.

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“Her scans are still clean” The doctor said looking a little baffled now. It was well into the evening now which meant Wynonna had been in the hospital for almost an entire day. She had gone for scans every couple of hours like clockwork and as far as anyone could tell she was healthy. So the fact she had yet to wake up from the anesthetic was stumping everyone.

“Are you sure?” Nicole asked gently. She knew the doctors were doing everything they could but it had been a long day for everyone and sometimes people missed things or forgot to run little tests.

The doctor gave a nod then looked to Wynonna who lay unmoving in her hospital bed. “As far as we can see there is no bleeding anywhere. No swelling. We can attempt to give her a stimulant and see if that stirs her but it’s advised against with the amount of trauma her organs received.”

“How soon would you suggest that?” Waverly choked out in a whimper. She was trying her best to hold herself together but she was terrified Wynonna was going to die.

The doctor just shook his head. He stared at Wynonna for a few moments before his eyes flickered around to the machines that surrounded her. They all read normally. Nothing in the realm of his medical knowledge could explain why she had not come out of the anesthesia yet. He finally sighed and looked back to Waverly “I wouldn’t recommend it at all since we don’t know what is causing the delay in her waking up.”

Nicole nodded and looked over to Waverly. She reached out and grabbed her hand, giving it a soft squeeze, before she tried to smile at the doctor “Thank you for all you’ve done already.”

“We will keep trying. We will continue to run the regular tests as scheduled” The man adjusted his glasses on his face and frowned at the girls. “I wish I had better news.”

“She’s alive” Nicole stated quickly as another small smile came to her lips. She was trying to be polite because she knew it was not the doctor who was at fault for the situation. “That’s the most important thing.”

Waverly tried to agree with a nod but she failed. She turned her head and buried it against Nicole’s shoulder as her sobs took over again.

Nicole let out a sigh and wrapped her arm around Waverly’s shoulders. She pulled her close then looked at the man “Thank you, again.”

The doctor nodded then moved to the door. He paused to look back at the two girls and his guts twisted. He felt awful that he had no answers for them.

Nicole waited until they were alone in the room again before she spoke. She cleared her throat and started to move her hand slowly along Waverly’s back as her eyes focused on Wynonna. “Come on, Wynonna. I know you’re in there. Stop being such a stubborn asshole and just wake up.”

Waverly laughed out softly through her tears at Nicole’s words. She lifted her face from her shoulder
to look up at her friend with a soft smile. She really had no idea how she would be managing without her there “You think she’s doing this for attention?”

“Absolutely” Nicole nodded firmly as her eyes moved from Wynonna to Waverly. She reached up and pushed some of Waverly’s loose hair off her eyes before offering her a smile “You know how dramatic she can be sometimes.”

Waverly nodded weakly and turned her head now to look at her sister. Her heart twisted. She had never seen Wynonna look anything but strong. She looked up to her sister so much. She had grown up admiring how Wynonna had always seemed to take everything in stride and conquer it no matter the challenge. So seeing her like that, in the bed, with the only signs of life being the beeps and blips from the machines was eerie. She almost didn’t recognize her own sister.

A silence filled the room now. Well as silent as it could be with the machines surrounding Wynonna to monitor her. But the sounds weren’t too loud and for a moment they were actually soothing. A soft reminder that even if the circumstances weren’t the best that at least she was still alive. It was a grain of good they could cling to for hope.

A few minutes passed where Nicole just held Waverly against her. She knew the girl needed comfort and strength and, honestly, there was nowhere in the world Nicole would rather be than right there in that room with her family. So the two of them sat there, side by side, Nicole’s arm around Waverly as she leaned into her side. Neither of them dared look away from Wynonna now. It was surreal how staring at a loved one in a hospital bed could make you feel so detached from the rest of the world.

When the light knock came to the door both girls flinched in surprise. Nicole let out a breath of a laugh and sat more upright where she had been slouching over to allow Waverly to comfortably lean against her. She touched a kiss to the top of her friend’s head then rubbed her back before moving to get up “Stay here. Hold her hand. Talk to her.”

Waverly nodded and moved to allow Nicole the room she needed to stand from the small couch they had in the room. She watched as the other girl moved across to the door before her eyes flickered back to her sister. She immediately frowned and scooted to the edge of the couch closest to the bed, reaching for her hand, and clearing her throat so she could speak softly to her.

“What’s going on?” Nicole asked as she slipped into the hallway and pulled the door closed behind her. Her eyes focused immediately on Dolls, the one who had knocked, and she could tell he had news.

“Jeremy was able to trace the source of the other emails” He spoke softly as his eyes moved about. He realized they were not in a secure place. There were three guards standing watch outside the room and a nurses’ station just a few feet away. So he cleared his throat and motioned for Nicole to follow him.

Without hesitation Nicole moved behind Dolls. The two of them stayed silent until they could find a place to be alone. They ended up in one of the other abandoned patient rooms in the wing. Since the hospital had closed down an entire wing to aid in Wynonna’s privacy there were a lot of empty rooms about. Some of them had turned into makeshift hotel rooms for all of the guards and Dolls’ Army men that were lingering about taking turns standing watch. This one seemed to be untouched.

“So we know who Doc was talking to?” Nicole asked as soon as the door was shut behind her.

Dolls gave a single nod. He stared at her in a way that told her it was bad news before he even spoke. Then, as was his style, he just said it instead of beating around the bush “It was someone affiliated with the Hardy family.”
A white hot anger rose in Nicole at an alarming pace. Every limb grew hot. Every nerve ending seemed to ignite with fire. She gave a single shake of her head and clenched her jaw to try and contain the rage that wanted to flow out of her in that moment “Those no good shit eaters. I should have known.”

Dolls nodded and reached out to put a hand on Nicole’s shoulder. He understood her rage. If anyone was the most pissed that the Hardy family had managed to pull this off it was him. But he also knew acting out of rage would solve nothing. So he attempted to keep her calm with a firm touch. “I know. I thought with the marriage contract they would pull back but apparently as soon as Doc reached out to this person and let them know Wynonna’s plan to get rid of the Monarchy they decided to follow through.”

“Follow through?” Nicole’s brow creased in confusion now.

“They had been hired by the Hardy family to take out Wynonna. This was before the contract. The money and everything had already been sent. The plans had already been laid out. They were going to strike at the Peace Summit the whole time.” Dolls breathed out sharply through his nose as he felt his own blood starting to boil. He tried to shake it off and push through “The hit had been put on hold once Wynonna reached out to Champ about this whole arranged marriage to end the feud thing.”

“Put on hold but not cancelled?” Nicole scoffed out in disgust.

Dolls nodded just once “They wanted to make sure it was legitimate before they cancelled the hit completely. Apparently…” He took his hand off of Nicole now and ran it back over his nearly bald head. He gave a slight shrug and let his hand now drop to his side “Once they had signed the contract, making it legitimate, they were so elated by the fact that they had won they forgot to reach out to their hitman and call it off. So when Doc reached out and told him what was happening he took it upon himself to follow through with what was already in motion instead of waiting for confirmation.”

Nicole was clenching her jaw so tightly she felt she might break teeth. It was also causing pressure to rise in her nose which was causing a headache but she didn’t care. She had to feel the pain to remind herself to keep a hold of herself and not go off in a blind rage. Through her gritted teeth she spoke with a low rumble in her throat “I am going to kill them.”

Dolls shook his head quickly. He stepped back from Nicole and turned to walk over to the window in the room. He looked down at the cityscape below them and let out a long sigh. He felt like he had failed his Queen. He wanted nothing more than to storm into the territory that the Hardy’s were delegates over and blow up their Palace. But he knew he couldn’t just do that. He licked his lips and without looking back at Nicole spoke firmly “I’m drafting a petition that allows me to head a covert operation to assassinate them.”

This surprised Nicole for some reason. As long as she had known Dolls, or at least known of Dolls through the stories she heard during her time in the Army, he had always seemed level-headed. He had always used the talk first route. Though he was a legend in combat situations he had only resorted to that as a last choice. When all else failed Dolls would call for combat.

So to hear that he was jumping straight to that was a little bit of a surprise. But Nicole also understood his desire to take the Hardy family down once and for all. They had struck first. They had struck violently. They had been taking out the Earp family for hundreds of years in secret. It made sense to attempt to end it now by any means necessary.

“We should do it while we have the upper hand” Nicole spoke suddenly as she made her way over
to Dolls. She stood next to him, her body facing him completely, her eyes locked on his face. “Go after them while they think we’re still clueless. Take them out when their defenses are down.”

Dolls didn’t look at Nicole. His eyes were focused still on the entire world that was going about its own business outside the hospital. It was easy to see that this idea was not one he had brought up lightly. Now that Nicole was agreeing with him he was starting to rethink it all over again. After a few moments of thought he swallowed then nodded just once “I’ll need Waverly’s permission.”

“I can get that” Nicole answered without a beat of hesitation.

Dolls finally turned away from the window to look at Nicole. His eyes locked into hers with a look more earnest than he had ever held in his life. “This would technically put us at war. A civil war, actually, since the Hardy’s reign in a territory of The Ghost River Triangle.”

“I know” Nicole nodded. She was Army trained she knew what it all meant.

“Our country has not been actively at war in decades, Haught. We are thriving. The people here are content and safe. Doing this could put that all at risk.” He cleared his throat and his eyes dropped away finally. He looked down at his feet and drew in a deep breath. It seemed that for just a split second he was nervous about the reality of what he wanted to do. That faded quickly and when he looked back up at Nicole his face was as stern as ever “Make sure Waverly understands that.”

Nicole nodded again, this time with less fervor than before, but her gaze did not waver. She didn’t even blink. If they could pull this off without anyone finding out they could end his feud without having to endanger any of the general public. She knew it was a risk but it was one she was willing to take. Dolls seemed willing too. She hoped Waverly would be on board as well.

“I’ll go talk to her right now” Nicole finally said with one more nod of her head.

“Haught” Dolls called out when Nicole had turned to rush from the room. When she paused and looked back at him he lifted a hand in a gesture as if he were trying to quiet a room full of people “Discreetly. The fewer people that know about this the higher chance of it succeeding.”

Nicole almost rolled her eyes at him now. She wanted to bark at him and remind him she had the same military background as him as well as all the additional special training that went into becoming Head of the Royal Guard. She was tired and on edge from being up more than twenty-four hours now and his constant reminders of how to handle this intel was grinding her last nerve. But she managed not to snap. Instead she acknowledged him with a quick half nod before she slipped out of the door and headed quickly back to Wynonna’s room.

She ordered the three guards standing outside the room to not let anyone, even doctors, interrupt until she came and gave them the all clear. She then slipped into the room and offered Waverly a soft smile when she looked up from where she had been laying her head on the bed near Wynonna.

“What did Dolls have to say? Did they find out who Doc was emailing with?” Waverly yawned as she spoke. It was obvious she had nearly been asleep when Nicole had come back.

“Yeah” Nicole moved quickly over to the couch and sat next to Waverly. Her eyes flickered to Wynonna and she felt her heart jump into her throat. It was a huge risk and she wondered now if Wynonna would approve.

She had to shake away the thought. She turned her head to look back at Waverly now as her hands reached out. One took hold of Wynonna’s lifeless hand on the bed. The other one came to rest against Waverly’s back as if it were a reflex to use it to comfort her in that way. She licked her lips
and when she spoke it was barely a whisper “What I’m about to say could change everything for us.”

“Just say it” Waverly had seen Nicole’s serious face when she walked in and she knew immediately something was up. So she had readied herself before her friend had even spoken. She straightened up where she sat and locked eyes with Nicole to show her she meant business. “No sugar coating it.”

Nicole had to admit she was impressed with how quickly Waverly had embraced her new role. Though she was not Queen, because Wynonna was still alive, she had already started to act like one in her approach to everything she had heard so far. It was actually a relief. She had already known Waverly could handle her own if she was ever truly tested and it was nice to see she had been right. The Earp girls definitely were not to be messed with.

She quickly shook that thought away. She kept her voice low as she spoke again “It was the Hardy family. They’d been planning it for a while. It was supposed to be called off once Wynonna and Champ finalized their contract but that never happened.” She licked her lips and glanced around to make sure they were still alone before focusing back on Waverly “Doc knew about it and helped the hitman pull it off.”

Waverly barely flinched. She just stared at Nicole as if she were visually seeing the words she had spoken and taking her time to read them all very slowly. She took her time absorbing it, making sure she had not misunderstood what had been said, then finally nodded. Her eyes blinked and her focus shifted to Wynonna. Her mouth felt dry but she managed a soft mumble “What are we going to do about it?”

Nicole was just a little bit unnerved by Waverly’s solemn demeanor. She had barely reacted at all. Maybe that was how she coped. Either way it was kind of scary. In a good way, though. She cleared her throat to answer Waverly in the whisper she had been using the entire time “He wants to head a covert operation to take the Hardy family out completely.”

Waverly closed her eyes. Her hand reached out and she gently laid it over Wynonna’s chest. She took a moment to feel her sister’s heart beating. She needed to be reminded what she was fighting for. She also hoped to take in some of her sister’s wisdom and strength so she could make the right decision.

Nicole didn’t interrupt. Instead she gave her hand that still held Wynonna’s a soft squeeze. Her eyes focused on her unconscious friend and her heart burned with immediate pain. Every second she had to look at Wynonna like this was another second that her thirst for revenge grew.

Silence fell between them for only a minute. Finally Waverly cleared her throat and opened her eyes. She did not look away from her sister when she spoke next but there was no lack of conviction in her words “This attack on the Crown was a blatant act of war. Our counter attack will be subtle and swift.” Her head turned slowly now and when her eyes landed on Nicole there was nothing but anger painting all of her features “Make sure they don’t see us coming.”

Nicole’s heart stopped for just a few beats when Waverly turned and cast that look on her. It was terrifying what she saw in her friend’s eyes. The girl she had always known to be sweet, bubbly, loving, and full of effervescent life was seemingly gone now. In her place was a cold, dark, callous person. It sent a chill along her spine.

She managed to nod at Waverly though. She looked back at Wynonna in the bed and her sense of revenge was renewed. She related to the cold, dark side she had just seen within Waverly. Nothing was bright at the moment. There was nothing fun or joyful about life. As long as Wynonna was lying unconscious in that bed there would be nothing but darkness for herself and Waverly. She felt it in
She stood without another word. She leaned over her friend lying in bed and touched a kiss to her forehead. Once she straightened up she looked over at Waverly once again. Their eyes met and that was all that needed to be communicated. They both knew it was an extreme reaction but neither of them doubted it was the right reaction. So Nicole would tell Dolls to go ahead at the behest of the acting Queen.

Nicole felt numb as she moved out of the room in search of Dolls. The walls around her blurred. Voices were all muffled. She wasn’t even sure she could feel the floor beneath her as she walked. Somehow, though, she was able to find Dolls and ask him to speak privately. She didn’t recall forming actual words but she must have because her and Dolls were once more making their way to the room they had been in earlier.

It was Dolls who broke the silence once they were in the room this time. He cleared his throat and spoke to Nicole. She didn’t hear what he had said at first. His voice managed to pull her out of the fog she had been gliding in, though, and after his second attempt to ask her what Waverly had said she finally processed it. She blinked now and it was like the world whirled back to her all at once. She heard sounds, felt the temperature of the room, and saw the features on Doll’s face sharply.

“Haught?” Dolls snapped now in front of Nicole’s face.

“Sorry” Nicole blinked rapidly a few times then brought her focus to Dolls. She let out a heavy breath then gave an almost timid nod “Yeah, Waverly said do it.”

“Really?” Dolls looked surprised but it faded quickly into a smile.

“She said they already committed the act of war with the bomb” Nicole shrugged just one shoulder at that. She was still having a hard time wrapping her mind around the fact that this was all really about to happen. “We would be responding in defense of the Crown so technically we aren’t starting the war. But she said do it fast and make sure no one knows it was us.”

“Of course” Dolls gave a few serious nods before his smile returned.

Nicole’s brows creased together in concern as her mind swirled with what was going on. This was really happening. They were about to send their mostly highly trained troops across the country to kill the leaders of one of their own territories. It seemed unreal. When she had joined the Army she had never expected there to ever be an actual conflict in their own backyard. She had seen warzones other places around the world when her squadron had been sent there as part of a relief effort but she had never thought she would see the day that The Ghost River Triangle would use their military for actual fighting.

Suddenly she was overwhelmed with that sense of duty that had always been inside her. She was trained for this. She was prepared for this. In fact, other than Dolls, there was no one in the entire country that was more qualified for this operation. She looked up at him and before she could lose her nerve she spat out the words “I’m coming with you.”

“Wh-what?” Dolls coughed out in pure shock. He stared at her with his mouth hanging open. She had literally said the last thing he would have ever expected from her.

“I’m Head of The Royal Guard” Nicole said plainly. “I should be the first to sign up. It’s my job. I have sworn to protect the Crown with my life. So I will.” She motioned to nothing in particular in a sharp flick of her arm to the side and just shrugged “No arguments, okay? I’m going.”
Dolls blinked. He stared at her a moment longer and when he realized she was dead serious he lifted his hands in a motion to show he would not put up a fight. “Yes, ma’am.”

Nicole rolled her eyes at him now “Save it for the mission, Dolls. Right now I need you focused on the details. I want intel of the Hardy’s location, their schedules, and how best to strike against them that will minimize any potential damage to the public.”

“Already working on it” Dolls assured her with an excited nod now. He moved with her to the door, pausing before opening it though. “It’s my three best men, you, and me. That’s all. If it goes south at least we don’t lose a lot of manpower.”

“Right” Nicole’s heart jumped at the thought. It couldn’t go south. She wouldn’t let it. The last thing she wanted to do right now was leave Waverly without any family. No she had to succeed if for no other reason than to make sure that Waverly could live out the rest of her life safely.

Dolls confirmed with one more nod then pulled the door open. As they left the room they parted ways immediately. Dolls went to get in touch with his intelligence team to see what they had for him. Nicole went back toward Wynonna’s room. She paused just outside the door and put her hand on the wall to use as support. She could feel her knees shaking. Her hand trembled where it held the wall. She was terrified.

She took a few moments to breathe and compose herself. The last thing she needed to do was go into that room looking unsure and tell Waverly she was leaving to go finish a war they never wanted to start in the first place. If she looked even the slightest bit uneasy she knew Waverly would tell her not to go. Hell she probably would anyway.

Finally she felt confident enough to walk into the room. She drew in a deep breath then pushed off the wall and pulled the door open. She walked in and let the door fall closed behind her. She stood near the door now. She felt being too close to Waverly and Wynonna might change her mind. She had to detach from them for the time being. It would make leaving easier. At least that was what she was trying to convince herself of when Waverly looked up at her curiously.

“Well?” Waverly asked with a slight shrug and an eyebrow arching on her forehead.

“It’s a go” Nicole stated softly.

Waverly nodded then looked Nicole over slowly. She had become a pro at reading body language, especially someone she had known her entire life, and she could tell something was wrong. She let out a sigh now and brought her eyes back to meet Nicole’s gaze “What’s wrong?”

“I’m leaving” Nicole almost choked on the words. She cleared her throat because she wasn’t sure Waverly had heard and she tried to speak louder now “I’m-”

“I heard you the first time” Waverly cut her off sharply. Her eyes scanned over Nicole standing there nervously again before she finally looked away. She looked at her sister and after a few moments of silence she spoke more gently than she had before “Wynonna would call you an idiot for risking your life for her.”

“I know” Nicole breathed out now. She was still nervous but she took a step closer to the girls. “But she would understand.”

“I know” Waverly agreed. Her eyes were still locked on Wynonna where she lay. She was trying to be strong. Truthfully she wanted to break down in tears and beg Nicole not to leave her. She wasn’t sure she could do this alone. But there was something inside her that simply just got why Nicole had
to leave. She understood it all. It was like she was genetically programmed to deal with this. So she swallowed the lump forming in her throat and nodded once more “Contact me when you can and I will call you if she wakes up.”

Nicole finally breathed out in relief. She moved over to the bed now but she did not sit. Instead her hand reached out and gently came to rest against Waverly’s shoulder. She gave a squeeze and spoke with a slight tremble as she felt tears starting to come to her eyes “I’ll be back before you know it.”

Waverly clenched her jaw to fight off her own tears. She heard Nicole battling off the urge to cry and it was making it hard for her to do the same. She let out a shaky sigh as her hand reached up and covered where Nicole’s hand lay against her shoulder. She gave a long squeeze of her friend’s fingers before speaking very softly “Don’t you dare make me have to tell Wynonna you’re dead.”

Nicole shook her head. Her hand turned over and she laced her fingers with Waverly’s. The girls both squeezed the other’s hand tightly as if they were clinging together for the very last time. Nicole’s eyes focused on Wynonna and that swelling inside her to do right by the person she cared for most in the world came rushing back. She wasn’t nervous anymore. She cleared her throat then slowly let go of Waverly’s hand. She stepped away from the bed now, letting her eyes linger on Wynonna as she moved toward the door. She paused now before leaving and her eyes moved now to Waverly. She gave her a single nod as a smile now flickered at the corners of her lips “God save the Queen.”

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Waverly walked into Wynonna’s bedroom and turned on the lights. She smiled at her sister where she lie in bed then moved over to the curtains. “Good morning, Wynonna!” She said cheerfully as she pulled the curtains open to let in the morning sunlight. She then turned and moved over toward the bed. She leaned down and gently kissed her sister on the forehead, brushing some of her hair from her eyes, before giving her a little nod. She looked at her closed eyes and the breathing tube down her throat and let out a soft sigh “Still don’t feel like waking up yet?”

It had been a week since Nicole left with Dolls and the others on their super secret mission to take out the Hardy family. As was protocol there was no communication allowed with the group. It was too risky. If someone were to intercept a phone call or text it could blow the lid off the secret mission and expose their plan. So Waverly had been left alone with no way of getting news on what was happening.

She had decided that taking Wynonna from the hospital was for the best. This way she could be close to her at all times and the hospital they had been staying at could re-open the wing it had closed down to accommodate the Queen’s stay there. She figured they were doing no good by denying rooms to people who needed healthcare. So she had set it up so that Wynonna could be transferred to their family cabin and have around the clock care at her disposal. If anything changed there would be someone there immediately.

It was nice to have a little company, at least. The nurses and doctors who were staying in the cabin now had grown quickly into people Waverly enjoyed being around. She felt bad having taken them from their families in order to tend to Wynonna but she had high hopes they would not be away long. They had also volunteered for the task when the subject of moving Wynonna had been brought up. It had humbled Waverly to the core and she made sure to thank them for their work every day. Having them there helped her keep hold of that hope that her sister would wake up.

In the meantime she had plenty to keep herself occupied. She had taken on the role as acting Queen and tried to settle into business as usual. There was still a country to be ran, after all. There was also the task of abolishing the Monarchy. Luckily she still had Jeremy and Rosita on her side helping her out with that. It had been admittedly awkward dealing with Doc, though.

She had to pretend like she didn’t know he had double crossed them. She had to go about her every day business around him. They had definitely started being more careful what they talked about around him but he did not seem to notice. That was good. If he caught on that they knew what he had done he would certainly tell the Hardy’s and warn them of a potential retaliation. That was the last thing they wanted. It could potentially lead to an outbreak of a civil war.

She had been dealing with most of the Royal duties from the cabin via video calls. She had only had to leave for a meeting once and it had been terrible. Her mind had been on Wynonna the entire time. The last thing she wanted was for her sister to wake up and be alone. So she did everything in her power to be by her bedside at all hours of the day. She had even taken it upon herself to change Wynonna’s dressings, roll her around in the bed to avoid bed sores, and check all I.V.s in case they needed changing.

She gave a soft smile to her sleeping sister now before turning toward the little table that sat near her bedside. “Today I thought I could give you a mani/pedi combo. Just because you are napping does not mean you get to let your gross toenails get out of control.” She let out a soft laugh at herself then turned back to her sister. She held up two different nail polish colors and perked an eyebrow “Sassy sassafras…” She shook the light orange colored bottle then looked at her other hand and gave a
wiggle to the soft green that was the other choice “Or menacing mint?”

She held the choices up in front of Wynonna and waited for a response. It wasn’t that she really expected her sister to randomly wake up and choose but she had read that talking to a person in a coma as if they were awake could keep them connected to their surroundings. So day in and day out she held one sided conversations in hopes that it was helping even the slightest bit.

“Yeah the mint is kind of ugly” Waverly agreed to no one and looked at the green polish with curled lips. She set that aside then shook the orange bottle instead. She then set it side and grabbed for her tools. She had gotten good at doing other’s nails when she was in college. It had been one of her favorite past times and all the girls in her sorority had loved her for it.

As she settled in, starting with Wynonna’s left hand, she let out a sigh and started to talk again. “Still no word from Nicole but that’s to be expected. I mean I know they are out in the middle of the desert where there’s no mail service or anything and I was warned that there would be no communication. Still…” She sighed and looked at her sister with a shrug “I kind of hoped Nicole would mail a letter or two on the sly.”

She was quiet for a moment as she focused on the task at hand. Then she smiled and let out the softest laugh as if Wynonna had said something funny “I know she hates breaking the rules but you’d think under extenuating circumstances she would make an exception.”

She sighed again and quiet filled the room as she worked. She focused on what she was doing as her mind whirled with a million thoughts a minute. She was worried about Nicole. She hoped when it came down to it she would follow through with the mission. It wasn’t that she didn’t think Nicole was capable. It was that both of them were a bit hesitant about the decision to strike back in such a way. At first, when they had both been emotionally drained, exhausted, and hurting it had seemed like the perfect revenge. But after they had had a few days to think about it they had come to one another to express that they were having second thoughts.

Unfortunately it had been too late. Waverly had signed the orders to proceed and Dolls had already set up a strike team. Nicole had reasoned that if they did not kill the Hardy’s now there would be no end to the violence until all the Earps were extinguished. Waverly had thought maybe they could have tried to set up a peace meeting with the Hardy’s. Then she had flashed back to the night Champ had beaten her up and decided Nicole was right. That family was too power hungry to be rational.

That did not mean she felt completely alright with it. But sometimes a drastic move must be made in order to save more lives than you lose. The threat of an all out war in the fight for power over the country was just too great to tread lightly around. It had to be stopped and it had to be stopped as soon as possible. That was the only thought that helped Waverly get at least a little sleep at night.

“Do you miss her?” Waverly finally broke her the silence she had been working in and glanced up at her sister. She offered her a smile then nodded in agreement even though, of course, Wynonna had not answered “So do I. I mean I know she was gone for seven years in the Army but this feels different somehow. I was young and didn’t really have the chance to miss her that much because I was always surrounded by people. I had you and daddy and all my friends, you know?”

She paused to grab the nail polish now and once more nodded at the silence “Yeah it’s probably because we’ve grown closer lately. I mean when you’ve been through all that we have in such a short period of time…” She trailed off and let out a sigh at that. It really had been a domino effect of one bad thing after another ever since the plane crash. Weaker people might have cracked. Hell there were some days she thought about giving up but then she looked at Wynonna fighting for her life and she knew she had to keep going.
She smiled and looked down at Wynonna’s hand as she started to carefully paint each nail “I don’t know how either of us would have made it through all of this without her.” She nodded once more as if responding to what her sister had said “Yeah we definitely won the jackpot with her. I can’t imagine having a better friend or more loyal protector.”

“Your Majesty” A voice broke into the soft conversation from the bedroom door.

Waverly looked up and turned around toward the source. She smiled when she saw it was the guard Nicole had left in charge while she was gone. “What is it?”

“Sir Chetri” The guard said with a nod and held out the secure cell phone that Jeremy had set up for them when they had first gone to the cabin.

Waverly nodded in acknowledgment then looked back at her sister. She gently set Wynonna’s hand down so as not to smudge the paint on her nails before she stood up. “Don’t you dare move. If I come back and these are smudged I will…” She gave a warning point at her sister then let out a soft laugh. She leaned down and kissed the top of her head once then whispered against her ear “I promise I won’t be gone long.”

She turned now toward the door, giving the guard a smile as she approached, before holding out her hand for the phone. “Thank you so much” She said sweetly. She waited until he stepped back outside the room before she put the phone to her ear “Hey Jeremy. What’s up?”

Nicole let out a heavy sigh as she pulled the binoculars off her eyes. She squinted through the darkness at what she had just been looking at before she turned to grab her notebook. She made a quick note of what she had observed then set everything down. She then kicked back where she sat so her back was resting against the wall of the building she was perched atop. Her legs were stretched out along the ledge where she sat. The wind that always seemed to be present on top of tall buildings was blowing the loose strands of her hair about in the dark.

She had been camped out on top of the abandoned building where she now sat for five days. Once they had left for their mission they spent a day of briefing and preparing before spending another day traveling across the country, changing vehicles and roads several times to avoid detection, before they made it to their destination. They were now holed up in an old abandoned warehouse district just outside the city limits of the capitol where the Hardy Palace was located. The last five days had been used to collect intel on the comings and goings of the Hardy family.

She took a moment to scan her surroundings now. The part of town they were set up in had no residence so most of the buildings were always shrouded by darkness. Just on the horizon, though, were the shining lights of civilization in a big city. It almost made Nicole miss home. Perhaps she just missed her family.

She glanced to her side now and grabbed the satellite phone that she always had on her. Jeremy had set it up before she had left Waverly and Wynonna. The only number allowed to call into it was from the other satellite phone that Waverly possessed. It could only receive incoming calls. Once a call was answered then terminated the signal for that phone would be scrambled and thus rendered useless. It was a security precaution to ensure that the only communication between Nicole and Waverly was done when Wynonna woke up from her coma. They had a helicopter always on standby to fly her out whenever that happened.

“You know you can’t will it to ring” Dolls had just climbed out one of the busted windows that led to the roof level position where Nicole was perched. He had two mugs in his hands and had noticed
Nicole staring at the phone yet again. It seemed she was always staring at it.

Nicole looked up when she heard Dolls speak. She gave him a crooked smile and set the phone in her lap. She reached out to take one of the mugs he was carrying when he offered it to her and gave a little shrug “I know. It just feels like I’ve been waiting forever already.”

“It’s only been a week” Dolls said with a nod as he eased himself down into the chair that was set up for those on roof watch. Nicole refused to use it though so it was open for him in that moment.

Nicole frowned and looked into the mug. It sure felt like longer than a week. “I’m just worried” She said softly before taking a sip. She immediately coughed at what she tasted and spit it over the edge of the building. She looked into the mug as if it had personally offended her now “What the Hell is this?”

Dolls let out a soft chuckle over the rim of his own mug as he took a sip. He swallowed what he had in his mouth then gave a nod as he looked into his cup too “The shittest coffee you will ever have.”

“You think?” Nicole wiped at her mouth with a scowl printed on her face.

Dolls shrugged and looked up from his mug to Nicole “Hey when you’re incognito you have to take what you can get.”

“Well next time I will pass on the dirt coffee” Nicole groaned and set her mug down on the floor of the roof.

“Your loss” Dolls said as he took another swig. He swallowed with a little grimace on his face and let out a laugh “Or your gain, I guess. It really is awful.”

Nicole let out a puff of a laugh before her eyes fell back to the phone in her laugh. She let out a sigh as her fingers slid over the ear piece. What she wouldn’t give to hear Waverly’s voice in that moment.

Dolls reached out now and put a hand on Nicole’s knee. He gave it a gentle squeeze as he breathed out a sigh “She’s gonna pull through, Haught. You and I both know she’s too stubborn to let Champ or his family win.”

Nicole drew in a deep breath and nodded at the words. Her eyes stayed on the phone as she thought about Wynonna. She tried to stay busy throughout the day so she didn’t have to think about her but at night it was hard. It was so quiet. It was nights like this, when she couldn’t sleep, that she would have found herself in Wynonna’s room chatting about nothing at all. She missed those times.

Dolls’ hand slipped from Nicole’s knee. He knew there wasn’t much more he could say to comfort her. Everyone was worried about Wynonna. The men he had brought with him on this mission spoke about how they would avenge her death if it came to it. Everything they were doing and every day they spent on that rooftop was all for Wynonna. But it didn’t make it easier to talk about. So instead he reached for the binoculars and lifted them to his eyes.

A silence fell over them for a long time. Dolls sat there looking through the night vision binoculars and Nicole just sat there looking at the city lights that were twinkling at them from down the mountain. The breeze was starting to cool and a shiver danced up her spine. Even though it tasted awful, she reached for the coffee now because at least it was warm. After taking another sip and curling her lip up at it in disgust she cleared her throat and looked at Dolls “Do you think we are doing the right thing?”

“It doesn’t matter what I think” Dolls said without missing a beat. He pulled the binoculars from his
eyes now and looked at Nicole. “I was given an order by my commanding officer. The only thing I have to think about is following that order.”

Nicole rolled her eyes and set down her coffee. She gave her head a shake and looked back down the mountain at the town below. “If you give me your opinion I won’t tell Waverly.” She lifted the phone and gave it a little wave so Dolls could see it “I can’t tell her. So your commanding officer will never know.”

Dolls smiled very slightly at that. He looked down at the city lights and after a moment of thought he lifted one shoulder into a shrug “As far as I’m concerned they have all committed treason and the punishment for that is death. One way or another it’s coming to them. Why not have it be at my hands?” He glanced at Nicole now and perked one eyebrow slightly as if daring her to disagree “At least this way I’ll feel a little vindicated.”

Nicole couldn’t really argue with that reasoning. She had been stuck in an internal battle of right versus selfish vengeance. She didn’t think killing the entire family was fair. It had only been the actions of a few. But she definitely wanted nothing more than to strangle the life out of Champ with her bare hands. It was this battle that kept her up at night.

Dolls could see Nicole was struggling to accept what they were doing. He had his own reservations about it so he couldn’t blame her for her hesitation. But at the end of the day he was a military man and he had to follow orders as they were given. He cleared his throat now and gave Nicole’s leg a pat “Go get some rest, Haught. I’ll take watch for the next few hours.”

“I’m fine” Nicole shrugged him off.

“I know you are” He said in a calm tone because he knew arguing with her would get them both nowhere. “But we move locations tomorrow and I need you sharp on the road. So a few hours of rest will do you good.”

Nicole opened her mouth to argue but instead a yawn came out. She let it pass then let out a laugh before turning on the ledge where she sat and putting her boot clad feet on the floor. She stood now and grabbed for her Army blouse that she had taken off earlier in favor of just her tan tshirt underneath. She slung it over her shoulder and gave Dolls a little salute “Come get me if anything changes.”

“You know I will” Dolls didn’t even look at her now. Instead he put the binoculars back to his eyes.

Nicole made her way over to the busted out window that they used to climb through when moving to and from the rooftop. She had one leg inside when she heard Dolls say her name. She paused and looked up at him with a curious look.

He looked over at her and gave her a soft smile. He motioned up toward his own head where his Army cover sat then nodded “I like your haircut. It suits you.”

Nicole let out a soft laugh and reached up to touch the short, wavy strands of red hair that were blowing loosely around in the wind. She pushed her hand back through her hair and gave a little shrug “Thanks. I felt like I needed a change.”

“Well it looks nice” He repeated with a genuine smile on his lips. The two shared a moment of genuine connection that showed they were both glad the other was there before Dolls turned away and looked back over the city.

Nicole nodded to herself and stepped inside the building completely now. She would never admit it
but she was exhausted. They were sleeping on shitty flat cots in buildings with no insulation so it was always too cold. They were woken up every few hours to do walkthroughs to make sure there were no threats. She had forgotten how hard it had been being in the Army. It made her miss home even more.

As she reached her cot she sat down with a heavy sigh. She didn’t remove any of her clothing in case they had to get up and go in a hurry. So she laid back and used her heavy blouse as a blanket like she did most nights. As she rolled to her side she pulled the satellite phone close to her chest and closed her eyes. Maybe it would ring tonight.

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Waverly let out a soft laugh and turned her head to look at Wynonna. She shook her head at her sister then gave her hand that she held a squeeze before looking back to the t.v. where she was watching a movie. “I know this is one of your favorites and you can quote it from start to finish but I forget how funny it is. I can see why you like it so much.”

It had now been two weeks since Nicole had left and Wynonna had been moved to the cabin. Well seventeen days but who was counting? Waverly was. Nicole had left seventeen days ago and Wynonna had been bombed twenty-four days ago. Time moved slowly when you were waiting to hear how the rest of your life would play out. Even though she had been kept busy by Royal business it had not stopped the seconds from ticking away like hours.

Waverly had settled into a routine in hopes that it would help stir some sort of memory of life inside Wynonna and bring her out of her coma. She was trying everything at this point. She talked to her, sang to her, even ate her meals with her. She tried physical therapy, moving Wynonna’s limbs around, but nothing was helping. She didn’t want to say she was losing hope but it was getting harder to believe she would wake up, especially when the doctors kept telling her that every day she was unconscious was doing more damage to her brain.

Today was movie day and she played the same movie she played last week. It was Wynonna’s favorite. She had dressed as characters from that movie on Halloween on more than one occasion. She had gone through a phase where she didn’t let an hour pass without quoting the movie when she was a teenager. It had been annoying and caused Waverly to swear off ever watching the movie again. But now as she watched it while holding Wynonna’s hand she was hoping something inside her sister came to life.

“Ma’am” The guard at her door poked his head in and offered her a smile when she looked up. He stepped into the room now and extended his arm toward her. In his hand he held a letter that had very obviously already been open. That was standard procedure with mail. Usually it was scanned through security in the Palace before being given to them but since they were not in the Palace all mail was hand opened just in case.

Waverly perked an eyebrow. The only other piece of mail she had gotten while there was a test letter from Jeremy. He had set up a very extensive routing path for mail just in case something needed to be passed physically to the Earps while they stayed in the cabin. Everything else was communicated through email or video call so getting mail now as a surprise “What is it?”

“Lady Haught” The man said with a nod.

Waverly blinked again. She could not tell by the look on the guard’s face if it was good or bad news. Her heart stopped for a second. What if something bad had happened to Nicole. She quickly got up and rushed over to take the letter from him. “Thank you” She whispered as her eyes fell to the envelope.
The man nodded and quickly moved back out of the room to give Waverly some privacy. She looked at the envelope and tried to guess what was inside. The printing on the outside was all done by machine from an address and name she did not know. That was all part of Jeremy’s routing plan to keep their location a secret.

As she turned it over to reach into the envelope for the letter she felt her fingers tremble. She had read many stories about women who got letters or telegrams during war time back in the day that told them their husbands were dead. She couldn’t shake the feeling that this was bad news. The military had never been very sensitive about delivering bad news to waiting spouses.

She pulled the letter out and unfolded it slowly. Her heart was thundering against her chest and she nearly dropped the paper with how hard her hands were shaking. But she managed to hold on and as the scribbled writing on the paper came into view she let out a soft sigh. It was Nicole’s terrible writing. This was a letter from Nicole and not about Nicole. She had never felt so relieved in her life.

The note was dated a week earlier but she assumed it had taken that long to get through Jeremy’s mail routing system. As soon as she read the first few words she started to cry. She couldn’t help it. She was just so glad to hear from her friend.

Jim-
Not much time. We moved inward today. Had to steal a paper and pen to get this to you. I think about you and Jack every day. My heart is with you with every beat it takes. Please give my love to sleeping beauty. Let her know I will be home before dessert.

Miss you more with each passing second. Don’t worry though we are on schedule for success.

All my love,
Sugar tits

Waverly couldn’t help but laugh through her tears at how Nicole had signed the note. It was all in code but she understood every word of it. They were safe and everything had gone according to plan so far. She missed them and loved them.

She wiped a tear from her face and moved quickly over to Wynonna. She touched a firm kiss to her sister’s forehead and held it there for a few seconds. When she pulled back, she smiled down at her and laughed out softly before she spoke “That is from Nicole. She says she misses you.” She wiped another tear from her own cheek then looked at the letter again. She moved to sit in her chair beside Wynonna now before reaching out to take her hand. She cleared her throat then proceeded to read the note to her sister a few times over. Somehow that note scribbled on dirty paper with barely four lines of sloppy handwriting had worked to soothe her aching heart. Even if it was just temporary it was nice to have a moment where she wasn’t worrying about Nicole.

Nice shooting, Haught” Dolls gave Nicole a heavy slap on the back as his face held a smile. He turned around to the other three men that were with them on the mission and motioned to Nicole “And that is why she will be the one taking the killshot.”

Nicole blushed a little and tucked some of her loose hair behind her ear. They had taken the day to go out to a shooting range in preparation for the following day. They would be making their last move to their final location. They had gotten word that the Hardy family was taking a beach vacation to their own private beach. The five of them were going to be camping up in the hills that formed the natural alcove around the beach. This is where they would finish what they had set out to do.
“Everyone take a few more rounds” Dolls motioned to the other men then pointed to the range behind him. As they all moved to reload their weapons he turned to look back at Nicole. He motioned to the side with his head for her to follow him before he started to walk away.

She quickly set down the rifle she had been shooting with and followed Dolls without question. They had to move down the range quite a bit because the sounds of shots from the others were echoing out all around them. So they both stayed silent until they reached the large ammo shed about a hundred yards away.

Dolls held the door open for Nicole and once she stepped inside he followed her. He made sure the door was closed and locked behind them before he looked at Nicole and gave a slight nod of his head “Are you going to be able to follow through?”

Nicole’s brows creased together in a scowl of near offense. She gave her head a slight shake and huffed out at him “I’m here for the same reason you are.”

“I know” Dolls nodded but his tone didn’t sound like he was totally convinced. “But a week ago when we moved closer to the Hardy Palace you once again seemed to have reservations about killing them all. So I just wanted to make sure that you weren’t going to hesitate when I give the order to fire.”

“I think you’ve forgotten who is actually the higher ranking official here” Nicole nearly barked the words now as annoyance started to boil up in her.

Dolls lifted his hands in a motion of surrender and gave his head a shake “Alright, cool it. I crossed a line and I am sorry. I just wanted to make sure the entire team was on the same page.”

“You won’t have to worry about it” Nicole growled. She then shoved passed him and stormed out of the ammo shed. She gave her head a furious shake as she stomped her way back over to her rifle. She quickly loaded it up, turned off the safety, then laid on her stomach. She closed one eye and used the other to look through the scope as she took aim. This time when she fired at the paper target she was picturing Dolls’ face.

Waverly had just finished brushing Wynonna’s hair and was holding a mirror up in front of her face. “What do you think? I wanted to cut you some bangs just so you could complain about them when you woke up but I decided to take it easy on you.” She laughed to herself and set down the mirror. She then leaned over and kissed Wynonna’s forehead again “You are welcome for that.”

She moved now across the room to the calendar she had hung up on the wall. She lifted the pen and marked off the previous day before letting out a sigh. After replacing the pen to its spot she put her hands on her hips and stared at the calendar. There were more days crossed out than she liked. She gave her head a shake and moved over to Wynonna’s bed again “You’ve been asleep almost a month, Wynonna. I know she can’t really reach out to us but I worry.” She looked up at her sister’s face now and shrugged slightly “Sometimes I think about breaking down and seeing if Jeremy can contact them just to make sure they are safe. But I’m afraid Doc will get wind of it and figure out what’s going on.”
She perked an eyebrow at her sister and paused for a moment. When of course she was met with nothing but silence she let out a sigh and looked back to where her hand held Wynonna’s tightly. She lifted it now to her lips and kissed very gently at her knuckles. She then pressed the back of the hand she held into her cheek and closed her eyes. It was small but it kind of felt like Wynonna was giving her a comforting touch and it helped.

She stayed like that for a few minutes. She wished her sister would wake up. She wished Nicole would stroll in with her bright smile and say something sweet that Wynonna would make fun of until Nicole got annoyed. She wished Wynonna would say something inappropriate and smirk at their reactions. She wasn’t sure how much longer she could keep pretending that everything was going to be okay.

When her eyes opened and she looked back to her sister a few tears slid from her eyes. She sniffled softly and used her free hand to wipe just under her nose. She leaned over and laid her forehead against Wynonna’s bicep. She felt herself starting to lose control and for the first time since the hospital she was going to let herself succumb to the pain that coursed through her at every moment of every day.

So she sobbed. She hid her face against Wynonna’s arm and she let herself cry. Every moment she had been strong for her sister and for Nicole was rushing back to her. Every press conference to update the country on Wynonna’s condition where she had to be optimistic was catching up to her. The countless times she had been told by people in the Royal Court that she should prepare to be Queen was overwhelming her. It was all too much and now, after a month of fighting alone, she was finally starting to crack.

Then she heard a noise. It sounded like a grunt. Maybe a groan or a cough. It was soft and she couldn’t be sure but she could have sworn she heard someone make a noise. She lifted her head and looked around the room. She perked an eyebrow when she was obviously alone. She wiped quickly at her face with the hand not holding Wynonna’s and cleared her throat of the sobs she had just been consumed with “Hello? Is someone there?”

She swallowed and held her breath. She wanted to be as quiet as possible in case she heard the sound again. Maybe she had imagined it. Maybe she had finally gone crazy. She straightened up where she sat and looked around. Her heart was racing. There was no way someone could have sneaked into the room, right? She had more guards at the cabin than necessary.

After a full minute of silence she decided she was going to get up and look through the room. Maybe the person was hiding and waiting for her to give up. She would not give up. If there was a threat there she was going to stop it where it stood. So she turned back to look at Wynonna and gave her hand a squeeze as she stood “I’ll check it out. Don’t move.”

As she turned to move away from the bed she was stopped by Wynonna’s hand closing around her own.

Waverly froze. Her heart dropped to her feet. She whirled around quickly and her eyes looked widely down at her sister. She gripped Wynonna’s hand tightly and moved to her knees beside the bed now “Wy- Wynonna? Can you hear me?”

Silence. Waverly stared at her sister for any sign that confirmed she had not imagined her hand behind squeezed. She could barely breathe because her throat had closed up on itself in anticipation. She didn’t blink. She did not want to miss it if it happened again.

A minute passed and nothing more happened. Waverly finally breathed out a sigh of disappointment and gave her head a shake. She was certain she was going crazy now. She moved to cup both of her
hands around the one of Wynonna’s that she held and she lifted it to her lips once more “If you’re messing with me now would be a really good time to tell me because if not I am definitely going crazy.”

Nothing. Waverly again waited for any sign of life. She held Wynonna’s hand tightly, almost too tightly, her own fingers were starting to ache. But her eyes never flinched away from her sister. She was holding onto her last shred of hope but it as fading with every second that passed without a response from her sister.

Finally after another minute she let out another sigh. She kissed once more against Wynonna’s hand then moved to set it against the bed. Tears once more filled her eyes and she gave a little nod of her head “Yeah I knew I was cra-”

Wynonna’s hand closed around Waverly’s.

Waverly’s eyes went wide again as she witnessed the actual movement of the fingers around her own hand. She let out a sound that was a mix of relief and a soft sob. Tears now flowed freely down her face. Her eyes moved from their hands to Wynonna’s face and back again “Oh my god, Wynonna. Can you hear me?”

Wynonna’s brows creased together at the question from her sister.

Waverly breathed out a laugh and nodded as her other hand reached up to wipe at the tears in her eyes “If you can hear me squeeze my hand or groan or something.”

Wynonna let out a soft whimper in response now.

“Oh-” Waverly stood now in excitement. She turned and shouted toward the door because she did not want to leave her sister. “Hey! Um, hello! Randall?”

She waited for a moment, which felt like an eternity, before her head guard poked his head into the room with a look of concern on his face.

She squeaked out when she saw him and couldn’t fight the smile that came to her lips “She’s waking up! Get the doctors!”

The man looked shocked and he hesitated for a moment. When Waverly repeated that he needed to get the doctors that finally put him in motion and he ran off to fetch the doctor that had been staying in the cabin.

Waverly quickly looked back to her sister. She leaned over her now and put her free hand on Wynonna’s cheek. She stroked her face gently and gave a little nod “Can you hear me?”

Wynonna’s brows creased again and she let out a soft groan. Then she started to cough. Both hands started to move toward her face in a weak attempt to grab at the tube that was stuffed down her throat aiding in her breathing.

“Oh, shit” Waverly pushed the bedside table out of the way and quickly dropped the bars on the side of the bed to give herself the access she needed. She leaned as close as she could as her hands reached for the tube. She knew she should wait for the doctor but each second that Wynonna choked was another second she was panicking. So she grabbed hold of the tube at the mouth and nodded “Okay this might hurt I’m just gonna-”

“Wait!” The doctor rushed in and over to where Waverly stood. He pushed her out of the way then grabbed for the tube himself. “You could cause damage if you don’t know what you’re doing.” He
nodded as he focused on the tube. In just a couple of seconds the tube was yanked free of Wynonna’s throat in one fluid motion.

Wynonna coughed a little harder now that she could breathe. Her hand once more reached for her mouth to wipe at the drool that had come out with the tube. She let out a soft groan as her breathing started to even out. Finally, after what felt like forever, her eyes finally started to blink open.

Waverly was crying again. She couldn’t help it. She held tightly to Wynonna’s hand as the other used a tissue to wipe at her sister’s mouth and chin. When her eyes came open for the first time Waverly leaned over her just a bit. She gave her a wide smile as tears dripped from her eyes “There are those gorgeous blue eyes.”

“Gay” Wynonna pushed the word out hoarsely through a dry throat. She licked at her lips then used her free hand to tap at her throat a few times because it hurt too much to talk.

“Right, water” Waverly moved toward the bedside table that she had pushed out of the way. She grabbed the bottle of water she had been drinking out of and moved back to the bed. She uncapped it then paused and looked at the doctor “Is it alright?”

He nodded quickly as he pulled out his stethoscope “Perfectly fine. Just not too much.”

Waverly nodded and slowly moved the bottle of Wynonna’s face. She tipped it her lips and dumped just a little in her mouth.

That seemed to be enough. Wynonna swallowed and immediately started to cough. She let out a groan and laid her head back down. Her eyes focused on Waverly now and she gave her a weak smile “Did I miss Christmas?”

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“You ready, Haught?” Dolls asked softly as he tossed the last bit of supplies they would need into the back of the unmarked van they were taking up the mountain side that surrounded the Hardy family beach.

Nicole just nodded. They hadn’t really been on speaking terms since she had stormed out of the ammo shed at the shooting range the day before. Her emotions had been in overdrive since leaving the hospital a month earlier and they were on the verge of boiling over.

So she had decided to stay quiet and let herself calm down. She just wasn’t there yet so she was keeping to herself. She was also silently preparing herself for what they were about to do. Within a couple days the entire Hardy family line would be extinct and she would be partially responsible for that. It kind of made her sick to her stomach.

She climbed into the van behind the steering wheel. She turned the key and started it up. She watched in her side mirror as Dolls checked everything over once more then shut the back doors. This was it. They were about to take off toward the last stop on their slaughter mission.

Just then the satellite phone attached to Nicole’s waist started to ring. Nicole’s heart jumped into her throat. She looked down at the sound because she honestly didn’t believe it was real. She stared at the phone for a split second before her hands reached down and yanked it off her belt fiercely. She fumbled with it in her grip for a few seconds before finally getting it steady in her hands. She stared at it for another moment, her heart racing like a stampede against her sternum, before she finally pushed the button to answer the call.

“Nicole?” Waverly’s voice was a little broken by static but it was undoubtedly her’s. “Nicole she’s
awake. Come home.”

Nicole immediately choked up. Tears burst forth from her eyes before she could blink. She slid out of the van and had to catch herself with a tight grip on the handle of the door because her knees were wobbly. She pressed her back against the side of the van and she drew in a deep breath. Her entire body was trembling. She wasn't sure if this was really happening. Wynonna was awake. She had never heard such beautiful words in her life.

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The helicopter flight back to the cabin was the longest wait that Nicole had ever had to endure in her life. There were certain things that one waits for and anticipates in life and the flight seemed to last longer than the wait for all of those things combined. No amount of time that she had to be patient for something previously in her life compared to being in that helicopter. Waiting to turn sixteen so she could drive? No. Waiting to turn eighteen so she could join the Army? No. Even the thirty plus days that she had waited to see if Wynonna would wake up didn’t hold a candle to having to wait for the helicopter to land on the helipad at the cabin. It was only a couple hours but it felt like an eternity.

She was off the helicopter as soon as the skids had touched the ground. She ducked her head under the still turning blades above her and ran as fast as she could into the cabin. With each heavy thunk of her boots against the floors her heart raced faster. She could barely see anything. Her vision had tunneled and she was focused solely on finding Wynonna’s room. Faces blurred by. Greetings sounded like muffled noises. Nothing pierced her psyche. She was determined to have nothing distract her from her goal.

Her hand gripped the doorframe of Wynonna’s bedroom and the momentum of her movement seemed to swing her body into the room. When her feet landed and she realized she had made it to her destination she blinked just once and the fog she had been zooming through was gone. There were colors and noises and smells and faces. She had to draw in a few shaky breaths to center herself, to calm herself down, to help bring her back to reality.

Then her eyes fell to the hospital bed that had replaced Wynonna’s other one when she had been transferred to the cabin. That is when she saw two pairs of eyes looking up at her. Then she saw two bright smiles. Then she heard her name and she knew she wasn’t dreaming. This was real. She was home.

“Nicole” Waverly had rushed from Wynonna’s bedside to hug the girl as soon as she came bursting into the room. Her face buried against Nicole’s shoulder and she started to cry with relief almost immediately. “You made it. You’re really here.”

Nicole gave a slight nod as her arms wrapped around Waverly without hesitation. Her eyes dropped to look at her friend and when she heard the obvious sound of crying in her voice she couldn’t help but to well up herself. She had felt so distant, disconnected, while she was gone that it was taking a few moments for her to actually believe this was all really happening.

She finally managed to smile and her eyes lifted to look across the room. There, sitting in the bed, was her oldest and dearest friend. Her eyes were open. She was smiling. She was awake. She let out a soft breath of relief and that is when her tears started to fall. “I’m here, Waves. I am really here.” She stepped back out of the embrace but kept her hands on Waverly’s shoulders. Her eyes flickered down and she spoke softly “How is she?”

Waverly nodded quickly and though she was wiping tears from her eyes she was smiling. “She’s amazing.”

That was all Nicole had needed to hear. If Wynonna’s mental capacity had been compromised than she would have wanted to know beforehand so she could prepare herself. But to hear that wasn’t the case sent a wave of relief over her entire being. She pulled Waverly into one more quick hug then slipped around the smaller girl and moved right over to where Wynonna sat waiting for her.

She felt another wave of tears as she moved to the side of the bed. She immediately leaned over her
friend and whether Wynonna liked it or not she pulled her into a tight hug. She closed her eyes and
as the tears streamed down her face she let out a sniffled laugh “You scared the Hell out of us.”

Wynonna let out a grunt of a laugh because, well, Nicole was nearly squeezing the life out of her.
But her arms lifted and she returned the embrace as tightly as she could considering she was still
regaining her strength. She let it linger a few moments before she finally grunted out again “You’re
gonna put me back in a coma if you don’t let me breathe.”

“Shit” Nicole let go quickly and looked down at her friend with guilt in her eyes. “Did I hurt you?
I’m so sorry.”

Wynonna just gave a half smile and laughed very lightly at her friend “Well I broke your nose so we
will just call it even now, alright?”

Nicole immediately frowned at that as she shifted to now sit on the side of the bed. Her hand
dropped and she took a hold of one of Wynonna’s. Her head gave a little shake and she breathed out
heavily “I deserved it. I am so sorry about all of that. It was—”

“I know” Wynonna spoke gently now but with a serious tone. Her eyes didn’t waver from her gaze
fixed on her friend. “Waverly told me everything. I overreacted. Besides…” She gave a shrug and
used the hand that Nicole held to squeeze very gently “None of that matters now anyway.”

“I shouldn’t have gone along with it” Nicole said with a quick shake of her head. “I knew it was a
bad idea.”

“Shut up about it” Wynonna waved her hand to the side in a gesture of trying to dismiss the subject
from between them.

Nicole drew in a deep breath to unleash more of an explanation and an apology but she caught the
look on her friend’s face and she knew it was not necessary. Her friend had already forgiven her. So
she let out a heavy sigh and her eyes dropped to where she held Wynonna’s hand in her lap. She was
quiet for a moment as if reflecting on it all. When she finally looked up there was a new batch of
tears teetering on the edge of spilling out of her eyes “I should have been there.”

“It’s not your fault” Wynonna pulled her hand free of Nicole’s grip and lifted it to her friend’s face.
She wiped her thumb under her eyes in an attempt to wipe away the tears before they poured out.

“I was holding your cards” Nicole’s voice cracked as she spoke. Her chin trembled and her brow
creased into a frown “If we hadn’t gotten into that fight I would have had them on me and you
would have never had to go back to the room to get them.”

“And then what?” Wynonna said with a little shrug as her fingers worked now to wipe away the
tears that had escaped her first attempt to dry them up. “I would have given the speech and all of us
would have gone back to that room to wait for the next event to start and we all would have been
caught in the explosion.” She gave her head a solemn shake and she finally dropped her hand away
from Nicole’s face “Our fight saved all of our lives.”

Waverly, who had been giving them some space, approached now with a little nod. Her hand moved
to lay against Nicole’s back and she gave a little smile “She’s right, Nicole. You saved me. You
saved yourself. You saved….” She motioned around the room in a vague gesture to something
bigger than herself “Every single one of your men that were there protecting us. You even saved
Wynonna.”

“Well, I mean, I guess my gross overreaction did…” Wynonna lifted her hand to stop Waverly as a
playful smirk came to her lips. “Had I not punched Nicole than we might all be toast.”

This got a laugh from both Nicole and Waverly. Nicole rolled her eyes and took the moment to wipe at her face. She let out a heavy breath and her hand reached for Wynonna’s again “I’m still so sorry.”

Wynonna just shrugged. She glanced between her sister and Nicole and offered a soft smile “You two can make it up to me by never kissing again.”

“No problem” Nicole puffed out with a laugh.

“One time deal” Waverly said with a dismissive eye roll at the same time. The two of them exchanged a look then laughed before looking back to Wynonna.

Wynonna’s smile lingered for just a second or two more before it faded from her face. She looked more serious now as her eyes focused back on Nicole “Is Dolls with you?”

“He came with” Nicole motioned behind her to where the door of the bedroom was located.

“Waves can you go get him?” Wynonna looked at her sister now with a little nod.

Waverly nodded quickly in response. She leaned down and kissed Wynonna on the forehead then turned and wrapped Nicole into another brief hug. When she pulled back she smiled at them both “Don’t go anywhere.”

Wynonna rolled her eyes because, really, where would she go. She watched her sister hurry from the room and as soon as she was gone her eyes once more narrowed onto Nicole. “What in the world were you thinking?”

Nicole’s heart skipped a beat. She blinked a few times in surprise because it kind of sounded like Wynonna was suddenly upset at her. But why? She stammered out “Wh-what do you mean?”

“Going on a killing rampage as revenge?” Wynonna barked out. Her face dropped into a sort of shocked look for a few moments before she blinked it away and a scowl replaced it. “Were you trying to start a freaking war?”

“No!” Nicole’s voice went a few notes higher out of sheer surprise at the sharp tone Wynonna was using. She then blinked and cleared her throat and quickly tried again “Of course not. We were trying to prevent one. Technically they started it.”

“Oh the old” Wynonna used her fingers as air quotes as she spoke the words “they started it defense.” She dropped her hands and gave her eyes a sharp roll “What are you, twelve?”

“No” Nicole mumbled. She felt sort of like a scolded child at the moment.

Wynonna let out a huff and her head gave a shake “I honestly expected a more level-headed decision from you, Nicole.”

“What was I supposed to do?” Nicole almost shouted the words. She hadn’t meant to but she was growing a little defensive from the way Wynonna was speaking to her. “They tried to kill you. They weren’t ever going to stop coming after you, or Waverly, so we decided to put a stop to it for good.”

“By killing off an entire family?” Wynonna’s arm swung upwards in a vague gesture toward the entire group of people they had set out to kill.

“What would you have done if it was Waverly in that explosion?” Nicole stood now in frustration.
She stared at Wynonna with a firm scowl on her face. “You’d have been crazy. You would have demanded all of their heads!”

“Firstly, I would never actually demand anyone’s head be cut off. That is totally barbaric” Wynonna scoffed at that. She rolled her eyes and lifted her hand up to stop Nicole from cutting her off before she continued “You’re right I would have been crazy if it was Waverly but I also would have been smart. You have to think with your head more than your heart when you’re in my position. And believe me…” She could see Nicole puffing up in defense again so she softened her tone and her gaze “...You wear your heart on your sleeve and I love that about you. But using your heart to guide every decision you make, especially when it comes to your loved ones, is not always best.”

Nicole deflated instantly. Her shoulders slumped and she motioned slightly toward Wynonna “I saw you lying there in bed and I was being told you might never wake up and…” She let out a heavy sigh as she reached for the back of her head, rubbing at it almost nervously, before shrugging “...I couldn’t think straight.”

“Well you’re gay so you never think straight” Wynonna mumbled through a sideways smirk.

“Wynonna, really?” Nicole rolled her eyes in annoyance but could not fight the slightest hint of a smile. She had missed her sarcasm. She shook it away quickly though and sighed out again “I was raised to fight back, you know? So I saw you lying there and my primal instinct was to fight.”

Wynonna gave a little nod. She totally understood. Nicole was the type of person to fight for what she believed in. She stood up in the face of injustice. She put herself on the front line of any battle that needed to be won. But she had also been taught that the fighting was done physically. She had never learned that sometimes fighting for what’s right meant you laid down the guns and found a more peaceful resolution.

“It’s not your fault” She finally said as her hand moved to pat the bed to indicate Nicole should sit again. “You’re a trained soldier. It’s why you and Dolls had the same idea. Strike back and strike harder.” When Nicole didn’t immediately move to sit again she frowned.

Nicole stood a few feet away with her arms crossed and her eyes narrowed on Wynonna. It kind of sounded like she was saying she was a brute. Like she had no brains about her. All she knew was kill or be killed and she didn’t know how to approach a situation with reason. She gave her head a shake at that “I have walked away from plenty of fights in my life because they were just gross displays of physical power. This was not the same thing. This was personal.”

“And you led with your heart” Wynonna reached up and laid her hand over her own heart. “You can’t be faulted for that. But tell me honestly, since making the decision to do what you set out to do, wasn’t there a single moment that you second guessed that it was the right thing to do?”

Nicole breathed out in a short huff and nodded once “Just about every day I was out there.”

Wynonna smiled and lifted her hand to tap at the side of her head now “So you were thinking with your brain. It just took a little while for it to catch up.” She tried to beckon Nicole over again with another pat against her bed. “That is when you should have made the decision.”

“Waverly agreed” Nicole huffed but moved back to the bed anyway. She sat down harshly and folded her arms back across her chest.

“And she knew it was a bad decision almost immediately” Wynonna reached out and offered her hand to Nicole instead of just taking it. It was a gesture of trust and compassion between friends. “The good news is that it’s not too late to fix it.”
As if on cue Waverly returned with Dolls right behind her. She gave a smile at her sister and hurried over to her bedside. Dolls, on the other hand, stood stiffly a few feet away. When Wynonna looked at him she gave her a salute and addressed her seriously “Your Majesty.”

“Oh cut that shit out” Wynonna puffed out an indignant laugh and motioned for him to come closer. Dolls immediately smiled and his posture changed. He moved closer to the bed so he was now standing near her feet “How are you feeling, ma’am.”

“Like a bomb went off in my head” Wynonna replied nonchalantly.

All three of their faces dropped in synchronized unamusement.

Wynonna smirked and looked at them all before shrugging “Come on if you can’t joke about it then what’s the point?”

“Wynonna, please” Waverly said with a frown on her face.

“Fine” Wynonna rolled her eyes. Everyone was being way too serious. She held a smirk for a moment more before it dropped away and her eyes settled back on Dolls. She gave a nod to him and spoke evenly but firmly “I need you to call your men off immediately. Also…” She lifted her finger and motioned for Dolls to draw closer. When he was finally right at her side with his head dipped in as if waiting to receive a whisper she lifted her hand and smacked him right in the back of his head. “That’s for being an idiot!”

Dolls groaned and lifted his hand to rub at where Wynonna had just slapped him as he straightened upright. He did not complain, though, because that was his Queen and he was trained not to question her. Instead she gave her one nod and tried to smile “Right away, ma’am. I’ll send word to their camp. They never went up the mountain so they should get the message within the hour.”

“Thank you” Wynonna nodded in approval before her eyes then moved to scan the faces of the three people standing around her bed. She took a few moments to take in each one of their features before finally smiling very slightly “I am very disappointed in all of your decision making skills under pressure but I have to say I am damn glad to have you three on my side.”

Waverly smiled and leaned in to hug Wynonna quickly. Nicole half smiled and just gave her friend’s hand a squeeze. She still felt bad for what she had almost done. Wynonna was right it definitely was a gross overreaction. Dolls just shrugged because he stood by his decision completely. But that didn’t matter now because his Commanding Officer was telling him to stand down. So after saying goodbye he quickly left the room to fulfill the order he had been given.

Once Dolls left the room Wynonna perked an eyebrow curiously. She looked between the other two then gave a shrug. Her hands reached out toward Waverly and once the hand was taken hold of she nodded very slightly “Okay so here’s the plan. We arrest Doc. We arrest Champ, his parents, and whoever it was that Doc was emailing with. We put them in jail and charge them with conspiracy to commit Regicide.”

“And then what?” Nicole said with a little bit of a head shake. “The penalty for that is death.”

“It doesn’t have to be” Wynonna said with a shrug. “I’m still Queen and I still get to make up the rules as I go if I please. So if we can find undeniable proof of their involvement in this we put them behind bars for life without a chance for parole.”

“And what if the other members of the family decide to get revenge?” Nicole sounded a bit distressed now. “There’s just no easy end to this.”
“It won’t matter after I abolish the Monarchy. There will be no crowns to get revenge in the name of anymore. There will be no point” Wynonna spoke calmly but with conviction in her voice. “If they go after me they are just committing murder or attempted murder and they go to jail too.”

“But what if-”

“I’m not afraid of them” Wynonna cut off another possible scenario coming from Nicole. She looked firmly at her friend and then to her sister before her head gave a shake. “It was never about being afraid of them. It is about taking away their power, or their desire for power, so that’s what I’m going to do. That is what will hurt them the most. Taking away the one thing they have always wanted and making it impossible for them to ever get it back.”

Waverly nodded and gave her sister’s hand a squeeze. She smiled very softly at just how brave her sister really was. She had been through so much and here she was determined to still do the right thing, not for herself, for everyone else. “I agree. They will have nothing left to fight for when the Monarchy is gone.”

Wynonna gave a nod at her sister’s words then looked at Nicole. She gave her hand a gentle squeeze “Nothing has changed, Haught. We move forward with what we planned just like before.” She squeezed again at her hand and smiled very softly at her friend “Are you still with me?”

“Oh course I am” Nicole said with a roll of her eyes like that was the dumbest thing she had ever heard. She looked at Wynonna and couldn’t help but smile. She was right. Nothing else mattered. They had a plan and they needed to follow through with it. She just couldn’t wait for all of this to be over so she could take her family as far away from all of this drama and start fresh somewhere new. That was all that mattered to her now.

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Nicole had not slept well over the past month. Between long nights gathering intel or standing watch and worrying about Wynonna she just never relaxed enough to get any sleep. Now as she laid in a soft bed with the quiet of the cabin surrounding her she found herself still unable to shut off her brain long enough to sleep. So she gave up trying and decided to do what she had done so many times in the past. She decided to go see Wynonna.

She assumed her friend would be asleep but that was just fine by her. If she could sit at her bedside and hold her hand and just feel that she was alive she would be completely content. She had spent nearly every moment of the past month worrying that her best friend, the most important person in her life, was going to die. Just the idea of getting to watch her breathe right now was bringing more joy than she could say.

So when she quietly walked into Wynonna’s room and found her sitting up and awake she was more than surprised. She bit her lip almost nervously when her friend looked up at her and gave a timid little wave “I didn’t want to wake you up or anything. I just wanted to come sit in here.”

“Well I’m awake so you don’t have to worry about the first part” Wynonna said softly. She gave Nicole a smile and motioned for her to come over to the bed. She did her best to scoot over to one side in order to make room next to her. It wasn’t a large bed but she figured they could squeeze in together.

“I’m not going to lay in your bed” Nicole said with a laugh when she realized Wynonna was scooting over for her.

“Why the Hell not?” Wynonna scoffed.
“You’re still healing” Nicole motioned to the fact that it was a hospital bed. Then to the monitors that Wynonna was still hooked up to.

“So?” Wynonna shook her head and looked at the machines. “You’re not going to kill me by laying down next to me.”

Nicole rolled her eyes and gave her head a shake.

“Come on” Wynonna pouted as her hand patted the mattress next to her hips. She batted her eyes and stuck out her lip to look as sad and pathetic as possible.

Nicole stared at her friend for a few moments before giving in with a sigh and another roll of her eyes. “You’re incorrigible” She mumbled before she moved now to gently climb into the bed next to Wynonna. It was more of a tight fit than they were used to but they managed to get comfortable side by side. Nicole had to lift her arm between herself and Wynonna to prevent it from being smashed so she just slid it around her friend’s shoulders and let Wynonna lean against her lightly.

“Oh finally making a move on me?” Wynonna teased as Nicole’s arm settled around her. She didn’t hesitate to lean against Nicole’s chest. In fact she laid her head against her collarbone like it was a natural habit for her.

“You know, I thought I missed your sarcasm but I was mistaken” Nicole grumbled softly. She looked down at the top of Wynonna’s head and gave a smile. She had honestly missed everything about her best friend.

“Oh you love it” Wynonna said with a sure nod of her head. She let out a sigh as she relaxed against Nicole now. They both fell quiet for a few moments because neither one of them knew what to say. Neither one of them were really in any hurry to break the silence, honestly. It was nice to just sit together and simply exist. It was a small piece of normalcy in the shit storm that was their life.

Finally after a long pause between them Wynonna cleared her throat to break the silence and spoke softly “What’s on your mind?”

Nicole just shrugged the shoulder that Wynonna wasn’t lying against and gave her head a shake. There was so much swirling on in her head that she had no idea where to start. After a moment of thought about it she decided to start with the vaguest truth “I couldn’t sleep.”

Wynonna let out a huff of a laugh and her head turned now to look up at her friend “Ya think?”

Nicole rolled her eyes, mostly at herself, and let out a soft laugh. She shrugged again before trying another subject “It’s been a month since I’ve seen you and I was worried that entire month that you were gonna die so I guess I wanted to come in here and just feel that you were alive.”

Wynonna sat up from where she had been leaning against her friend. She turned so she was facing her more and though she was smiling her eyes were very serious “I don’t blame you. I had to beg Waverly to go to her own bed. I honestly can’t imagine how hard it was for the two of you.”

Wynonna frowned slightly. Her eyes flickered down to where her free hand was pulling randomly at the top of the blanket she had slipped under when she had crawled into bed “I know this is probably a lot for you, too. I mean the last thing you remember is getting your speech cards and then you wake up and we’re all big crying messes full of bloodlust for our enemies.”

Nicole couldn’t help the smirk that came to her lips. She perked an eyebrow curiously at her friend and gave her head a shake “Bloodlust for our enemies? Have you been watching Game of Thrones?”
“Reading” Nicole bit her lip to fight off a smile. The two friends shared an amused look before Nicole rolled her eyes at herself and laughed softly. “But seriously I’m sure waking up to what you woke up to has been more than overwhelming.”

Wynonna shrugged and settled back against the bed. She now let her head rest against Nicole’s arm behind her instead of laying against her chest “I mean it sucked when I woke up and realized what had happened. I was super pissed for like five whole minutes. But then Waverly was here and she was a hot mess and she’s pouring her heart out to me and I realized this was bigger than just me. It’s bigger than you and Waverly. I realized that now, more than ever, we had to get rid of the current political system and turn it into something for the people, you know? Put the power in the hands of the people who it effects and not just some entitled rich families who have had the power passed down to them whether they deserve it or not.”

Nicole nodded slightly. She knew that Wynonna wanted nothing more than to be free of the responsibility of taking care of other people. She wanted to take herself and the two other people in the world she cared about and get as far away from everyone else as possible. She felt bad that Wynonna had ever been put in this position in the first place.

“But then I thought, you know, all political structures are corrupt” Wynonna continued on without even realizing Nicole had nodded. “Even if we get rid of the whole Monarchy and put in a Democratic system there are going to be people backstabbing each other and lying and bribing their way to the top. So like is it even going to be worth it?” She let out a very defeated sounding sigh. “But then I realized that once I rid myself of the power that it doesn’t fucking matter to me anymore. It will literally be someone else’s problem and honestly I am alright with that. As long as I don’t have to decide anything for anyone ever again.”

Nicole used her arm around Wynonna to pull her against herself. She turned her head and placed a kiss to her forehead before letting out a sigh “Sometimes our best intentions aren’t enough. All you can do is the right thing and hope other people follow your lead.” She shrugged slightly and looked down at her friend with a smile “I think you’re doing the right thing. If the ones that follow after you fuck it up then it’s on them.”

“This is why you’re my best friend” Wynonna pulled away from Nicole enough to look at her and smile. She used her finger to tap the end of Nicole’s nose in a playful boop motion before letting out a soft laugh. “Also can I say…” She moved her hand now to the side of Nicole’s face. She gently curled her finger around one of Nicole’s short wavy strands of hair and pulled it forward. She watched it slide around her finger then fall back against the side of Nicole’s face before giving a slight nod “I was right. The haircut is totally hot.”

Nicole rolled her eyes but laughed out softly. She blushed very slightly but hoped the dim light in the room helped to hide it. “Well I didn’t do it for you. It was just easier, especially being secluded in super secret locations without mirrors.”

“Mhm” Wynonna hummed to show she did not believe Nicole for one moment. Her head gave a shake and her smile grew across her face “The haircut mixed with the whole Army outfit you came marching in here wearing earlier today?” She wiggled her eyebrows playfully as her smile widened and she gave a few slow nods.

“Oh grow up” Nicole rolled her eyes and tried to shove Wynonna away but it did not work since they were tightly pressed together in the bed. Also she was blushing more now and the last thing she wanted was for Wynonna to see.

“No I’m serious!” Wynonna let out a gasped laugh but tried to look serious as her eyes glistened with amusement. “You could totally make a killing starring in specific fetish videos. Call it…” She cleared
her throat and moved her hand through the air as if she were reading the title off a marquee sign
“Haught in the desert.”

“Stop” Nicole groaned and lifted her hand to her face. She knew Wynonna was just teasing her but
that did not stop her from blushing a deep red now. She didn’t know why but the idea that Wynonna
was thinking of her in that way, even if it was only playfully, was just too much for her to handle.

Wynonna gave a very light chuckle as her eyes settled on her friend's hidden face. She let out a soft
sigh and reached out to pull at the fingers that were covering Nicole’s beautiful features. After just a
little resistance the fingers gave way and Nicole dropped her hands completely. This made Wynonna
give a single nod as she focused on her friend “Wanna hear something weird?”

“As long as it has nothing to do with me making Army porn” Nicole let out a huffed laugh and
nodded.

Wynonna's face was gentle now as she looked at her friend. There was a sincere fondness behind her
eyes that she rarely held. It was usually reserved for Waverly, or the few times she'd gotten to drink
her father's 100 year old whiskey, and it was a little unnerving for Nicole to see. It was a look of
adoration that reached a very personal level.

She took a moment before speaking to just look at Nicole with that look. Her eyes slowly moved
around her friend's face as if she were taking in every last detail about her. As she did so her slight
smile grew very faintly and her head gave a single bob in a sort of silent confirmation to herself
before her eyes finally settled on Nicole's.

When she finally spoke it was in a tone so delicate it almost didn't sound like her at all. “I don't
remember much of anything from being in a coma. It's like I had a dreamless sleep and then woke
up. The only things I recall were having conversations with Waverly and the very vivid feeling of
missing you.”

This was not at all what Nicole had expected to hear and the surprise rose on her face to say just as
much. The words paired with the way Wynonna had just looked at her sent a shiver along her spine.
She was speechless. She didn't really know what to say. Wynonna never expressed this depth of
emotion. She was wasn’t sure how to handle it. So she just shook her head and mumbled out the first
thing she could manage to form cohesively “Why would you miss me?”

The sound Wynonna made at Nicole's response was a mix of disbelief and offense with a hint of
amusement. Her eyes, still holding their delicate gaze on her friend, focused more and she shook her
head “Do you really have no idea why I would miss you so much?”

Wynonna looked a little wounded and Nicole's eyes went wide at that. She had not meant to upset
her friend. She had just been caught off guard by her honesty. She quickly shook her head and tried
again “I just meant I thought Waverly would be the one you'd miss most.”

Wynonna gave a single nod but her expression did not change. Her eyes still held such a gentle
fondness for the girl sitting next to her in her hospital bed. She wondered why Nicole doubted for a
single moment why she would miss her at all.

She finally looked away but only so her eyes could find her hand. She reached out to take hold of
her friend’s hand and immediately gave it a squeeze before her eyes lifted and returned to look at
Nicole's face. Her lips twitched into a smile now and her tone reached a softness foreign even to
herself as she spoke candidly “I guess it just goes to show how much you mean to me.”

Suddenly, as if someone had snapped their fingers to make it so, the dynamic of their friendship
changed. It was palpable in that moment. In just a blink of an eye everything was different. Everything was new.

Nicole shivered as the change moved through her. The way Wynonna held her hand, the way her eyes gazed into hers, and even the little flicker of a smile at the corner of her mouth was all completely new to Nicole in that instant. There was something more now. Something that perhaps had been lying dormant until that moment. There was no real explanation for it and that was the most unsettling thing about it all for Nicole.

She was suddenly aware of the fact that she was pressed tightly against Wynonna with how they were sitting in the bed together. She was very much in tune with every inch of her body that touched any inch of Wynonna. She could hear every beat of her heart in her chest and feel every molecule of oxygen as it filled her lungs.

She blinked just once and when her eyes focused on her friend again it was like seeing her for the first time. Her hair seemed softer in the light. Her eyes seemed bluer. Her face more purely beautiful. Whatever had just snapped into being was exposing new details in new ways and it was terrifying.

Wynonna had felt it too but it wasn't as scary for her. In fact it was quite the opposite. It was calming. It was like finding a piece to a puzzle that you'd been looking for from the beginning. It made sense to her. It just fit. An epiphany of the most obvious fact.

She shrugged slightly as that split second where everything changed passed. Her hand gently slid away from Nicole's now. She didn't speak. The moment, for her, required no words. Instead she shifted so she was not turned toward her friend and instead back to being pressed shoulder to shoulder. She let out a soft yawn and her body leaned into Nicole enough to allow her head to rest on her friend's shoulder. She gave a content smile and let her eyes close.

Nicole looked over when Wynonna leaned against her. She blinked in surprise because, quite frankly, everything that had just unfolded between them was completely startling to her. Yet Wynonna seemed to have either not noticed or not been surprised and that confused Nicole even more. Somehow her world had been totally flipped on its head with a soft gaze and a few words and she had no idea how to begin to sort through it all.

She drew in a breath and opened her mouth to speak before realizing Wynonna was drifting to sleep. So she just sat there with her head spinning. Her eyes stared at the top of her best friend's head and her heart fluttered. The sensation was a new reaction to looking at Wynonna and that caused her gut to knot up. What in the world had just happened?

She had plenty of time to try to unravel it all. She stayed there beside Wynonna all night. Her friend slept peacefully and she sat there searching for answers to every question her mind could produce. The more she thought, the more questions she had.

By the time she had worn herself down enough to sleep she had finally been honest enough with herself to come to a suitable conclusion. Somewhere in the time they had spent growing up together Nicole had developed some sort of feelings for her best friend but had suppressed them or written them off as just regular closeness between friends. But she realized now they had surfaced and she was presently tasked with dealing with them.

The timing couldn't be more horrible for this epiphany. Wynonna was still on the mend, Waverly was still acting Queen, they had traitors to arrest, and they still had a Monarchy to abolish. How she was going to focus on any of that was beyond her. She hoped she could do what she had always done and just pretend nothing was going on. Suppress and forget her own complications until the other, more important, issues were dealt with. Maybe if she got lucky she could distract herself until
the day she died and would never have to admit what was really going on. Knowing her luck, though, things would implode before they were even the slightest bit sorted out. Such is life when you’re Nicole Haught.

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Nicole did find a little luck the next morning. She was able to slip out of bed without waking Wynonna and head to her room to get an early start. She was exhausted from the night before. Her mind, even during her slumber, had raced so much it felt like her body had run a marathon. But there was no time for her to relax or catch up on sleep because today was the day they were going to arrest Doc and the Hardys for their involvement in the explosion. That was a most welcome distraction for everything else going on.

She had taken her time in the shower, letting the hot water ease her stiff muscles, before finally getting out and dressing in her Royal Guards uniform. This was, after all, official business so she had to look the part. She didn’t mind, though. She felt safe in that uniform. It was like a security net for her. Nothing bad could happen so long as she wore that uniform. Maybe it was odd of her to lean on clothing for a sense of security but that’s where it came from and she was glad for it.

By the time she had dressed and finished her telephone conversation with Dolls it was time for breakfast. This was another lucky distraction for her. Wynonna couldn’t leave her bed just yet so all food was taken to her. Waverly had already eaten and was with her sister so Nicole had the luxury of eating alone. That was fine by her. The two people who knew her best in the world would be able to tell something was up, especially if she sat there eating quietly, so she was glad she did not have to face that test just yet.

After breakfast and another phone call, this one with her second in command of the Royal Guard, she finally decided it was time to go say good morning. It was weird. Never in her entire life had she dreaded seeing Wynonna. Well there was the one time right before she was leaving for the Army where she had not told her best friend she was leaving and she left that for the last possible moment. Other than that she could not remember a time where seeing Wynonna gave her anxiety.

She drew in a deep breath as she stood outside the open doorway of Wynonna’s room. She could hear the sisters inside the room chatting lightly and Nicole smiled. She could tell just by their tones that they were both enjoying each other’s company. That made her heart skip a beat. If she could tell just by their tone of voice that they were happy then she knew they would both be able to read her face and see something was going on inside her.

A new wave of dread filled her in that moment. She froze in the hallway and felt like she couldn’t move. She didn’t want to go into the room. She didn’t want to see the two people she considered family. She wanted to run and never come back which was a weird notion considering Nicole never ran away from a fight. This was different, though. This wasn’t a fight this was emotions. This was real life. This was something that would affect her entire life. At least in a fight there was a winner and a loser.

She drew in another deep breath and she held it for a moment. She took a few seconds to build up her courage. She could do this. It was just a quick good morning and then she would find an excuse to leave. Put on a smile, give a few hugs, and be on her way. There was no way they’d be able to tell something was up. She just had to stop thinking about it and do it. Like ripping off the bandaid. Put it out of her mind and think about something else so her face wouldn’t give her away.

Just as she was about to step through the bedroom door she heard her name from down the hall. She paused and turned her head in the direction that it had come from. She saw Dolls a few doors down and she smiled slightly “I was just going in to say good morning. Want to join?”

Dolls closed the space between them in a rush. He gave his head a little shake and motioned behind
himself “The chopper is ready for us, Haught. We gotta go now.”

Nicole immediately snapped into duty mode. She gave a really quick nod of her head at his words “I’m right behind you.”

Dolls nodded at the confirmation then turned and hurried back down the hallway. Nicole waited until he disappeared before she looked back at the open doorway. She had to go so she could not linger. This was the perfect excuse and she would not have to worry about the others suspecting a thing.

“Hey” Nicole poked her head into the doorway now. Her hand gripped the door frame to keep her balance with how she was leaning into the room. “I’m so sorry I was on my way to say good morning and Dolls informed me the helicopter is heading out. So I have to go.”

“Ah boo” Waverly frowned and gave a thumbs down.

Wynonna, looking rather emotionless, just gave a nod. She barely even looked at her friend before her eyes returned to the plate of food she had been working on. “Be careful, Haught. Update us when you can.”

Nicole blinked in surprise. Now she almost wanted to stay behind and try to figure out why Wynonna was being so uninterested in her presence. She frowned slightly and mumbled out a soft “You got it.”

Waverly perked an eyebrow at her sister. She waited until Nicole, looking a little hesitant to do so, disappeared from the doorway before looking at Wynonna. She gave her head a shake and pointed over her shoulder to where their friend had just been standing “You’ve been talking about Nicole all morning and when she can’t stick around you suddenly don’t care?”

“I have not been talking about her all morning” Wynonna grumbled as her fork poked mindlessly at her eggs now. She kept her eyes on her food because she knew Waverly would be able to see right through her lies if she looked up. “I told you it was nice to have a middle of the night chat again. It was just like old times. I don’t think that constitutes talking about her all morning.”

Waverly breathed out with a grunt of disbelief. She stared at her sister with surprise on her features for a few moments before her head shook. She reached out for the cards they had been getting ready to play with and started to shuffle them “Fine if you don’t want to talk about it we don’t have to. But I’d appreciate it if you wouldn’t lie to my face.”

“There’s nothing to talk about” Wynonna snapped and looked up at Waverly with a scowl. Her heart twisted when she saw the wounded look from her sister and her face softened immediately. She just rolled her eyes and looked back at her food as she breathed out a sigh “Sorry. I guess I’m just disappointed she didn’t come hang out before she left, you know? She knew she was going to be gone most of the day today and I figured since I’d been in a coma for a month she would want to spend a little time with me before leaving.”

“I get it” Waverly nodded and looked up from the deck of cards she was shuffling. “Trust me I know she’s happy you’re awake but you and I both know Nicole doesn’t rest when there’s a threat hanging around. She’s loyal to a fault and part of that loyalty is following through on protecting the ones she loves.” She bit at her bottom lip slightly as she reached for her sister’s hand. She gave it a light squeeze and added “As soon as they’re all in jail she will have plenty of time to hang out.”

“Yeah I’m sure that’s it” Wynonna mumbled but did not look up. She wasn’t sure why she had reacted the way she had. Her pain medication had a funny effect on her. She was still adjusting to the fact that she had been in a coma for a month while the world went on without her. To say she was
moody was a bit of an understatement. All that considered there was something that was pretty clear to her. She had, in her own little way, indicated to Nicole that she had some sort of feelings for her and then she had woken up alone. That tends to leave a bit of a bitter taste in one’s mouth.

Nicole was numb for most of the helicopter ride. Her mind was once more sent racing by the way Wynonna had dismissed her before she left. It had been a complete turn around from the night before where Wynonna had looked at her like she was the best thing in the entire world. It made her wonder if she had done something wrong somehow. She knew she didn’t say something wrong because she had not spoken. She had simply laid there unmoving most of the night so she did not disturb Wynonna who was asleep on her shoulder. If anything it was a considerate gesture.

Her mind had been occupied by those thoughts for most of the flight but as they drew closer to the Palace Dolls had started to go over the plan. They needed to stop by their Palace first for two very important reasons. The first reason was to obtain the official arrest documents. The second reason, and more important one if you asked Nicole, was because that was where Doc was. They needed to get him first. They couldn’t risk one of the Hardy family members calling to give him a heads up once they arrived over there. They wanted the element of surprise so Doc had to be the first arrest.

Once they had landed they made their way into the Palace. They met up in the security office where they briefed the men that were going to accompany them on their trip. They gave very clear instructions that no one was to be physically harmed. That everything had to be by the book. This was all going to be done cleanly so the traitors had no way of weaseling their way out of jail time with some false claim of brutality.

After the briefing everyone moved out to their assigned locations. A few men went with Nicole and a few with Dolls. Dolls was on his way to get the legal documents from the Royal legal team and Nicole, well, she had the privilege of putting the handcuffs on Doc.

She looked like a woman on a mission as she marched through the corridors of the Palace. It seemed almost strange for her to be back within the walls of the building where she had spent most of her life. With everything that had happened and the time they had spent in the cabin it almost didn’t feel like home any longer. It was a strange feeling knowing that sometime soon the building would no longer be used to house all the pieces of a Monarchy and instead turned into a Historical landmark to remind everyone of what used to be.

The thought left her now as she turned a corner and headed for the conference style meeting rooms where the Royal Court members all worked. She knew Doc was there because her guardsmen were keeping tabs on him. As soon as she had arrived she had been updated on his position within the Palace.

As she drew closer her heart started to race. Sure arresting him would not satiate the desire for revenge on those that had brought harm to Wynonna but it would definitely feel good. A bit of a release of anger, perhaps. Maybe just a little relief. Either way Nicole’s excitement was rising with each step she took. She could not wait to put a criminal behind bars. Maybe Wynonna had been right in suggesting Nicole become a cop once the Monarchy was no more.

She pushed through the door of the meeting room with a force that caused it to slam open and draw everyone’s attention to her arrival. Some people grasped at their chests because of the sheer surprise that her entrance into the room had brought. Some yelped then laughed at their self for having been startled. Doc, though, he simply lifted his eyes from what he had been working on and offered a very sincere smile when he realized who was there.
“Lady Haught it is an absolute joy to see you back in the Palace” He spoke in that charming drawl he always had as he stood from his desk and made his way over to her. He stretched his hand toward her as his other reached up to remove his hat. “I am so thrilled to see you’ve healed up and are back at work protecting our Queen.”

Nicole took hold of Doc’s offered hand but she did not shake it. Instead she gripped tightly at it and used her grip to tug firmly. The momentum of the tug and his own approach aided Nicole in her actions to detain him. In a swift move she stepped to the side, pulled his arm around his back, lifted her other hand to the back of his head, grabbed a handful of his long hair, and pushed with all her might until he was slammed face first into the wall next to the door she had just walked through. With him successfully pinned and unable to move she leaned into his ear to speak but instead of whispering she spoke loud enough for everyone watching to hear her.

“John Henry Holliday you are under arrest on the charges of attempted Regicide and conspiracy to commit crimes against the Throne” She pushed her hand against his head firmly once more before releasing her grip there in favor of reaching for her handcuffs. She pulled them out of their designated spot on her belt and worked quickly to slap them around both wrists.

“What in the World are you referring to, m’lady?” Doc’s pleasant tone had not changed as he spoke calmly from where he was pressed to the wall.

“Due to the nature of your charges you have giving up any rights to fair treatment or trial. You will be detained while you wait to be assigned an attorney and given one attempt to plead your case. The Queen will then give her final judgement. She will pass down a punishment she sees fit for your crimes.” Nicole didn’t waver as she recited the lines she had practiced so many times in her training to become a member of the Royal Guard. They were essential to learn for cases such as this. All criminals were read their rights upon arrest by the civilian police. But all criminals against the Crown were informed that their rights had been stripped. It was a legality to avoid any chance of a defense attorney being able to find a loophole while pleading a criminals case. Luckily, in the Monarchy, the Queen had final say so most of the time there was no negotiating once the final punishment was dealt out.

There were gasps around the room as the scene unfolded. It was easy to tell that this had been the most unexpected thing in the world. Everyone on that court, everyone who had worked with Doc for years, had trusted him. To hear he had committed treason was a shock to everyone who knew him.

“Lady Haught I believe you are mistaken” Doc grunted out as he was pulled off of the wall by Nicole now that she had the handcuffs secured. His head was turned as she pushed him out of the room and started to lead him down the corridor. “Please, Nicole, you know I would never-”

“Lady Haught” Nicole hissed at him in a fierce tone as her eyes shot him a deathly glare. Yes, she hated being addressed by any title she may hold but in this moment he did not get the privilege to speak to her on a personal level. In this moment she wanted him to know he was so far beneath her that she hadn’t made him lick her boot.

“Lady…” Doc tried again but when he caught a glimpse of her firm glare he gave up. Instead he hung his head in front of him and walked out silently. Everyone that they passed by as they wound their way through the Palace corridors was shocked by what they saw. Doc had been the advisor to the Throne for longer than most in that position. He had sat next to Wynonna’s grandfather as the youngest advisor in modern history. He had been Wynonna’s father’s right hand man for his entire reign. He had even been right by Wynonna’s side the entire time she had taken over the Crown. So seeing him being marched out in handcuffs caused a palpable shockwave to rip through the Palace.

Nothing else was said as Nicole pushed Doc along the corridors. They finally found their way to the
underground garage where most employees within the Palace parked their vehicles. Waiting for them when they stepped through the steel doors into the dark structure was Dolls. He gave Nicole a smile when he saw her then motioned toward a police car waiting just a few feet away “Haught.”

“Dolls” Nicole acknowledged his greeting with one of her own. They traded satisfied smirks before Nicole guided Doc to the car. One of the guardsmen opened the back door for her and she none-too-gently helped push Doc down and into his seat. Once he was inside she gave a heavy swing to the door that ended with a slam that echoed throughout the vicinity. It was a small victory but it was satisfying nonetheless.

“Make sure you unload him in the back alley of the prison” Nicole told the driver of the car with a nod. “We don’t want any press getting wind of this before we can get the others.”

“Yes ma’am” The man gave a quick salute then settled himself quickly into the driver side seat. Two other guardsmen filled the other two seats of the car before it was guided swiftly away from Nicole and Dolls toward its final destination.

Nicole watched until the car was gone. Once it was out of sight she let out a happy sigh and looked back at Dolls. She gave a solitary nod before her smile faded. When she spoke all joy from what she had just done was gone from her tone “One down.”

“Let’s go get the rest” Dolls agreed with a nod. He motioned for her to follow and soon they were making their way back toward the helicopter they had flown there in. Both of them were in silent agreement that they could congratulate each other later. They had a bigger threat to take down and until then their job was not done.

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“That was Nicole” Waverly said with a smile as she came back into Wynonna's bedroom after being summoned out to take an important phone call. She moved to sit back at the side of the bed and reached for the cards she had set down when she left the room “They just got Doc and he’s on the way to the jail. He was surprised which she said meant there's a good chance the Hardys have no idea they're coming.”

Wynonna nodded but her eyes did not leave the cards in her hands. She shifted a few cards around to change their order than motioned to the pile of cards in the middle of the small table that was positioned over her lap “It's your turn.”

Waverly perked an eyebrow at Wynonna's complete lack of interest in what was going on. She stared at her sister blankly for a few heartbeats in complete confusion. She was absolutely baffled at her behavior. So when nothing more came from her sister she finally huffed and gave her head a shake “Okay what is your deal today?”

“What do you mean?” Wynonna finally looked up at her sister with a false innocence in her eyes. “Are you kidding me?” Waverly puffed out a breathe of a laugh and gave her head another shake. “You were so excited yesterday. You were smiling and being your sassy self, making jokes and teasing us, and you were all about making these arrests. Now…” She motioned vaguely at Wynonna where she sat in the bed and shrugged “It seems like you could not give two shits about anything.”

Wynonna just shrugged blandly and looked back at her cards. She drew in a deep breath and tried to pretend nothing was up. “I guess the excitement of not being dead has worn off. I'm just really tired and sore today.”
“That's bullshit” Waverly said firmly. She could tell when her sister was hiding something and she was not going to let her get away with it now. “You're drugged up enough to not feel any pain and before Nicole came in this morning you were all smiles. So I'm going to ask you again what's going on.” She perked an eyebrow and folded her arms across herself firmly now in a way of showing her sister she meant business.

“Come on, man” Wynonna groaned and gave her eyes a roll as she looked up at her sister. Her head shook slightly and the look in her eyes told Waverly that whatever was going on was something she did not want to discuss. “I promise I'm not hiding anything important from you. I'm just…” She let her head shake again and let out a heavy sigh “…I think my head is still a bit fuzzy from the coma and I'm having trouble regulating thoughts and logic and putting everything in the right place.”

Now Waverly felt bad for pushing her sister. She frowned and reached out to take Wynonna by the hand. She gave a soft squeeze and offered a sad smile “I'm sorry. I guess I'm so relieved you're alive that I forget you were unconscious for a month. It must be hard coming back and trying to catch up with everything that happened while you were asleep.”

Wynonna just nodded and dropped her eyes from her sister. She didn't want Waverly to look into her eyes and see there was much more going on in her head. So she agreed with the idea that it must be hard adjusting to what had happened because, well it was, and left it at that. The last thing Waverly needed was more stress caused by her overdramatic sister.

Waverly sighed again before letting go of her sister's hand in favor if reaching for her cards once more. Silence settled over them as they resumed their game. Waverly knew Wynonna must be going through so much that it was hard to sort out but there was a part of her that felt like that wasn't what had Wynonna acting weird. She couldn't explain it but her gut was telling her something specific was going on in her sister's mind. She wouldn't push anymore at the moment. She just hoped Wynonna would open up to her soon. Now more than before it was important to lean on each other for everything especially if they were going to get through all they had coming toward them.

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The helicopter flight from the Earp Palace to the Hardy’s private beach house was only a couple hours but it felt like days. It had not felt as long as the one Nicole had taken on her way to see Wynonna once she had first woken up but it was close. She was nervous. What if Doc had tipped them off somehow? What if someone else within the Royal Court had told them what had happened? What if they were met with resistance in the form of the military forces that resided in the Hardy’s territory? There was so much that could go wrong.

They landed the helicopter just a few miles away from the beach. They were met with the local branch of police there and briefed immediately about the Hardy family’s movements. They were all still hanging out at the private beach which was good news. It meant they had not gotten wind of Doc’s arrest. At least they hoped as much. They could be hanging out on the beach as a decoy while they put together some other sort of sneaky attack or something just as devious. It was growing increasingly clear that the Hardy family was more cunning than they had first thought.

Once everyone was briefed on the plan they all got into the police vehicles and made their way toward the private beach. No one really talked much. Dolls and Nicole shared the backseat of one of the cars while their other men they had brought with them were in some of the other vehicles. They wanted to bring more cars and more manpower because they had more people to detain. They wanted to make sure the Hardys were outnumbered so they would hopefully surrender more quickly.

As their car approached the gate that surrounded the private beach Nicole’s heart started to race. This was it. They would either be let in willingly or they would have to force their way in. She was
hoping it was the former. She was so tired of fighting that she wanted something to go right.

The window came down on her side of the car as they pulled to a stop at the speaker box at the gate. She reached out and pressed the call button and waited for an answer. There was a bit of a pause but a voice finally answered her call “State your name.”

“Lady Nicole Haught Head of the Royal Guard. I am here on official business in the name of Queen Wynonna.” She spoke confidently even though she was trembling on the inside.

There was another silence from the speaker. Nicole could only hear her heartbeat with every second that passed without a response from the speaker. She worried maybe they were stalling so the Hardy family could flee. If that happened she had no idea what their next move would be.

Finally the silence broke as the box spit out the voice again “You may enter.”

Relief flooded Nicole and she visibly released a full body sigh as the gates in front of them came open. She glanced over to Dolls and gave him a weak smile as if she had not been completely nervous that they would not be let in.

Dolls knew Nicole had been nervous. He gave her an encouraging nod and reached out to put his hand on her shoulder. He gave her a gentle squeeze then pulled his hand back. His eyes turned forward and he focused as their car lurched into motion toward the huge house looming in the distance.

Nicole’s eyes moved about as their car moved. She was on the lookout for anything that seemed off. Were they moving into an ambush? Did they have their military forces set up inside the gate waiting to take them down unexpectedly? Her heart was pounding against her ribcage so hard it was starting to hurt. She wasn’t scared. But she was definitely worried. If something failed and she was, heaven forbid, taken out for good she would not be able to defend Wynonna and Waverly any longer and that thought was what worried her more than anything.

Nothing happened, though. They drove the distance from the gate to the house and all she saw were a few people enjoying a day on the beach. It seemed that some of the families that worked for the Hardys were there enjoying a nice getaway. For a moment she felt bad she was ruining some innocent people’s vacation. It wasn’t their fault their employers were terrible people.

That thought left her head as they came to a stop in the drive of the house. She looked over to Dolls now and gave him a single firm nod as if signalling that it was time to go. She then pushed her door open, stepped out of the car, turned her eyes to the huge mini palace of a house, and smoothed her hand over the front of her uniform shirt. She moved to the front of the car and waited for Dolls to join her. She then looked at the other men getting out of the cars and a sense of calm came over her. It was going to be okay.

They moved as a group to the front door. She cleared her throat as she reached for the bell then stepped back once she pushed the button. She waited what felt like a week before an answer came. The door was pulled open and they were greeted by a very polite looking older woman. She was Lady Hardy, Champ’s mother, and she offered them a gentle smile “Well to what do we owe the pleasure of your visit this beautiful afternoon.”

“We are here on official business of Queen Wynonna” Nicole said with a firm tone. “May we come in?”

“The men at the gate already told me the Queen sent you. Is there a reason for that?” Lady Hardy’s smile didn’t fade but she also did not step aside to let anyone inside.
“We would like to come inside and speak to you, your husband, and your son” Nicole offered with a nod. She had her hands on her hips in an attempt to establish dominance over the situation.

“They’re busy and, quite frankly, we don’t appreciate the interruption to our family vacation so unless you have a good reason for-”

Dolls stepped between the two women now and held up a paper he had brought with him. He didn’t say what it was he just held it up for her to be able to read it. It was the arrest paperwork. He gave her a few seconds to look at it then offered her a cocky smile and nodded at her “We are going to ask politely only once more and then we will be forced to take more extreme actions.”

Lady Hardy’s smile dropped as soon as she read the first few lines on the paper. Her eyes flickered from Dolls to Nicole once before giving them a nod. She stepped aside and moved the door open completely now before motioning for them to go ahead and come inside.

“Thank you” Nicole said with a nod as she led the way inside. She made her way as deeply into the foyer as she could, which was quite a bit considering it was huge, then turned around and waited for the rest of the group to come inside. Once everyone had gathered there and the door was pushed closed she cleared her throat and spoke to Lady Hardy again “Your husband and son, please?”

The other woman gave a nod and motioned to one of her guards standing nearby. The man moved down the hallway a bit and could be heard talking into his radio. It was soft and could not be made out but he definitely had a short conversation with someone on the other end. A few moments later he came back down the hallway into the foyer and nodded at the group of people waiting there “They are on their way.”

An awkward silence now filled the huge foyer of the house. Nicole looked around where she stood and had she not grown up in the Earp Palace she might be impressed with what she saw. Instead she felt gross standing there in a house that had been given to this family over 400 years ago by the Earp family as a gesture of goodwill only to have the Hardys betray them for centuries. They did not deserve the comfort and privilege of a Royal Family. They deserved the fate of a traitor at least twenty times over.

Her thoughts were banished to the back of her mind with the arrival of Lord Hardy and Champ. She blinked and turned her attention to the men. As soon as she saw Champ she felt rage boil through her body. Just his stupid face made her red with anger. Nothing brought out her primal urge to kill like Champ Hardy did.

“No” Champ paused just a step into the room when his eyes fell to Nicole. He pointed at her and shook his head “She’s not supposed to be here. I only agreed to drop the assault charges on her if I was promised she would never come anywhere near me again.”

“Stop being such a princess” Lord Hardy growled at his son. “She is in our home. She would be stupid to assault you again. Especially with so many witnesses this time” The man gave a self-satisfied smirk and motioned to all the people standing in the room. He then focused his eyes on Nicole and folded his hands together in front of him “You aren’t here to cause more ugliness between the countries two oldest standing Royal families, are you?”

Nicole was pulsating from head to toe with rage. She let out a sharp exhale through her nose and clenched her jaw. If she had the chance she would punch his head from his shoulders and not regret it for a single second. She could see now just why Champ was such a monster. He took after his disgustingly misogynistic father.

“Actually” Dolls stepped forward now because he knew that he was more inclined to keep a cool
head in this situation because he was not personally involved. He moved toward Lord Hardy and that cocky little smirk he got at the front door was there again as he once more raised the paper he held up so the man could read it. Instead of letting him read it, though, he started to recite what the paper said “By order of the Queen the following individuals have been charged with conspiracy to commit Regicide and treason…”

“This is a witch hunt!” Lord Hardy yelped out as panic moved over his features when he realized what was happening. He slapped the paper out of Dolls’ hands and stepped away from him. He put his arm out to move Champ back with him before using his other arm to motion to the various guardsmen standing around his foyer protecting them. “Cease them! Do not let them touch us!”

Everyone that came with Nicole reached for their guns.

“Stop!” Lady Hardy lifted her hand and everyone froze. She looked around the room slowly. Once everyone put their guns away she looked over to her husband and son. She gave a single nod to the men and her tone was serious when she spoke “Go with them willingly, dear. Let’s not make this any harder than it needs to be.”

This was surprising to hear to everyone around. Lord Hardy huffed and his head gave a quick shake. He was going to argue but his wife lifted her hand to quiet his appeal. She then looked at Nicole and Dolls and motioned for them to go ahead “Peacefully, please.”

This snapped everyone into action. Nicole grabbed her handcuffs and Dolls did the same. They moved over to the Hardy men and Nicole showed Champ the cuffs before giving him a firm nod “Champ Hardy, by order of the Queen, you are under arrest.”

“Don’t you dare touch me” Champ growled and lifted his hand to point at her again.

Dolls had snapped the cuffs on Lord Hardy’s wrists and handed the man over to one of the other men they had come with. He perked an eyebrow at Champ and stepped closer “Are you actively refusing to follow orders given to you by your Queen?”

Champ shook his head and stepped back from the both of them. He looked at Nicole and his pointed finger stiffened. “I don’t want her to lay a hand on me.”

“Too bad” Nicole growled as her hand snapped down against the wrist of the hand he held up toward her. She then quickly used the other hand to slap the first cuff around his wrist. With one quick motion she swung his arm down and spun him so she had his arm pinned behind his back.

Champ started to fight now. His free elbow swung backwards as he started to thrash in Nicole’s grip. “Unhand me you disgusting bitch.”

The elbow that was swung backwards would have hit Nicole in the side of the head had Dolls not seen it coming. He reached out and used his forearm to block the swing. He then quickly snapped Champ’s arm down and twisted it up against his back. With it pinned in place now he gave Nicole a nod for her to go ahead and slap the other side of the cuffs on.

Nicole gave Dolls a grateful smile for him having stopped her from being hit in the head. She made quick work of handcuffing Champ completely before tugging him fiercely backwards. She sidestepped and used the momentum to swing him so he was now facing toward the exit. Her grip on his wrists tightened and she used her foot to push at his knees to encourage him to walk “If you don’t walk on your own we will drag you out of here.”

Champ tried his best to wiggle himself free but found out quickly it was useless. He glanced over his
shoulder at Nicole with a scowl and tried to spit at her but it just landed on his own arm.

Nicole smirked at that. It was small but it was a victory nonetheless. She reached up now with the hand not holding into Champ's wrists and shoved his head forward “I will be sure to tell your cellmate in prison that you're a spitter.”

Dolls smirked at the joke from Nicole as she passed by. He watched her go then turned around look at Lady Hardy now. He gave a sorrowful shrug and lifted a pair of cuffs now “Your name is on our list.”

The woman didn't argue. She simply lifted both of her wrists toward Dolls and gave him a nod. She watched him click the handcuffs in place before letting out a heavy sigh “I am willing to tell you everything. But I want my freedom in exchange.”

“That is not up to me but I will pass on the message to the legal team” Dolls said with a sincere nod as he put his hand on the woman's back and started to lead her out of the house.

The local police cars that they had come in all contained prisoners now. Along with the members inside the home that had been detained their team had sought out and taken a few other senior members of the family. By now the majority of the people who had been on the beach for the vacation were gathered near the drive watching the scene unfold. Some of the extended members of the Hardy family were arguing but everyone else just started in shock. It seemed their betrayal of the Crown had been kept secret from most people in their inner circle.

Once she had ensured Champ had been locked in his assigned car Nicole walked around to the rest if the vehicles. She looked into each one to verify they were all occupied before she made her way over to Dolls. She gave him a single nod and motioned to all of the cars behind them “It looks like they are all present and accounted for. I can't believe we really pulled this off.”

“Yeah, well, most of them are already ready to talk which probably means our first guess of who was involved was wrong. But that is what the lawyers are for” Dolls looked up from where he had been looking over the arrest orders to be sure they had everyone. He gave Nicole a slight smile and extended his hand to her “Our job here is done, Haught. You did well.”

Nicole nodded and took Dolls hand. She gave it a firm shake before dropping her hand and shrugging “I am just glad it's over.”

“Hopefully” Dolls said with a shrug as he looked around the scene. There were eight police cars with prisoners in them and several dozen bystanders watching. He looked back at Nicole and nodded once “Let's just hope there's no radical backlash from their loyal followers.”

“You really think that could happen?” Nicole frowned with worry now at she glanced around the crowd watching as if she could pick out who might attempt something in retaliation.

Dolls gave a slight shrug then motioned to the car he was standing next to “Radical political action is not anything new, Haught. But we don't need to worry about that right now.” He pulled the door to the car open now and gave Nicole a soft smile “Right now you need to go home and get some rest. Your job here is done. You get to go back to protecting the Queen and Princess.”

Nicole nodded but was not really put at ease. She wouldn't argue though. Instead she moved to sit down in the car. She let Dolls shut her door then she settled back against her seat. Dolls was right in saying she needed some rest. She had been so wound up and worried for longer than she could say so even one night of rest sounded amazing.
“This will never stand, you bitch. My legal team will get me out of these charges and then you and those Earp whores will be sorry.”

Nicole let out a long exhale of annoyance as Champ’s words filled the car. She had wanted to be the one to detain and escort him but now she thought that might have been a bad idea. Even if the ride to the local prison was not a long one she knew it was going to be obnoxious with Champ barking in her ear the entire time.

She gave the driver a nod to go ahead and start their journey toward the prison before she turned around to look at Champ in the backseat. She gave him a forced smile and spoke in a fake cheerful tone “Every word you say from here on out is being recorded and will be used to put you away for life so, please, threaten the Crown again because I would love to hear the Queen add yet another life sentence to the time your crimes have already amassed.”

This shut Champ up. He kicked the back of Nicole’s seat as he flopped back against his own. He shook his head and stared out the window now as dread started to fill him.

Nicole watched Champ pout in the backseat for a moment before turning back around in her own seat with a satisfied smirk on her lips. For as much as herself and Wynonna hated the power the Crown possessed she was grateful for one perk at the moment. She was glad Wynonna would get the justice of putting the Hardy family in jail for life for what they had done to her. It wouldn’t atone for the centuries of betrayal but it would bring peace of mind to the remaining Earps and allow them to live the rest of their lives peacefully. Another small victory but important nonetheless.

With this thought in mind Nicole enjoyed the rest of the drive to the prison. She couldn’t wait to drop Champ off then head back to the cabin. She had forgotten all about the awkwardness of that morning with Wynonna. At this moment all that mattered was seeing her family and knowing she had done what she could to keep them protected. That was all she had ever really wanted in life.

At least she thought that was all. She was yet to realize that life had a surprise in store for her.

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Even a puppy can only take being kicked so many times before it bites back

By the time Nicole had finished processing all the arrests and made her way back to the cabin it was late in the night. She was exhausted but she was also very pumped up. There was a part of her that felt like they had just closed a really bad chapter in their story and they were now looking forward to the beginning of a new one. A better one. A chapter where only positive things happened.

Needless to say she knew that sleep would be nearly impossible. So as soon as she got off the helicopter she made her way toward Wynonna’s room. She didn’t change her clothes, she didn’t get food, she just went straight to her best friend’s room.

She paused just outside the door before going in as the memory of that morning washed over her. The way she had been so anxious to say good morning and had actively avoided Wynonna up until she had to leave. How Wynonna had just dismissed her when she had come to say goodbye as if she couldn’t care less about what she was going to do.

A part of her was nervous now. What if she was received the same way? What if Wynonna just didn’t want to see her? No. She had to shake that thought away. That didn’t matter anymore. That was part of the bad chapter that had closed. She had to march in there with her head held high and a positive outlook. She had to be ready to face whatever mood Wynonna was in because now was not the time to wallow. Now was the time to thrive and move toward the future they had been working at achieving for months now.

So she drew in a deep breath and she pushed the door open. She came into the room with a smile on her lips. She took three steps into the room and when her eyes landed on Wynonna asleep in her bed her smile faded. She bit her lip and almost felt bad she might wake her. But it didn’t stop her from moving right over to her bedside and looking down at her best friend sleeping there. She let out a soft sigh and her hand reached down to brush some of her hair from her eyes. She really did look peaceful when she slept.

“You’re home” Waverly’s whisper came now from behind Nicole.

Nicole whirled around quickly and the surprise on her face was evident. She had not known Waverly was there and it had startled her. She let out a breath of a laugh and nodded at the girl who was sitting on the big chair in the corner of the room. She moved over to her now with another nod of her head “I didn’t see you there. Did I wake you up?”

“Nope” Waverly said softly and lifted the book she had laid in her lap to indicate she had been sitting there reading. She looked Nicole up and down slowly and a soft smile came to her lips “I’m so happy to see you’re alright. I mean, I know you had Dolls and a bunch of your men with you but I was still worried something might go wrong.”

“I was worried the same thing the entire time” Nicole admitted with a soft laugh. She moved to lean back against the windowsill that was next to the chair where Waverly sat. She smiled down at her friend then lifted her eyes to look across the room to where Wynonna slept. She let out a soft sigh and let it linger in the air for a moment before she spoke “I kept thinking how awful I would feel if something bad happened to me and you two were left here alone to deal with the aftermath. Like…what if the Hardys escaped and came after you guys and I wasn’t there to protect you?”

“That’s crazy” Waverly reached out and put her hand on Nicole’s arm gently. “I know for a fact you will always be here to protect us.”
Nicole smiled slightly at that and looked down at Waverly now. There was such a kindness in her eyes and a sincerity in her tone that it made Nicole’s heart skip a beat. Waverly had always been so innately sweet and she was glad to see that after all they had been through that quality was not gone from the girl.

“Plus we have control over all military personnel in the country so if they did attack us they would be severely outmanned” Waverly continued with a soft huff now. When Nicole looked at her with surprise she just shrugged and let her eyes move to look at her sister “The things I’ve been briefed on since stepping into the role of Interim Queen.”

Nicole let out a soft breath of a laugh at that. Her eyes moved back to Wynonna and she nodded slightly “It makes you really respect the Hell out of everything she’s had to deal with since her coronation, huh?”

Waverly let out a heavy breath and nodded just once. She kept her eyes focused on her sleeping sister as she thought about Nicole’s words for a moment. A small smile lifted at the corner of her mouth and when she spoke it was firm “I used to think I was ready to be Queen but now I know I couldn’t have done it. Not the way she has. Not under the circumstances that she’s had to endure.”

Nicole nodded in silent agreement. There was no one in the world who was stronger and braver than her best friend. She had always believed it and when Wynonna had been thrust into the Crown unexpectedly she had known without a doubt that she could do it. It made her proud to be by her side through it all. It made her swell with complete joy to see Wynonna proving everyone wrong.

The two of them stayed in silence for a few moments. They both thought about Wynonna’s strength and all she had gone through. Waverly had lost her father too, of course, but she had dealt with it in a way that was selfish. Wynonna had never had that chance and that made her feel a little guilty. She knew she had been terrible to her sister in the beginning. She wished she could go back and be more supportive. It hurt her heart to look back at her own actions. She felt partially responsible for the string of events that had led them to where they were at the very moment.

She let out a heavy sigh and looked away from her sister now. Her head shook and she had to draw in a deep breath to stop herself from getting emotional. She had to be strong now. Even if Wynonna was awake and alive that did not mean she was completely healthy. She still needed to heal. She needed time to get back to her old self. Waverly knew it was her turn to be strong and do all she could do to ensure everything was in place for Wynonna’s return. So they could succeed in abolishing the Monarchy, putting the Hardy family in jail, and freeing their own family of the burden of the Crown for the rest of time.

“Can I ask you something?” Nicole broke the silence after a minute. She glanced down to Waverly now as she spoke, hoping she had not startled her.

Waverly nodded and her eyes lifted back to Wynonna for a moment. She drew in a steadying breath then lifted her eyes to Nicole “You can always ask me anything.”

Nicole smiled at Waverly’s sincerity again. She kind of wished there had been a spark when they had kissed because Waverly was an absolutely incredible human being. She pushed the thought away, though, and focused on her question. She licked her lips and glanced back at Wynonna “Was she acting weird today or was that just me?”

Waverly let out a puff of a laugh and her head shook as her eyes fell back to her sister. “You know, I noticed she seemed a little off. When I asked her about it she just said she was having a hard time keeping her head clear since waking up. Like everything going on was so much to process and it was all getting a little mixed up in her head and she was having a difficult time sorting it all out
Nicole just nodded at that. She wondered now if the conversation they had shared in bed the night before was one of the things Wynonna was having a hard time sorting out. She knew she had definitely been thrown for a loop by it all and she didn’t even have a head injury. She couldn’t imagine how hard it must be for Wynonna to try and piece it all together through the fogginess that must be lingering in her head.

Letting out a sigh now she looked back to Waverly. She reached out and put her hand on top of her head. She let her hand slowly stroke down through her hair down to her shoulder. When Waverly looked up and met her eyes she gave the girl a smile “You should get some sleep, Your Majesty. I can stand watch.”

Waverly let out a soft laugh at that. She reached up and took hold of Nicole’s hand. She drew it out of her hair and in front of her face. She cupped both hands around it and lightly kissed at her her thumb before squeezing the hand gently “You really are too good to us. You know that right?”

“There is no such thing as being too good to family, Waves” Nicole said gently as her hand was released now from Waverly’s grip. She motioned to where Wynonna was asleep and gave a little shrug “I am too pumped up from the day’s events that I can’t sleep anyway so I might as well hold her hand or something. I feel bad I wasn’t here when she came out of the coma.”

“Don’t feel bad” Waverly stood now from her chair. She gathered the blanket that had been draped over her lap and her book before standing completely upright next to Nicole. Her eyes drifted back to Wynonna and she gave a nod “I gave you the orders that sent you away. She knows that. She’s just glad you made it back as quickly as you could and she will be glad you’re home again.” Her eyes looked back to Nicole now and that’s when she saw it. The way Nicole was looking at Wynonna in that moment was the same way her mother used to look at her father before she died.

Waverly bit her lip as she felt her heart twist in her chest. She had been kind of teasing Nicole a while back when she had made the passing comment that she had been in love with Wynonna for years. But seeing the way she looked at her sister in that moment? She had no doubt about it now. She just wondered if Nicole was aware of it, too.

She smiled and gently gave Nicole’s back a light pat before she moved passed her now. “Don’t stay up too late” She said softly as she reached the door and looked back at her friend. “I have to do a press conference in the morning about the arrests and you have to escort me. You are still Head of the Royal Guard and, well…” She motioned to Wynonna and then herself and shrugged “…she’s not going anywhere for awhile.”

Nicole let out a soft laugh and glanced to Waverly with a nod “I’ll be there.”

Waverly nodded and returned the smile. She watched Nicole look back to her sister now and her heart did another flip in her chest. She knew that no matter what happened from here on out Wynonna would never have to be alone. She would be taken care of for the rest of her life and not because it was Nicole’s job.

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Nicole let out a soft laugh and glanced to Waverly with a nod “I’ll be there.”

Waverly nodded and returned the smile. She watched Nicole look back to her sister now and her heart did another flip in her chest. She knew that no matter what happened from here on out Wynonna would never have to be alone. She would be taken care of for the rest of her life and not because it was Nicole’s job.

“Sweet dreams” Waverly said softly before she finally moved out of the room. She paused just outside the doorway and drew in a deep breath. A soft smile came to her lips as she processed what she had just witnessed. She drew comfort from knowing that Wynonna was truly loved. She just hoped her sister felt the same. It would break her heart to see Nicole, the most genuinely loving and caring person she knew, love someone who didn’t love her back.

She frowned at the thought as she moved now down the hall toward her own room. There was no
way Nicole was going to come out of this with a broken heart, right?

Nicole waited until Waverly left the room, and then she waited a few moments after that to make sure she was really gone, before she moved over to Wynonna’s bed. She smiled even though her friend couldn’t see her and took a seat on the chair that was always beside the bed. She reached out now and gently took hold of her hand. She let out a sigh as her eyes watched her thumb pass slowly back and forth over Wynonna’s knuckles.

She sat there silently for a few minutes just holding her hand. She felt like she had a million things she wanted to say but what was the point of saying them. Wynonna was asleep and couldn’t respond to any of them. Would she even want her to respond? Maybe she should just say a few of the things on her mind. It was way less scary to talk about stuff when you knew the other person wouldn’t hear them. It was like getting things off your chest with no risk of getting a response you didn’t want to hear.

Then again Wynonna was asleep and not in a coma so her talking could easily wake her. She let out a heavy sigh at the thought. When did being Wynonna’s friend become so hard? They had always had such an effortless bond. Even when she had been away with the Army for years they could come together and it would be like no time had passed. So why did it seem so hard now?

Things had changed. Wynonna had become Queen. Nicole had become Head of the Royal Guard. There had been scandal and sabotage and betrayal. There had been attacks and family secrets and tragedy. They had been through so much in such a short span of time that it was only natural to feel a change in the dynamic of their bond.

Yet it hadn’t really seemed to affect them too much. They had stuck together. Hell they had even seemed to draw closer through it all. Even Waverly had seemed to be brought into their little bubble of a friendship. The three of them had taken on the us against the world mentality and it had only aided in strengthening their bond. The three of them felt they could take on anything.

So why was it that Nicole felt like she couldn’t handle this? Whatever this was. Because through everything that had happened the one thing that had remained unchanged was her friendship with Wynonna. That had not been touched. The walls of their safe little world had come crumbling down and their friendship had risen out of it unscathed. Nothing had broken them.

Nothing, that is, until the conversation they had engaged in the night before. There was a moment that had seemed so innocent and yet it was the epicenter of everything that now unnerved Nicole. Wynonna had taken her hand and looked into her eyes and spoken words so genuine that it had changed every moment they would share from that time forward. It had only been a day but it felt like that moment had already destroyed everything sacred that Nicole had held so dear.

Why was that? Well that question was easy to answer but Nicole was just too afraid to admit it. Being honest with yourself was sometimes the hardest thing in the world to do. Because if she admitted it to herself it was now her truth, it was now part of who she was, and that was just too terrifying to face. She had dealt with so many defining moments in her life and done so with ease. Never had she faced something like this. Something that would completely change who she was as a person. Not even realizing she was gay had been this scary. No this was at an entirely new level of scary and she was petrified by what it meant.

She let out a heavy sigh now as her eyes lifted to Wynonna’s face. In the dim light of the room all of Wynonna’s features seemed softer. Her friend was always so tough, so sarcastic and sassy, and she knew that was a defense mechanism. But Wynonna had never been afraid to be soft with Nicole. She had let her walls down around her best friend without hesitation and that’s what really fortified their friendship. That there was no one else in the world Wynonna felt safe to be herself around. Not
even her sisterly bond with Waverly allowed her to be completely vulnerable. No she had always felt she had to carry a sense of strength around Waverly. It was her job as an older sister, to protect Waverly, so she never completely relaxed around her.

But Nicole was different. Nicole had never judged her or shamed her for having human emotions. If she had a moment where she was uncertain Nicole never once made her feel guilty for it. Nicole had been her safety net for her entire life. She was grateful for that and she had made sure that Nicole knew that.

The thought made Nicole smile. She remembered very few moments between them where Wynonna had done her best to thank Nicole for always being there for her. Wynonna wasn’t the best with emotions and being vulnerable but that hadn’t mattered. Nicole understood her without her having to explain too much and that was just another root that had helped their friendship bloom and thrive.

She looked down now at where she held Wynonna’s hand and her heart twisted slightly. She flashed back to the night before and the way Wynonna had so tenderly taken hold of her hand. It had felt different. Never had she thought a touch from Wynonna was anything but a simple act of friendly affection but as she looked back at it now she saw it was more. Wynonna was, in her own Wynonna way, communicating her feelings to her. But what exactly were those feelings?

That is where Nicole found herself most confused. Had Wynonna simply been expressing her gratitude for Nicole once more being there for her and fighting her fight for her while she was in a coma? Or had there been more behind it. She had always been pretty good at deciphering what Wynonna meant without her having to explain it but this time she was not as clear.

Why was it that Nicole couldn’t decode it this time? Was it because the message was more encrypted than usual or was it because Nicole was searching for more depth in it than there actually was? It all seemed to go back to the truth that Nicole was fighting off inside herself. The truth that had probably been there for years laying in wait to be discovered. The truth that had surged to life when Wynonna had taken her hand and looked into her eyes and told her just how important Nicole was to her.

Nicole shook the thought away as her heart raced in her chest. She lifted her eyes back to Wynonna’s face as a heavy breath escaped her mouth. She had done nothing but think about Wynonna while she had been gone on her mission for a month. She had spent more nights awake, her mind spinning in uncertainty, than she had spent asleep. It had been the only thought consistently in her mind for the entirety of her trip. Yet she still had been unable to admit why she thought only of Wynonna. She had told herself it was because it was her job to protect her and she had failed. She had convinced herself it was because Wynonna had been her only confidant for most of her life. What she had never dared discuss with herself was the real reason why her gut ached when the thought of being without Wynonna in her life flooded her in the middle of the night.

Then Wynonna had woken up and they had shared such a moment where Wynonna had looked right into her soul and spoke in a new tone and everything had changed. The moment, the two of them sharing a late night talk in bed, was one they had been through countless times before. The words, Wynonna saying Nicole was important to her, were ones that had been spoken in various ways throughout their friendship. Yet they had been so different and so much more meaningful in that moment and it haunted Nicole now.

Why? Had it been the look in Wynonna’s eyes? The tone of her voice? The way she held her hand? Nicole didn’t know. She couldn’t pinpoint it and that was most maddening of all.

She was frustrated now. She was upset at herself and her own confusion. Maybe she was upset at her own cowardice. She also found herself upset at Wynonna. What right did she have to wake up from a near death experience having apparently had an epiphany that she just had to share with
Nicole. Why couldn’t she keep that to herself? It wasn’t that hard. Nicole had done it many times throughout her life. In fact she was currently doing it. So why couldn’t Wynonna? Stupid Wynonna and her dumb late night intimate confessions.

She shook her head again to push the thought away. It was not Wynonna’s fault. She had just gone through literal trauma. That tends to change a person. It enlightens them and makes them see things differently. She was just being honest. She was just expressing something as genuinely and honestly as she could. She could not be blamed for feeling.

Nicole felt bad for having silently cursed her best friend for opening up to her. She let out another heavy sigh and lifted Wynonna’s hand to her lips. She lightly kissed at her knuckles once before bringing their hands to rest back against the bed. She gave her head a shake as she stared at Wynonna sound asleep in her bed. Her heart gave a little flutter and she found herself smiling at the feeling.

She couldn’t be mad. She couldn’t blame Wynonna for her vulnerability. She had to feel grateful for it. Because through everything it was still Nicole that Wynonna sought solace in. That meant more to her than she could say. It was one of her most favorite things that the two of them shared. She cherished it. It made her heart sing with joy knowing that she would always be the one person Wynonna looked to for comfort in her most delicate emotional states.

Maybe that’s why this was so hard. What if that changed? What if Nicole was honest with herself and she told Wynonna and that changed their friendship. What if she lost what she held most sacred? It was too risky for her. She didn’t have a lot in life that was her own but Wynonna had always been for her. That side of Wynonna that was soft and funny and just a genuinely good person had been only for her. She selfishly did not want to share that. Even more so she did not want to lose that.

Then it clicked. Nicole looked a little wide eyed at Wynonna as if her best friend had heard the conclusion she had just reached in her own mind too. She let out a very soft, defeated sounding laugh and gave her head a shake. She spoke now, in a whisper almost too soft to hear because she did not want to wake Wynonna, with a slight tremble in the words “I think I just went through the stages of grief and I haven’t even lost you.”

She looked down at where she held Wynonna’s hand in her own. She gave a very light squeeze then released her grip. She stood now from the bed and leaned over her friend to touch a very light brush of a kiss to her forehead. She pulled back and took a moment to look at the girl she had never had to worry about losing before in her life. She had always pictured the two of them side by side. Never had a scenario crossed her mind where the two of them were not together. But now it was a real fear.

It was in that moment she decided to never risk it. Because losing Wynonna in her life was not worth anything good that might come from admitting the truth she was wrestling with. So she silently promised herself to push it down and never say a thing about it. She’d rather live by Wynonna’s side forever as friends than risk losing her because of how deep her feelings for her best friend ran.

“I love you too much to lose you, kid” Nicole whispered with a nod. Her eyes lingered on her friend for just a moment longer before she took a step back from the bed. She moved across the room and paused at the door. She looked back and a smile came to her lips. She could be happy for the rest of her life having her best friend beside her. That was enough for her. It always had been and it would continue to be so. Of that she was certain. She nodded in silent agreement to herself before turning and finally leaving the room.

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Wynonna had been asleep when Waverly and Nicole had to leave for the press conference. They
had stopped by to say goodbye but had not wanted to wake her. So they both gave her a kiss on the forehead then made their way to the helicopter.

They were both pretty quiet for most of the flight. The sun was barely rising as they flew through the air and they were both still fairly tired. It was a beautiful sight, watching the sunrise from above, and they had taken a moment to comment on it and share it together. They had both agreed they wished Wynonna could have seen it and made a pact to make sure the three of them did this together once everything had been taken care of and Wynonna was at full strength again.

They arrived at the Palace and were immediately rushed through the corridors by Rosita and the rest of the PR team. They were briefing Waverly on everything that had been said about the arrests and the Hardy family overnight. They had prepared a statement for her and were going over which topics to stay clear of when answering questions from the media. They gave a rundown of how long the press conference was to last and how many questions she was going to have to answer.

They led them into the official press room inside the Palace. There were already members of the media waiting. There were also already cameras set up and as soon as they entered the room flashes started to go off. Nicole put a hand on Waverly’s back as a way of helping to guide her to the podium since all of the flashes were kind of washing out the room and making it hard to see. Honestly the room was lit enough that the flashes should not be necessary.

They moved to the podium and Waverly paused before approaching the microphone. She looked up at Nicole with uncertainty in her eyes. It was easy to see she had suddenly become overwhelmed by the size of what had happened. The entire country was buzzing with the news that one Royal family had tried to kill another. It was basically unheard of it in the modern era of the Monarchy.

“Just stick to the statement Rosita gave you” Nicole said very softly, very calmly, and gave a nod. “If you don’t want to answer a question than politely decline. You have a team of lawyers and publicists to back you up and fill in any blanks you leave, okay? Just state the facts of what happened and then we can go home. You got this” She smiled now very lightly “Everyone loves you, Waverly. Just be your bubbly self. But not too bubbly. You don’t want people thinking you’re happy about this.”

Waverly let out a soft laugh and rolled her eyes “Not your best pep talk but thank you.” She gave Nicole a nod to let her know she really was grateful before she turned toward the microphone. As she approached it more flashes immediately started to go off. She winced at the brightness of it but did not pause her approach. Once she made it to the podium she gripped the sides of it tightly and leaned into the mic. She cleared her throat then lifted one hand to indicate everyone should stop what they were doing and be silent.

The room immediately died down. No more flashes. No more excited mumbles between people. You could hear a pin drop in the room. Waverly smiled at that. Having the Royal power to just command a room into silence was something she would definitely miss once the entire Monarchy was gone.

She took a moment to look over the room before she nodded and looked down at the statement that Rosita had handed her earlier. She read the first few lines then started to speak.

“Thank you all for coming today. I know the news of the stunning arrests of a number of traitors has come as a surprise to the nation. I am here to lay to rest any concerns the people of the country of The Ghost River Triangle may have. The Crown has always taken pride in putting the safety of the people first and this case is no different. Please rest assured that though the investigation is in the early stages we are certain that there is no further threat to the Queen or any other member of the Royal Parliament. The public that we, the members of the Royal Parliament, are sworn to protect were never in direct danger as the acts of violence were directed only toward the Crown.”
Nicole’s eyes scanned the room as she stood just a few feet behind Waverly. Though all members of the media were screened, patted down, and searched that did not mean mistakes weren’t made. Someone could have easily smuggled a weapon in. Hell someone else on the inside could be colluding against the Crown still. There was never any certainty in moments like these. Any regular person could turn into a radical activist with violent motives.

“We strive to bring swift justice to this case so as to be able to move on as a unified people. The Crown and all it’s inner members are no different than the people of this land that we love and care for every day. Be sure that taking care of the amazing citizens of the country will always remain our number one priority. We will do everything in our power to make sure this threat remains neutralized and any future threats are contained before they can act out in violence as they have in this case.”

Nicole’s eyes landed on the back of Waverly and she couldn’t help but smile. This situation was terrible but Waverly had stepped in without hesitation. There was no doubt that when the world looked back on the history of The Ghost River Triangle they would see the last of the Monarchy were the two bravest of them all.

“As more details come to light we will certainly keep our citizens informed. It is my personal promise as Interim Queen that we will be as transparent as possible so as to avoid any rising doubt in the safety of our people and the integrity of the Crown and it’s legal team.” Waverly gave a nod at her final words. She paused to take a look around the room and then motioned to where Rosita stood “We will now field a few questions from the press.”

Rosita nodded at her cue and looked around the crowd. It was her job to pick the members of the media she trusted not to ask the wrong type of questions. She had dealt with every media source and every reporter for years so she knew the ones who would ask questions just to stir up controversy. Though they had nothing to hide they also did not want unnecessary drama to be started so she had to choose carefully.

Finally she motioned to someone in the third row and nodded for them to go ahead and speak their question to Waverly.

“Hi, good morning Princess Waverly” The man was older but had a jolly smile on his face. “I was wondering if, first and foremost, you could update us on Queen Wynonna’s status and if there is any time table for her return to the Royal proceedings.”

“Good morning” Waverly said with a soft smile. She gave a nod at the question before pausing to gather her thoughts. She wanted to make sure to speak clearly, eloquently, honestly, but as vaguely as possible. “Thank you so much for your concern. I know Wynonna appreciates all of the love that she has received from all around the country.” She gave a smile as she paused and looked at a few of the cameras. “Wynonna is doing well. She is growing stronger every day and there is nothing in the prognosis from her doctors that has given us any cause for worry. Her return will depend simply on when her body is ready to handle the demands of being Queen. As I have quickly learned this is not an easy task…” She paused for a laugh, which she got, before she continued “…and it takes a toll on both mind and body. Her endurance is steadily growing and we are confident she will be returning to her rightful place in the very near future.”

Nicole smiled because that was one Hell of a great answer. It must be in the Earp genetics or something because both of the sisters were total naturals at this whole thing.

Rosita had picked the next person to speak now and they were standing and clearing their throat quickly. “It’s an honor to be here, Princess. Thank you for having us.” The woman that spoke was younger than the previous speaker but still had a few years on Waverly. She glanced at her notepad that she had written questions on during Waverly’s speech then looked back to her at the podium
“Can you give us any details about the acts of treason those arrested have committed outside the bombing at the Peace Summit last month?”

Waverly’s soft features that held the calm on her face did not flinch at the question. She knew she could not really answer this question clearly but she did not want to let that show. She simply gave her head a single shake as she spoke “Unfortunately with the investigation still in the early stages they wish to keep all details close to the chest. They are confident that the ones arrested are the only ones involved, though. We can say for certain that all threats from that particular group of people have been contained.”

Rosita gave Waverly an impressed nod at that. The girl was good. She then turned and looked over the crowd. She scanned the room and pointed to one more person. She caught Waverly’s eyes as the person stood to speak and lifted her finger to indicate this was the last question they would take.

Waverly was grateful for that because she was already so exhausted. She had no idea how people before her had been head of the Monarchy for years at a time. She definitely needed a nap. But she smiled at the new person who was standing and listened carefully to the question.

“What can you say about rumors that the explosion at the Peace Summit was all a hoax put on by your inner circle as a means to eliminate the marriage contract between Duke Champ and Queen Wynonna?”

Waverly was baffled. Her calm demeanor faded and was replaced with the surprise she felt at the question. She could not believe they had the audacity to ask that considering that Wynonna had been in a coma for a month and was just now started to regain her strength enough to walk without risking her own health. She wanted to scream at the person for being so insensitive but she knew she couldn’t. So she just cleared her throat and did her best not to show how utterly offended she was.

“Young Queen has been suffering from severe injuries caused by that bomb since the moment it went off. If you think she did that to herself instead of being the honorable and honest ruler that she is than that is your own mistake. Wynonna is a woman of her word and loyal to every agreement she has ever made. This was a blatant act of terror against your Queen and you should be ashamed that you have thought anything else.” She cleared her throat and added a quick “That is all for today. Thank you.”

She turned away from the mic swiftly and Nicole was right there beside her. She slid her arm around her protectively as the two of them made quick work of leaving the room. There were more flashes from cameras and more questions being shouted as they left but neither of them paused on their path toward the door.

As soon as they were out of the room and in the quiet of the corridor Waverly pushed away from Nicole and shook her head. She drew in a deep breath to try and calm herself before she turned to look at her friend. She wiped at a tear that had escaped as emotion rushed through her then motioned angrily toward the door they had just came from “Can you believe that guy?”

“Hey there are people out there that are loyal to the Hardy family, okay? It’s to be expected that people are going to be upset. You can’t let them get to you” Nicole moved over to Waverly slowly, wanting to comfort her, but not wanting to impose herself on her if she did not want it. “So take a few deep breaths and let it go. You can’t linger on it. Don’t let them rattle you. That is exactly what they want. If you react to them it gives life to their ideas that you and Wynonna are inept.”

Waverly closed her eyes and drew in a few deep breaths. She held them for a beat before releasing them slowly. She nodded and finally opened her eyes once she felt she had calmed down. “You’re right. I need to ignore them.”
“You are doing a fantastic job as Queen” Nicole assured her with another firm nod. “Let’s just focus on getting through the day to day now and working on what needs to happen for the abolishment.”

“You are right” Waverly repeated with another deep inhale. She nodded a few times as she slowly released the breath she had drawn in. She offered Nicole a soft smile now and motioned in the direction of the nearest exit “But for now can we just go back to the cabin and get out of here? It’s weird to say but the Palace doesn’t feel like home anymore.”

“I know what you mean” Nicole agreed with a nod before turning and heading down the corridor with Waverly by her side. She was glad she was not the only one who felt that way about the Palace. It was weird to think that the only building you had ever called home could so quickly turn into a place you no longer felt welcome. Instead, she felt, as long as she had Waverly and Wynonna with her it didn’t matter where they were located because she would always be home.

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Once they arrived back home both girls had parted ways to change out of their official Royal Business clothes and into more comfortable clothes. They then met up in the kitchen to grab a quick bite before heading together to Wynonna’s room. When they walked in together Wynonna looked up from the book she had been reading and smiled at the two of them. Her eyes focused first on Waverly and gave her a quick motion to hurry over to her bedside.

“I am so damn proud of you” Wynonna chirped out happily as her sister leaned over her bed to hug her. “You were a rockstar up there. I always knew you’d kick ass at this whole Queen thing.”

Waverly let out a humbled laugh and shook her head slightly “It was all Rosita, honestly. She gave me a statement when I got there and told me what to say.”

“But she didn’t answer the questions for you” Wynonna corrected her sister with a firm point at her. The smile she held as she looked at Waverly told just how proud she was “You handled yourself perfectly, babygirl. Honestly I would have probably leaped off the stage and tackled the last guy for being such a dick bag.”

Waverly laughed softly and gave one nod “Trust me I wanted nothing more than to do that but I just kept thinking about how close we are to accomplishing everything we want and the last thing we needed was a scandal like that. How would it look if I suddenly started tackling reporters and then we announce we are getting rid of the Monarchy as a whole? It will look like we couldn’t handle it so we just decided to run from it or something.”

Wynonna just shrugged at that. She honestly did not care how it was going to look. She knew there would be people who did not agree with it no matter how classy they approached the whole thing. “All I know is you had much more poise than I would have.”

“You’d have been just fine” Waverly said with a roll of her eyes as she sat next to her sister’s bed now.

“Yeah you have quite the knack for eloquence and poise when you’re in Queen mode” Nicole chimed in now, having been standing back a bit while the sisters greeted one another. She approached the bed feeling a little timid because of how cold Wynonna had been the last time they had even attempted to interact.

Wynonna’s eyes shifted from Waverly to Nicole now. She looked her friend up and down slowly then gave a shrug of her shoulders. She was still pretty frustrated by how Nicole had avoided her the morning after their talk that had been more than just a talk. She wasn’t sure how to even approach it
and she certainly didn’t want to do it with Waverly in the room so she decided to ignore it. “Thanks.”

Waverly perked an eyebrow at the response from her sister. She couldn’t hide her surprise as it took over her features in that moment. She stared at Wynonna for a moment in disbelief before she looked over to Nicole. She saw the girl drop her head and she was certain now that she had missed something big between them. She gave off a huffed laugh and motioned between the two of them now “Okay what in the world is going on here?”

“Nothing” Wynonna said quickly enough to cut Nicole off from answering.

Nicole just nodded in agreement as she quickly glanced from Wynonna to Waverly before looking back to the floor.

“No this is not nothing” Waverly shook her head and continued to motion between the other two women. “I’ve seen you two bicker. I’ve seen what it looks like when you have a fight and this is something else. What did I miss?”

“Honestly Waves it’s-”

“Nothing” Wynonna cut Nicole off as she repeated insistently. Her eyes narrowed into a scowl as she looked at Nicole before she slowly looked at her sister and immediately softened her features. She pushed out a fake smile and shrugged her shoulders “I am still pretty upset she thought it was okay to go on a murder spree while I was in a coma. We just don’t see eye to eye on it yet, I guess.”

“Well that’s not true at all” Waverly huffed out and looked between the women again. She could see Nicole standing there with her head hanging and she knew that whatever was going on had nothing to do with what Wynonna had just said. She let out a heavy sigh and focused on her sister now.

“Nicole and I have had extensive discussions about how stupid we both feel at the actions we decided to take in response to the attack. So do you want to try again and this time not lie to me?”

“I’m going to go” Nicole interrupted now. She motioned to the door behind her and gave a shrug “I am going to take a walk around the premises and make sure everything is secure. Maybe I’ll relieve someone on watch for a bit.”

“Nicole you don’t have to-”

“Bye” Wynonna cut Waverly off to hiss the word at Nicole. She narrowed her eyes again in a look that almost dared Nicole to stay in the room now.

Nicole didn’t argue. Honestly she didn’t want to be in the room if Wynonna was going to act this way. So she threw a quick frown at Waverly then turned and left the room without another word. Her heart ached as she rushed away down the hallway. She could not believe how callous Wynonna was being. She had no idea what she had done to warrant this behavior but she didn’t like it. She wanted her best friend back and she would do anything she could to make sure that happened. She just wasn’t sure where to start.

Waverly was stunned. She watched Nicole nearly sprint from the room before her head turned back to look at her sister. Her jaw hung open slightly and her head shook “What in the Hell is wrong with you!”

Wynonna waved her hand to the side in a dismissive manner and gave her head a shake “It’s nothing. She will be just fine. She’s been just fine carrying on without me this far and she will continue to be just fine in the future.”

“Without you?” Waverly nearly coughed the words out she was so shocked by them. Her eyes
fluttered in quick blinks as if she were trying to focus in on what was happening. She huffed out again and motioned to where Nicole had just left “If you think there was a single moment of that woman’s life where she did anything without you on her mind than you are sorely mistaken, Wynonna. Everything has been about you. Every beat of her heart and every breath she has taken has been so she could live a life where you were taken care of and you were safe. For you to ever think that Nicole Haught, the most devoted and loyal person on the planet, would ever do anything without you in mind is quite honestly baffling. Where do you get the notion that she has, to quote you, carried on without you?”

Wynonna just rolled her eyes at her sister. She could be so dramatic sometimes. If only she knew what was going on, what Wynonna had said to Nicole, then maybe she would get it. But she couldn’t tell Waverly that. She would just be overdramatic about that, too. So she just shrugged at her sister and looked down at her own hands folded in her lap “You wouldn’t understand.”

“I wouldn’t understand?” Waverly put a hand to her chest as her mouth dropped again in shock. She looked completely offended now. “I had to grow up watching you two be attached at the hip. There were times I wanted to hate Nicole for stealing my sister away only I couldn’t because she was so damn sweet to me. She knew how important it was to make sure you and I were close, too. She never wanted to do anything that would upset me or take you away from me. Yet she somehow managed to still gain more of your trust and more of your devotion than I did and, you know what,” Waverly shrugged at that “I accept that because I know that if there is anyone in this world that can love you and care for you in my absence, it’s her. She’s been doing it since the moment you two met and I have no doubt she will continue to do it until the day she breathes her last breath. So don’t you dare tell me I wouldn’t understand what the Hell is going on between you two. I’ve seen everything you two have ever shared together. I get you two. I understand you two.”

“It’s complicat-”

“I swear to god if you tell me how complicated it is as an excuse not to talk about it I will strangle you” Waverly nearly growled the words. “Wynonna, if there is one thing in your world that is absolutely the least complicated thing possible it is your friendship with Nicole. It has always been automatic and for you to pretend it’s anything but is really insulting to the two of you.”

Wynonna let out a frustrated huff now and folded her arms. She stared at Waverly with a scowl because she hated how right she was. Nothing about her friendship with Nicole had ever been difficult. She rolled her eyes now and let out a sigh as her arms unfolded. She drew in a deep breath and when she spoke she did her best to do so in a level tone “I am sure it will work itself out but I really, really don’t want to talk about it right now.”

Waverly knew immediately this was a deep issue. It was something personal and Wynonna had a hard time talking about personal things. She had definitely gotten better at it over the years, even confiding in Waverly a lot while Nicole had been away in the Army, but it was still something she hesitated with. She knew that giving Wynonna time and space to work it out was the best way to ensure she would open up when she needed to. So she gave a nod to her sister and spoke very softly “That’s fair. But can I make one suggestion?”

“Shoot” Wynonna mumbled and motioned toward Waverly to indicate she should spit it out. She knew whether she wanted to hear it or not Waverly was going to say it either way.

“Don’t push her away in the meantime” Waverly said gently. She stood now from the chair at the side of the bed and motioned toward the door. “Even a puppy can only take being kicked so many times before it bites back.”

“Waverly, I-”
Waverly put her hand up to stop Wynonna from arguing or making excuses. She motioned to the door and gave a single nod “I am going to leave you alone to think for a while. I’ll check back with you at dinner.” She moved slowly but with determination so that Wynonna wouldn’t interrupt her. She wanted her sister to know she loved her but she was not going to stand for her behavior. She needed to figure her shit out, and fast, because the last thing they needed was a divide between them as they charged forward with their plan of abolishment.

Wynonna frowned as Waverly left. She let out a sigh and looked around. She hated being alone but Waverly was right. She needed to stop pushing people away and figure herself out. Although she thought she had already figured it out. Maybe not. Apparently it was less about figuring herself out and more about figuring out what was going on with Nicole. But that required talking and right now she wasn’t sure she could talk to Nicole without being harsh with her. She had kind of said something pretty serious and Nicole had disappeared afterwards. That tends to wound someone. So maybe she needed to swallow her pride and try again.

Or maybe she would just swallow her feelings and never speak of them again. That seemed way more her style.

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Like I said you don’t have to protect my feelings

After making her way around the grounds surrounding the cabin and checking in with a few of her guards Nicole made her way back inside. She had taken her time while walking around outside so she could clear her head and back herself down from being upset. She still had no idea why Wynonna was treating her the way she was but she decided she was going to be the bigger person about it. She would keep her distance so as not to upset Wynonna further and only come around when she was requested. She would focus on her job now since that was the only capacity that Wynonna approved of her in.

She was heading down the hallway toward where she knew Waverly was in a meeting when the radio she was carrying with her went off.

“Come in, Haught.”

She paused and reached for the radio where it was clipped to her waist. She pulled it to her mouth and pushed the button to talk “Go ahead.”

“Sorry to bother you ma’am but the Queen is looking for the Princess.”

“She’s in a meeting” Nicole replied into the radio.

“I know and I told her as such but she is insistent on seeing her.”

She let out a sigh and gave her head a shake. She pushed the button to talk as she turned around and started to head toward Wynonna’s room “Can she wait?”

“Apparently it’s time sensitive, ma’am.”

Nicole climbed a few steps up to the floor where Wynonna’s room was located and gave a nod “Do you know what this is about?”

“She refuses to tell me.”

“I’ll be right there. Don’t tell her I’m coming.” Nicole rounded the corner of the long hallway where the bedroom was at and quickened her pace. She was sure it was nothing but if she could help with whatever was going on she would. It was part of her job.

Within a few moments she was greeting the guard that had talked to her on the radio outside Wynonna’s room. She gave him a nod then walked past him and into the room. She paused just a few steps inside and put her hand on her hips as she focused her eyes on Wynonna who was sitting on the edge of her bed “Hey, what’s going on?”

Wynonna looked up at the voice and immediately frowned. She shook her head and waved her hand to the side like she was trying to brush Nicole away “I asked for Waverly.”

“She’s in a meeting” Nicole sighed and motioned to the vague direction in the house where Waverly was.

“She, interrupt her” Wynonna said with a roll of her eyes.

“Wynonna…” Nicole shook her head and took a few slow steps toward the bed. “She’s with Rosita. They’re going over all the press coverage, interview requests, and how they want to handle it all
going forward.”

“Well I really need her and I’m the Queen, so…” Wynonna huffed as if she were insulted she even had to explain that.

Nicole rolled her eyes and folded her arms across her chest. She eyed her friend carefully then let out a soft sigh “Is there something I can help you with?”

Wynonna let out a huff of a laugh and gave her head a quick shake. “That is the last thing I want” She mumbled then pushed herself from sitting on the edge of the bed to standing. She winced slightly then reached for the walker that was nearby “You know what? I can do it myself.”

“Come on, Wynonna” Nicole quickly moved toward Wynonna when she stood. She put a hand on her back and used the other one to move the walker right up against her friend. “Stop being stubborn and just let me help. What’s going on?”

“Don’t” Wynonna moved away from Nicole’s touch. She gripped the walker with both hands tightly and looked up at her with a scowl “I don’t need your help. I don’t want your help. Just move out of my way and I will figure it out on my own.”

Nicole lifted both hands up in a gesture to show she would not touch her then took a few steps backwards. She watched as Wynonna took one slow step and winced again. This made Nicole roll her eyes and let out a frustrated breath “Honestly, Wynonna, I’m here. Just let me help you. I don’t want you getting hurt.”

“Oh now you care about hurting me?” Wynonna growled the words as her eyes narrowed on Nicole. The reaction took Nicole by surprise. She blinked just once and took another step backwards. Her brows creased together into a frown and she shrugged “What do you mean by that exactly?”

Wynonna rolled her eyes and took another slow step. She tried to hide the fact that each step hurt but it wasn’t easy. She winced each time she moved forward. After another couple of steps she decided to rest because the pain was a lot to deal with. She glanced up at Nicole now and when she realized the girl was still waiting for an answer she shook her head “It doesn’t matter.”

“No” Nicole shook her head quickly and pointed firmly at Wynonna. “You don’t get to treat me like this and say shit like that and then just push it aside. I don’t know what I did to personally offend you but we’ve been friends our entire lives and I refuse to let whatever that was destroy us.”

Wynonna was a little surprised that Nicole was standing her ground. Most of their lives Nicole had just kind of gone along with whatever Wynonna wanted. She hadn’t had much of a backbone when it came to her. So it was definitely unexpected now that Nicole was calling her out at the moment. She looked over at her friend and took a moment to really look at her, as if trying to read her mind, before she let out a huff “You really have no idea what this is about?”

Nicole opened her mouth to answer but was interrupted when one of the nurses on staff came into the room. Apparently the guard outside the room had heard Wynonna refusing Nicole’s help and had called the nurse in.

“Oh good you’re ready for your walk” The nurse said with a bright smile when she saw Wynonna was standing up. “How are you feeling today?”

Wynonna shrugged and let her eyes linger on Nicole a moment before she finally looked to the nurse. She motioned to her stomach area and nodded “Still sore when I move a lot.”
“That’s normal. You were asleep for a month and though your wounds are nearly healed they did so without you moving your muscles. You’re using muscles you haven’t for awhile. Muscles that were cut through during surgery. It’s going to take a little while before you’re comfortable with every day movements.” The nurse was all smiles as she moved over to Wynonna now. Without hesitating she reached down and pulled up Wynonna’s shirt so she could look at the wounds.

Nicole had not expected that. Her eyes went wide with surprise as they landed on Wynonna’s exposed stomach. It wasn’t the fact that it was the exposed stomach of her best friend, it was after all just a stomach, but rather it was what she saw on the stomach area. She had never seen the extent of Wynonna’s abdominal injuries. She had no idea how bad they had been. But now she knew. There seemed to be stitches everywhere.

Realizing she was staring she quickly turned away. She gave her head a little shake and cleared her throat “I’m sorry I can go.”

“She’s done” Wynonna mumbled softly as her eyes lifted to where Nicole stood now that her shirt was being settled back over her stomach. “You can stay if you want.” Her tone was soft, almost defeated, which was a complete difference from just a few moments ago.

The change in tone surprised Nicole yet again. She slowly turned back around and when she realized Wynonna was covered fully she let out a relieved breath. Her eyes took in a moment to look her friend over. She frowned slightly because she could see how miserable Wynonna looked just standing there as the woman poked her and looked her over.

“Everything looks good” The nurse said with a bright smile as she stepped back around Wynonna now that she was done inspecting her to make sure she didn’t have any new soreness that wasn’t present before. She motioned to where Nicole stood now “Will she be accompanying you on your walk today or would you like me to take you?”

“Oh, no, you can-”

“She’s taking me” Wynonna cut Nicole off quickly with a nod to the nurse. “She is more than capable of making sure I don’t push myself.” She gave the nurse a fake smile now “So you can go back to doing whatever it was you were doing before. We will be fine.”

“If you’re sure” The woman glanced back at Nicole. She eyed her up and down slowly then gave a nod as if she were silently approving of Nicole’s abilities to help Wynonna walk. She then looked back to Wynonna then down to the watch she was wearing “Try for twenty minutes today. I will be back in a half hour to help with your shower if you’d like.”

“Not necessary” Wynonna held up her hand to stop the woman from continuing. She offered a slightly more genuine smile now and nodded at her. “I think I’ve figured out the shower already.”

“Well if you need help you know where to find me” The nurse chirped happily.

“I won’t need help” Wynonna mumbled very softly.

“But if you do” The nurse pointed at her and gave her a wink before turning now toward the door. She motioned to Nicole then paused in front of her “Do not let her lie to you. If you think she’s in pain make her stop.”

“Sure” Nicole said softly. Her answer seemed to satisfy the nurse and the woman gave them both one more smile before she swiftly breezed out of the room. Nicole perked an eyebrow slightly and turned her head from where the woman had disappeared to look back at Wynonna. She bit her lip
and gave her head a shake “I can get another guard to walk with you if you want.”

Wynonna just rolled her eyes and took a few slow steps toward Nicole “I only told her that because she hates when I walk alone and she talks too much when she tags along so…” She shrugged then motioned to the door of her bedroom as if indicating toward the nurse who had just left.

“You can’t go alone. What if something goes wrong?” Nicole gave her head a quick shake as worry moved over her features now.

“I’m not going alone, dink” Wynonna rolled her eyes again and turned her walker now toward the door. She took a few more slow steps then paused to look over her shoulder. She beckoned with her head now “You’re coming with me so hurry up or I’ll leave you in the dust.”

This surprised Nicole completely. They had gone from arguing and barely talking to Wynonna suddenly wanting her company. She had not expected it and it showed by how she did not immediately follow. It took her a few moments to realize what was going on. It was a good thing Wynonna was not quick moving or she might very well have been left behind. But by the time Nicole’s feet started to move Wynonna was barely at the door so she did not have to go too far to catch up with her.

The two of them moved silently and excruciatingly slowly down the hallway. Nicole stayed a step behind Wynonna just so she could keep her eyes on her. If she fell or something else happened Nicole wanted to be able to see it and react to it.

At the end of the hallway Wynonna looked back and forth as if trying to decide which way she wanted to go. She then glanced over her shoulder at Nicole and gave a slight shrug “Do you care where we go?”

Nicole just shook her head. She put a hand on Wynonna’s back as she stepped up beside her and glanced around as well. To the left was another long hallway that led to more bedrooms. To the right was a hallway that led to an open area that could be described as a family room. There were couches and chairs, a t.v., the doors to the deck that wrapped around the cabin, and a pool table. She looked back to Wynonna after giving it some thought “How about we head to the deck. You can walk around the outside of the house without having to tackle the stairs.”

“I always knew you were the smart one” Wynonna said with a weak smile before she turned toward the right and started to move again.

Nicole smiled softly. There was a hint of the old Wynonna starting to shine through for the first time in about two days. It didn’t seem like a long time but for them it was an eternity. They had never been able to stay mad at each other in the past. An apology was usually given within just hours any time they had butted heads before. It was relieving to see that maybe there was hope they could get back to being friends again sometime soon.

Silence fell between them again as they moved. Well, relative silence. Wynonna’s walker clicked every time she moved it. She grunted softly with each step she took. But they weren’t talking. Nicole was concentrating on watching Wynonna and Wynonna was focusing on trying not to move too fast because it hurt to do so.

They were about halfway down the hallway that led to the family room when Wynonna let out a sigh and stopped. She glanced over her shoulder and before Nicole could ask her she nodded “I’m okay I just need a rest.” She reached down and put a hand over her stomach before glancing down “I guess I never realized how many abs it takes to walk.”
“Yeah, I guess you don’t think about it until you hurt something...” Nicole shrugged too and looked at her feet. She was suddenly washed over by guilt that Wynonna was in so much pain. She should have been there. If she would have had her speech cards then she would have never been in the blast.

Wynonna knew exactly why Nicole was avoiding eye contact. She let out a soft sigh and even though Nicole couldn’t see it she shook her head “Please stop blaming yourself. There was no way to know this was going to happen.”

“But you wouldn’t have been in danger if-”

“If it hadn’t been the Peace Summit it would have been some other time” Wynonna cut Nicole off firmly. Her tone was delicate but there was no mistaken she was being serious as she spoke “We got lucky it happened when it did. It allowed us to catch them in the act before anything more serious happened. Before they could plan something that took us all out at once.”

Nicole shook her head and finally looked up from her feet. She bit at her lip and held a look in her eyes that told Wynonna that there was nothing she could say that would ever take away the guilt she felt about what had happened.

“Stop” Wynonna said sharply. She steadied herself with her walker again and without another word she started to move. She took one step before she started to speak again “You knew going into this job that the risk of me being attacked was very real. That is the point of the job, Nicole.” She paused and let out a grunt as she took another step. She glanced over to her friend and shrugged “If I wasn’t going to be in danger there would be no need for a Royal Guard. So stop blaming yourself, okay? It was an unspoken truth about the position and pretending that anything you did directly caused me harm will drive you crazy.”

Nicole wanted to argue because she would always feel at fault but she also knew Wynonna was right. The whole point of the Royal Guard was to protect the Crown because, throughout history, many of those in rule had been attacked in some way. It was no surprise that someone would plan a way to kill the reigning ruler in an attempt to take over the Crown.

So instead of arguing Nicole just followed behind Wynonna quietly. She didn’t know what to say because the only thing she wanted to say was how completely sorry she was about what had happened to Wynonna and how she wished she could go back and change it.

The silence annoyed Wynonna and she let it show with a heavy sigh. She glanced behind her again but did not stop her movements forward “If I had known you were just going to mope behind me I would have taken the nurse up on her offer to join me instead.”

“I’m sorry” Nicole mumbled out of habit. She realized what she had said and gave her head a quick shake. She drew in a deep breath to calm herself because she felt she was about to ramble. As she exhaled, her head nodded “I just don’t know what to say, Wynonna, which is weird for me because I’ve never found myself unable to talk to you.”

Wynonna nodded to let Nicole know she was listening. They had made it to the family room and she was pausing now next to the couch. She let out a sigh as she turned to let her butt rest against the armrest of the couch. She looked up at Nicole and shrugged slightly “You don’t owe me anything. As much as it goes against your nature you don’t always have to protect my feelings. I’m a big girl and I’ve gotten really good at handling shitty situations.”

Nicole looked a little wounded at the words. Her brows curled into a frown and her head dropped to look at her feet. She drew in another deep breath and she held it for a moment. She gathered her
thoughts before looking back up. She exhaled slowly and her sad eyes settled on Wynonna’s “I don’t know what I did but I feel like you’re pissed at me on a level you’ve never been pissed at me before and I have no idea how to apologize. All I know is I haven’t felt good about you and I in nearly two days and it’s the absolute worst feeling in the world.”

“You didn’t do…” Wynonna breathed the words out but stopped and gave her head a shake. She looked away from Nicole and looked out the window. She clenched her jaw to fight off the emotions that were welling up inside her. She took a few moments before looking back at her friend and sighing “It sucked to wake up alone, Nicole.”

Nicole’s eyes fluttered to fight off the sudden urge to cry that washed over her. Her heart immediately felt like it had been hit by a truck. She felt sick to her stomach. She would have never guessed that Wynonna was upset with her because she had not been there when she woke up from her coma. “I...I told you how sorry I was about that, Wynonna. Trust me I wanted nothing more than to be by your side when you came out of your coma but I was blinded by rage and vengeance and I know it was so damn stupid and I—”

“Not that” Wynonna cut Nicole off weakly. She stared at her friend with a little bit of disbelief on her face because she could not understand how Nicole had misunderstood her. Maybe that was the problem here. Neither of them were fully understanding the other. She shook her head before lifting her hand to her face to pinch at the bridge of her nose. “Nicole I’m not talking about my coma.”

Well now Nicole was confused. She tilted her head to the side and her brows curled together in perplexity as she eyed Wynonna. She took a moment to think, really think about what she was talking about now, before she finally gave in with a frustrated sigh “What are you talking about?”

“It’s nothing” Wynonna waved the subject off as she pushed away from the couch now. She grabbed a hold of her walker and once more started to move forward. “Like I said you don’t have to protect my feelings.”

“Hey, no” Nicole reached out and quickly grabbed the front of the walker so that Wynonna could not move. She stepped around her so she was facing her now and her eyes narrowed into a more serious look of concern. “You don’t get to do that. You don’t get to vaguely throw out what’s wrong to see if I get it and then pretend it’s no big deal when I don’t understand. Talk to me god damn it.”

Had she been at full strength Wynonna might have shoved Nicole away from her and told her to fuck off because that was just the reaction she had when someone got her in face. But she could barely pee without whimpering right now so she could not use that defense mechanism at the moment. So instead she stepped back out of the walker and once more leaned against the armrest of the couch. She threw one of her hands out to the side in frustration and looked at Nicole as if what she was about to say should be totally obvious “I said something to you and, I know I was all goofed up on pain medicine but, I was pretty sure I enunciated clearly and then…” She puffed out a breath and dropped her hand to her side “You were gone and I guess I just thought you were avoiding me.”

Nicole’s bit her lip and looked down to her feet. She should have realized Wynonna would pick up on the fact she was most definitely avoiding her. But what could she say? She had been hit like lightening with very confusing feelings and she had no idea how to deal with them around her. She could barely be honest with herself about it so how in the Hell was she going to have a talk with her best friend and let her know what was going on?

She finally shrugged in defeat and looked back to Wynonna who was gazing at her expectedly. She threw her hands out to the side and huffed “You were so sweet and I was so relieved you were alive that I think I got confused in my own head, you know? Like I can’t even count the amount of times you’ve told me how much I mean to you and how grateful you are that I’m in your life. Then
suddenly I’m so relieved to hear you say that again that it totally twists around in my head and I made it bigger than it was and it scared me and confused me so I needed some time to figure it out first before I opened my mouth and ruined our friendship.”

Wynonna stared at Nicole with a clear look of shock on her face. An eyebrow slowly arched on her forehead and she blinked just once. She looked like that for a few long moments before she breathed out a laugh and gave one nod “What exactly do you think I said?”

Nicole saw the way that Wynonna was looking at her and she suddenly felt like she had missed something and that only served to confuse her more. Her arms dropped to her sides and she used one to motion at her friend “Well you, I mean, were making it clear how much you care about me. Like, you know, when people have near death experiences and they realize what’s important in life and…” She drew in a deep breath because she had said that all in one exhale. Then she realized that Wynonna was smirking at her and she let out the breath with an annoyed puff “What in the Hell is so funny?”

“Okay so I either wasn’t very clear or you are very dense” Wynonna said through a soft laugh. “You’re not helping” Nicole pouted and folded her arms across her chest with a huff. “You’re also making me feel like an idiot here so feel free to chime in at any time.”

Wynonna bit back another laugh. She couldn’t help but be completely amused at Nicole’s rambling and the way she was trying to explain something she didn’t seem too sure about. She motioned with her head now in a beckoning nod and patted the armrest to indicate that she wanted Nicole to come sit next to her.

Part of Nicole was too annoyed by Wynonna’s amusement that she didn’t want to go over to her. But the bigger part of her, the part that would always win out, gave in and moved over to sit next to her best friend on the armrest of the couch. She let out a sigh then looked at Wynonna with a shrug “The way you said I was important to you that night was so certain and the look in your eyes was so intense that it threw me off guard. I think something somewhere inside me took it a little more seriously than I should have because I was suddenly feeling things I’ve never felt before. I was totally baffled by my own reaction, I guess.”

Wynonna reached out now and took hold of one of Nicole’s hands. She held it gently between both of hers and gave it a gentle squeeze. She focused her eyes firmly but with a softness behind them as she looked at Nicole. When Nicole finally turned her head to look at her she offered her a smile so tender it almost seemed unnatural on her lips. “You weren’t wrong in feeling like there was more of a depth behind what I said.” She gave a single nod but her smile did not fade “I thought you would just kind of understand what I meant but apparently our non-verbal communication skills weakened while I was in a coma.”

“Wait” Nicole pulled her hand out of Wynonna’s two hands gently and held it up in a gesture for Wynonna not to interrupt her now. Her head gave a single shake and as she spoke her voice trembled “What were you really trying to say, Wynonna?”

“Come on, man” Wynonna said with an attempt of a laugh leaving her lips. It fell flat and ended up sounding like a shaky sigh instead. She gave her head a shake and used her shoulder to nudge against Nicole's since they were sitting side by side “I am not on drugs right now so I'm not gonna be able to even come close to saying anything remotely serious.”

“You are infuriating!” Nicole growled out in frustration as she pushed off the couch to her feet. Her head was shaking back and forth quickly as she started to pace now in front of the couch. “Wynonna, my mind has been racing in a million different directions trying to talk myself out of
these delusional thoughts and I've been drowning in my own denial because there is no way I am suddenly feeling all these...” She paused now and motioned with her hand at her stomach in quick circles “....things. And I'm here literally being driven crazy trying to talk myself out of it and you're just gonna sit there and...” She huffed and motioned toward Wynonna with a frustrated flick of her arm “....let me continue to be eaten alive on the inside because you're too afraid to show a single second of vulnerability?”

Wynonna frowned and her eyes dropped away from Nicole now because she felt completely ashamed at herself. All of this could have been avoided if either of them would have just tried to communicate what was going on and yet now she had the chance to clarify and she was dancing around it. What was wrong with her? This was her best friend in the entire world and if she couldn't talk to her then how was she ever going to get through any of this.

When Wynonna just looked away from her Nicole let out a loud groan and threw her hands up in surrender. She couldn't do this anymore. “You're not the only one going through some shit, Wynonna. Get over yourself.” With the last of her words she stormed passed Wynonna and out of the room.

“Nicole, wait!” Wynonna tried to call for her but it was too late. She groaned and reached for her stomach because the effort of calling after Nicole had hurt her sore muscles.

“Woah” Waverly appeared in the opening that Nicole had just exited. She looked surprised and she pointed over her shoulder with her thumb “Nicole just about ran me over coming down the hall. What happened?”

Wynonna deflated as a sigh escaped her lips. She gave her head a shake as she reached for her walker and pulled herself to standing again. She kept her eyes away from Waverly because she knew her sister would be able to see right through her denial “We are apparently not communicating well.”

“About what?” The look of surprise had not left Waverly's face as she moved toward her sister now. She put a hand on Wynonna's back when she noticed her hunched over in pain. Surprise was replaced by concern and she leaned over to try and catch her sister's expression “Are you okay? I can call one of the men to carry you back to your room.”

“I just need a second” Wynonna breathed out through gritted teeth. She had her eyes closed and she was breathing slowly as the pain started to subside. She gave a little nod after a few seconds and finally blinked her eyes open. She pushed herself upright now and gave Waverly the most convincing smile she could muster “See? It is all about mind over matter. No pain, no gain and all the other clichés out there.”

“Are you sure? You're not supposed to push too much” Waverly spoke softly with concern still in her tone.

Wynonna lifted a hand and gave her sister a thumbs up and a wink. She then worked to turn her walker around and started toward the door before Waverly could argue again. She was moving a little faster than before only because she wanted to get back to her bed and take some painkillers. It had been a draining walk and she wanted to get it over with.

Waverly knew when to argue with her sister and now was not that time. So she just followed behind and made sure she was there if her sister needed her. They walked together quietly for nearly the length of the hallway before Waverly finally cleared her throat to speak.

“So did you and Rosita figure out a plan for the press moving forward?” Wynonna asked quickly before Waverly could attempt to ask whatever prying question she had in mind.
Waverly frowned slightly at the fact that Wynonna had cut her off to avoid talking about her and Nicole. She rolled her eyes but did not engage in an argument about it. Instead she just nodded and spoke softly as they rounded the corner of the hall that led to Wynonna's room “We did. She's actually really great at what she does. It's pretty impressive.”

Wynonna nodded at that and glanced back to her sister “Why do you think I suggested her to daddy when our old PR head died?”

“I didn't know you knew her before she worked for us” Waverly looked pleasantly surprised this.

“Met her in a bar a while back and when she told me she did PR for celebrities I laughed because I didn't think that was a real job. She then spent an hour telling me how she would handle every fake situation I could come to with” Wynonna smiled fondly at the memory. “I only remembered her because I asked her how she would deal with a sex tape of me in various graphic positions and she didn't even blink.”

Waverly let out a laugh as they rounded now into Wynonna's room. “Of course you did.”

Wynonna just shrugged as if that was just how she was. She moved to her bed and as soon as she could she sat down. She let out a sigh of total relief and slowly moved to lay down. As soon as she was resting fully against the mattress and pillow she drew in a deep breath and nodded once “I am fiending for my drugs.”

Waverly frowned again at the obvious pain her sister was in. She moved over to the table near the bed and popped open the pill bottle there. She poured a couple into her hand then turned and offered them out to her sister. “You know you could still be on the I.V. medications if you really wanted.”

Wynonna just shrugged as she took the pills from Waverly. She sat up and popped them in her mouth before taking the water bottle from her as well and using that to swallow everything down. Once she was done she handed the water back and eased herself back to the bed “It’s only really painful when I walk. I'll survive.”

Waverly nodded at that. If there was one thing to be said about Wynonna it was that she was most definitely a survivor. She always found a way through whatever was happening around her. It was admirable.

Silence washed over the room now. Wynonna laid in bed waiting for the medicine to kick in. Waverly sat next to the bed watching her sister. She hated seeing her sister in such pain. It made what she was doing all the more worth it. If she could even slightly help Wynonna succeed in getting away from the madness of being Queen forever it was worth what they were going through right now.

Having been thrust into the position of Queen unexpectedly had been a lot to handle at first. It added another layer of respect that she already held for her sister. Though she had been the one groomed for the position by their father she was now grateful it had not been her to take over. It was not something she could see herself doing for any significant amount of time.

She sighed at the thought as she reached out to take her sister's hand now. She realized as soon as she grabbed it that Wynonna had drifted to sleep. That was for the best. She needed all the rest she could get.

They sat together for a few minutes. Waverly just held her sister's hand and contemplated their lives outside the craziness of the Monarchy. With each passing moment it was something she yearned for more and more.
The silence was interrupted when Nicole marched into the room suddenly. She drew in a deep breath and was about to unleash a long winded rant when her eyes fell to the bed and the obvious fact that Wynonna was asleep and she immediately deflated. She bit her lip in guilt and looked at Waverly with a frown “I am so sorry I thought she was alone.”

Waverly perked an eyebrow curiously at the way Nicole had stormed into the room. She looked her friend over once then let out a soft laugh “You looked like you had something you really wanted to say. Care to share what's on your mind?”

“Uh” Nicole's eyes flickered to Wynonna and then to Waverly before looking back to Wynonna. She bit her lip and quickly shook her head.

“I get it. It's a you two thing” Waverly nodded softly and gave Nicole a gentle smile. “I just wish I could help because it's easy to see it's tearing you both up.”

“That’s an understatement” Nicole mumbled to herself as she moved over to stand next to Waverly. Her eyes drifted to Wynonna and she let out a sigh. She knew that whatever was going on was most certainly wrecking havoc for her on the inside. She hated this. Her head shook at the thought and her eyes slowly moved to Waverly now “Maybe you can help.”

“Oh?” This surprised Waverly and she straightened herself where she sat as a smile came over her face. She looked like a kid about to receive a gift “Well by all means don’t hold back now.”

Nicole shrugged and offered Waverly a quick half smile before it faded and her eyes fell back to Wynonna. She gave her head a little bit of a shake before a sigh left her lips “I feel like I did something to offend her and I can’t figure out what that was.” She looked back over to Waverly with a frown “Has she said anything to you?”

“All she’s said to me is that you two weren’t communicating well” Waverly said honestly. She slowly moved her eyes from Nicole to Wynonna and gave a single nod “Which is usually Wynonna speak for someone is not listening to what she said.”

Nicole let out a huff that sounded almost offended. She crossed her arms and frowned at Wynonna in annoyance. She had totally listened to what she had said! Her head shook and she glanced back at Waverly “I listened to her. I know exactly what she said. At least I thought I had and then I started to think maybe I had misinterpreted it, especially once she started being cold toward me, so now I’m just over here as confused as ever.”

Waverly nodded to show she was listening. She gave a moment of thought then opened her mouth to suggest something but was cut off when Nicole suddenly started to ramble.

“And here I am thinking that Wynonna and I are always so in sync and I know her so well and she knows me so well and there would never be a problem with us when it came to communicating and talking because we have always been able to talk about anything and…” She drew in a deep breath and let it out in frustration before motioning to Wynonna with a shrug “Apparently I am not as fluent in Wynonna speak as I thought.”

Waverly’s eyes fluttered as the quick-fire words from Nicole swirled around her head. She puffed out a soft laugh and lifted a hand to indicate Nicole needed slow down. “Okay, wow, you’ve been holding that one in for a while huh?”

“Only two days” Nicole breathed out a sheepish laugh and gave Waverly a nod.

“Well…” Waverly slowly dropped her hand now that it seemed like Nicole was done rambling.
“Firstly, I’ve known Wynonna my entire life and Wynonna speak is my first language and I still have a hard time understanding her sometimes.” She laughed softly at that, glancing at her sister for a split second before looking back to Nicole. “Secondly, it sounds like one of you needs to speak clearly. No hints or beating around the bush or anything. Say what it is you exactly mean so there is no way to mistake it.” She shrugged and motioned at Wynonna with a side nod “And we both know she’s not gonna do that.”

“I have!” Nicole threw her hands up in the air with a huff.

“Have you?” Waverly perked an eyebrow as if challenging Nicole to really think about it.

Nicole nodded and opened her mouth to argue before she paused. She blinked, her mouth slowly shut, and she tilted her head to the side. Her brows creased together as she really thought about it. She had tried to be clear but maybe she hadn’t been. She bit at her lip slightly and after a moment she focused on Waverly. Her face held an expression that showed Waverly was absolutely right. “I guess I’ve been too afraid to say it directly because…” She looked at Wynonna now and slowly breathed out in a soft surrender “…it would make it too real and that’s terrifying.”

Waverly’s face softened as she watched Nicole circle around her mind before finally coming to the realization she just had. She reached out now and gently put her hand against Nicole’s arm, giving it a comforting squeeze, before speaking very lightly “Of all the scary things you’ve been through lately this can’t be the worst of it. Trust me…” She looked back to her sister and a soft, almost knowing, smile came to her lips now “…however scary it might be I know she won’t let you face it alone.”

Nicole’s heart fluttered and a warmth filled her body slowly at Waverly’s words. It was almost as if she knew what was going on between Wynonna and herself and was gently trying to ease them into dealing with it. That was a scary thought too but, somehow, it also put her at peace. If Waverly felt like everything was going to be alright then it gave Nicole faith that maybe she was right. She swallowed the nervous lump that had risen suddenly in her throat and her eyes focused on Wynonna again. She felt herself tremble because the next time she spoke to Wynonna there was a very real possibility that her entire life was going to change and she wasn’t sure if she was ready for that. But Waverly was right. She needed to be straight forward if they were ever going to get through this and move forward.

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Why in the Hell can’t you two go five minutes without yelling at each other?

Although Nicole had wanted to stay and wait for Wynonna to wake up from her painkiller induced nap she had not gotten the chance. Jeremy had called Waverly and said he needed to speak to her privately. The subject matter was so sensitive that he did not want to risk speaking it over any sort of technology in case there were any bugs or other sort of line tapping agents being used. So Waverly had to meet him in person and since Nicole’s job was to protect the current Head of The Monarchy she had to go with her.

Jeremy had not wanted to meet at the Palace just in case there were more moles lingering about. So Dolls suggested they use one of the secure training bunkers for the Army. It was secluded and no sort of communications signals could go in or out of it. It was also underground which Jeremy loved because it made him feel like a secret agent in a spy movie.

Once they had arrived at the bunker Nicole and the few guardsmen she had brought with her did a sweep of the bunker to make sure it was safe and secure. After that checked out Waverly was allowed to enter. They hung out in a surprisingly comfortable bunker while the guardsmen stood watch in the observation tower attached at the top. If anyone who was not authorized to be in the area approached they would flip a switch that would alert them underground so they could flee safely. Jeremy had been right in saying it was kind of like a secret mission in a spy movie.

Nicole paced around the bunker now, looking at the random odds and ends that had been left behind from the last training drills held there. It kind of made her miss the days she had been in training for Special Ops so she could become Head of the Royal Guard. Those were much simpler times. Everything was straight forward. There was no emotion involved. You learned weapons and hand to hand combat and knew that one day you might have to die to protect The Crown. That was easy. There was nothing confusing there.

“Will you relax?” Waverly mumbled to Nicole as she passed by were she sat reading her book. “I am sure everything is fine. Jeremy is just being super cautious lately because of the fact that Doc as able to infiltrate us for years and no one suspected a thing.” She turned a page in her book and shrugged “I think he was kind of heartbroken by it. He really liked Doc.”

“Yeah, well, having the Advisor to The Crown be the person who betrayed The Crown would make anyone uneasy” Nicole mumbled as she set down the old pack of freeze-dried meals she had found on one of the shelves. She turned now to look at Waverly and let out a sigh “Should we be worried he’s not here yet? He said he had sensitive information. What if someone found out and cut him off before he could get here and now we will never know what’s going on and-”

“Stop” Waverly looked up from her book with a gentle laugh. Her head shook very slightly and she patted the small cot she sat on to indicate she wanted Nicole to come sit next to her. “I am sure he is fine. Were you always this paranoid in the Army?”

“No” Nicole huffed with a roll of her eyes as she moved toward the cot. She sat next to Waverly and she let out a heavy breath “I feel like I’m losing my damn mind, Waves. I used to feel impervious to fear and now…” She motioned vaguely around the room and gave a single shrug “…so much has happened and so much of what I love has come under attack that I’m literally skeptical of everything.”

“Maybe that’s because you’ve realized what you could lose” Waverly said in a straightforward tone as she lowered her book and looked at Nicole now. “Before all of this, you grew up with the only truth about your life being that one day you would protect The Crown. Now, though, you have new
truly and different truths and you know that you could very well lose things you didn’t even know you’d have back then and that’s scary.”

Nicole blushed and looked away from Waverly because her words hit way too close to home. It was like she was reading the deepest darkest things that Nicole tried to keep hidden. Almost like she was trying to get Nicole to admit all of it so she would stop dancing around it and face the truth. Her head shook and she kept her eyes locked on something across the room so she didn’t have to look at Waverly “I guess the reality of the position was never fed to me in favor of instilling the deep devotion I needed to The Crown in order to be willing to risk my life for it.”

“Deep devotion to The Crown my ass” Waverly spat out softly through an indignant laugh. She looked at Nicole with all seriousness in her eyes and waited for the girl to look at her. When Nicole finally did Waverly stared right into her eyes and spoke firmly “Nicole will you stop pretending like I don’t know what’s going on? I’m not an idiot and it’s kind of insulting how you’re both acting as if I’m not completely tuned into the both of you.”

“What do you-”

Nicole’s panicked denial she was about to launch into was cut off by the bunker door being opened. An excited looking Jeremy walked in with a few of Dolls’ Army guards behind him. He looked between the two girls, who had both stood up at his sudden arrival, and smiled widely “Okay are you ready to have your minds totally blown?”

Nicole was grateful for the distraction. Waverly was pushing too much now and it was kind of annoying. She would have to mention as much to her later on but right now she had to focus on whatever it was Jeremy had discovered.

“So” Jeremy barely hesitated before he moved over to the small table in the middle of the room and started to unload the bag he had brought with him. It was paper after paper and file after file. He spread them all out and once he had everything displayed he looked up at the girls with a nod “You know how we’ve been researching what it would take to get rid of the whole Monarchy as a body of government and turn it over to an electoral thing for the people?”

“Yes” Waverly and Nicole both said in unison without blinking. He did not have to explain what they were doing. They knew. It was all they thought about lately. Well, mostly. Some other thoughts crept in but that didn’t matter now.

“I was digging through the archives in the Royal Library because a lot of journals and letters and stuff from past Kings and Queens are kept there. It’s actually really fascinating and you should take a look if you get a chance” Jeremy nodded as he spoke in a way that seemed like he was trying to convince the other two to check it out.

“Yes” Waverly and Nicole both said in unison without blinking. He did not have to explain what they were doing. They knew. It was all they thought about lately. Well, mostly. Some other thoughts crept in but that didn’t matter now.

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“Jeremy we don’t have time” Waverly sounded a little annoyed but she smiled because, well, she loved how excitable he always was. No matter what was going on he had a bubbly demeanor and it was refreshing to be around.

“Right, sorry” Jeremy shook his previous thought off then started to tap at a few of the papers on the table as he continued. “Well I stumbled across a string of letters between King Ward and Lady Michelle, before they were married, and…” His smile somehow grew larger as he picked up a letter and showed it to Waverly “Your parents were already working on trying to abolish the Monarchy.”

“What?” Waverly barely breathed the word out as shock filled her body. She blinked once and reached for the old letter that Jeremy held up. Her hand trembled slightly as she took a hold of it. Her mother had died when she was ten. Her father had completely shut down after that and refused to
talk about her and what had happened. As she read the words she felt herself starting to tear up. Her parents had been undeniably head over heels in love from the very get go.

“What does that mean?” Nicole asked softly. Her hand had moved to Waverly’s back, giving slow rubs up and down in an attempt to comfort her, but she would not interrupt Jeremy now. This was huge. This could be game changing.

“Well apparently all that is really needed is a Constitution written as a sort of cornerstone of laws that the new government will uphold and follow. It has to be approved and signed by the reigning King or Queen. Once that’s in place The Throne can be abdicated and an election will be held to put someone else in power over the Democratic government” His smile grew again and he looked between the two girls with a shrug as if to say it really was that easy.

“A Constitution?” Nicole asked with a bit of confusion on her face. She glanced at Waverly who was still looking at one of the letters then looked back at Jeremy. “How do we go about doing that?”

“That’s the awesome part” Jeremy said with a giddy laugh before looking down at the table. He shuffled a few things around before finding what he needed. He lifted up a stack of papers now and held them out toward Nicole “Ward and Michelle had started writing one already. It’s a rough draft and some of it is outdated and would need to be modernised but the groundwork has already been laid.” He looked between both girls again and nodded “We’re basically there, guys!”

“Holy shit!” Nicole exclaimed as she grabbed the stack of papers from Jeremy. She started to flip through the pages, skimming the words quickly, and her head began to shake in disbelief at what she was seeing. “This is a lot. This is seriously almost done.”

Waverly looked over at what Nicole held and her eyes focused on some of the words too. She leaned closer and each time Nicole flipped a page she read as quickly as she could. She sniffled now and wiped a single tear from her eyes before straightening up and looking at Jeremy “So what else needs to be done?”

“Well you and Wynonna would have to go over it and make sure all the laws and rights and everything you want for the country are all in there. Make any changes, you know, add or take away anything you don’t like. Then the legal team would have to review it for mistakes and all the boring shit” Jeremy grabbed the stack from Nicole now that she was handing it back to him. He smiled down at it then shrugged “Then Wynonna would sign it. After that she basically acts as temporary head of the Democracy until after the elections.”

“And then we’re done?” Waverly’s face started to light up with a little bit of hope.

Jeremy nodded quickly as his own face lit up “Dunzo. You and Wynonna would be normal, hopefully law abiding, registered voters living in The Ghost River Triangle. You would be civilians with no more power than your neighbor.”

“Besides the fact that everyone would know your names and you’d be rich” Nicole mumbled through a laugh.

Jeremy nodded at the point Nicole had made “Okay so you’d be celebrities but you’d still have no power and no obligation to running the country.”

Waverly looked at the letter she still held. She shook her head slightly and drew in a deep breath. Her eyes closed and she pulled the letter to her chest as if embracing it. She slowly exhaled and a smile came to her face as she opened her eyes and looked down at the letter now. Her finger moved to
Nicole smiled very gently and slid her arm around Waverly’s shoulders. She pulled her in for a side hug then kissed the side of her head lightly. She was happy for her friend. She was relieved that what they wanted most in the world was actually within reach. It was like everything was working out and it was all because of Ward and Michelle’s desire to give their children a normal life.

“Can I keep this?” Waverly asked softly and motioned to the letter.

“Sure” Jeremy grinned then reached for a file on the table. He held it up to her and gave a nod “Have them all. They span pretty much the length of their relationship. I have to warn you, though, some of them get a little…” He bit his lip and let out a sort of awkward laugh “…intimate.”

“Ew” Waverly said with a laugh but took the file anyway. She then moved over to Jeremy and pulled him into a tight hug. “Thank you so much. We couldn’t do this without you.”

“Oh, you know, it’s okay” Jeremy mumbled humbly as he stood stiffly in Waverly’s arms. He used a single arm to wrap loosely around her and patted her back a few times. He was just kind of an awkward guy and it showed. But he loved what he did and was happy to help so he didn’t mind the hug.

“I will make sure you are set for life” Waverly said firmly once she pulled back from the hug. “I know you’re losing a job when all of this is said and done. It seems cruel for me not to compensate you for all you’ve done as a way of showing how grateful both myself and Wynonna are.”

“Oh that’s not really necessary” Jeremy shook his head quickly and once more laughed awkwardly. “Dolls already offered me a job in intelligence with the Army so I’m good to go there.”

Waverly let out a soft laugh and stepped back now from Jeremy completely “Well you will at least be getting a large severance package, then.”

“Oookay” Jeremy blushed and shook his head as he looked down and started to gather up everything he had spread out on the table. He knew there was no arguing so he was just going to accept it even though money was not necessarily his first priority in life.

The girls helped Jeremy with his things and the three of them left the bunker. They moved to their separate vehicles and said their goodbyes. After Waverly was settled in the backseat of the SUV they had come in Nicole moved over to Jeremy’s vehicle. She gave him a soft smile and put her hand on his shoulder. She looked him straight in the eyes and in a sincere but firm tone she spoke “Thank you. You have no idea how much this means to all of us.”

“Yes I do” Jeremy said with a quick nod. His smile was still there but his tone was serious. “It’s been my pleasure.”

Nicole gave a grateful smile then patted his shoulder once before stepping away. She watched him climb into the car then stepped back as it drove away. She gave him a wave as he passed then turned to climb into the SUV next to Waverly. She gave her a soft smile then motioned to the driver that he could go ahead and take off.

The two of them fell silent as they headed home. Waverly flipped through all of the letters between her parents and Nicole just watched the scenery outside pass by the window. She held a gentle smile on her lips and for the first time in a very long time a sense of peace washed over her. She was now certain that everything was going to work out perfectly. It was the first time she had ever felt this completely confident that they were going to make it through. They were so close now. She could
not wait to get back and share the news with Wynonna.

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“Holy shit! Are you fucking kidding me?” Wynonna’s eyes were as big as they had ever been as she stared at everything Waverly had set down on her lap. By the time Waverly and Nicole had gotten back to the cabin it was after dinner time. They had gone straight to Wynonna’s room because both of there were bursting at the seams with joy and couldn’t wait to see Wynonna’s reaction. Now Waverly bounced excitedly next to Wynonna’s bed as Nicole stood back a bit and just watched the sisters share in their happiness.

“It’s all right here” Waverly nearly squealed out the words as she flipped through the rough Constitution her parents had begun to draft. “It’s incredible, Wynonna. I had no idea they were trying to do this.”

“Me neither” Wynonna puffed out a laugh as she looked over some of the papers. Her head gave a shake of disbelief and she laughed again. “Those sneaky little bastards” She grinned happily and looked up at her sister now “I would have loved it if they had actually gotten to see this happen. Momma would have been thrilled.”

“Then let’s make sure they do see it” Waverly said gently now. The two of them shared a look, as a fondness for their mother filled both their eyes, before Waverly motioned to the Constitution again “They are smiling down on us right now. Let’s finish the job and make them proud.”

Wynonna nodded and reached out her hand. She took a hold of Waverly’s gently and squeezed it once. They had lost their mother due to sickness and it had nearly destroyed their father. It seemed like fate that they were now striving to finish what their parents had started. She offered her sister a soft smile before her hand slid away and she looked back at the papers on her lap “Buckle up, babygirl. It’s gonna be a long night.”

Waverly bounced up onto her toes and clapped excitedly. She loved all night study sessions. Sure they weren’t really studying but it was kind of the same thing. Either way she was looking forward to it “Okay, so, I am gonna go get into some comfy clothes and get some hot cocoa and some snacks and then we are gonna do this!”

Wynonna let out a soft laugh and motioned for Waverly to go ahead “And I will just sit here and wait because…” She then motioned to herself and shrugged “I have been ready to sit in bed all night long writing the fate of the country for a month now, apparently.”

Waverly leaned over and kissed her sister’s forehead quickly then bounced away from the bed “Oh, while I go get everything ready you should look at all the letters…” She paused on her way toward the door and pointed at the other file that was on the bed “…they’re incredible, Wynonna.”

Wynonna reached for the file and held it up. She gave it a little wave as if to show Waverly she had it then gave a nod “I will put it on my reading list.”

Waverly gave a satisfied looking smile at the answer then started out of the room again. She was practically skipping as she left the room and headed to her own to get changed. There was no way to describe how much sheer joy was surging through her. She had not felt this much since before the explosion.

Nicole lingered for just a moment before giving a silent nod to herself and turning to follow Waverly from the room.
“And where exactly are you going?” Wynonna spoke softly in an effort to halt her friend’s exit from the room.

“Oh I was going to…” Nicole pointed to where Waverly had just disappeared through the door and shrugged. She rocked awkwardly onto her toes and let out a sigh “I kind of felt like this was an Earp Sister deal so I was just going to leave you two be for the night.”

“Don’t be an idiot, Haught” Wynonna laughed out the words as her eyes fell to the files on her lap. She shifted through a few papers before speaking again without looking up “This is as much your business as it is ours. So slip into something a little more comfortable then get your ass back here.”

She looked up now and gave her a sincere smile “It’ll be just like the sleepovers we used to have as kids.”

Nicole tilted her head to the side and perked an eyebrow. She had been alright to just let the sisters have their moment. They had dozens of letters between their parents to go through and it felt like a personal thing. She did not want to intrude. It was a surprise to hear that Wynonna had just assumed Nicole was joining. But she didn’t argue. She just gave a nod “I can do that but can I ask you something first?”

Wynonna perked a curious eyebrow herself now. She eyed Nicole slowly as if trying to read her body language to figure out what she was about to ask before she asked it. Were they about to launch into an excruciating conversation about the thing they had been dancing around for two days right now? Because honestly she did not have the strength. Curiosity got the best of her though and she nodded to indicate she was listening and awaiting the inquiry.

“Don’t you think it would be easier to do all of that…” Nicole motioned to the papers that were spread out on Wynonna’s legs “...in a bigger bed?”

Wynonna had definitely not been expecting that. It was such a casual question it almost seemed silly. She had been anticipating something much deeper. To say she was relieved by it was an understatement. She looked down at the papers and let out a soft laugh in agreement “Well, shit, Haught. This is why I keep you around…” She looked up now and tapped the side of her head, indicating where her brain was, and gave a wink “Brains and beauty. You are absolutely right.”

Nicole let out a soft laugh too at Wynonna’s reaction. It was small but it was nice to share a moment that wasn’t filled with agony and inner turmoil. She gave a nod and motioned toward the bedroom door “So I’ll go get changed and find Waverly, then. Tell her we are doing it in her room since she has the king size mattress. Then I will come get you.”

Wynonna lifted her hand and formed it into the universal sign for “ok” and gave her friend another wink. She smiled when Nicole smiled in return. They shared a momentary look that spoke volumes to one another about how nice it was to be acting like friends again before Nicole finally turned to leave. Wynonna let out a sigh and her smile faded. It was nice to have a glimpse of normalcy back with Nicole. She knew there was still a lot to deal with between them but that did not matter at the moment. What mattered now was shaping the destiny of The Ghost River Triangle for generations to come. This was monumental. She wanted to do it right. Nothing in the world was more important than this.

The three of them made relatively quick work at getting changed and making their way to Waverly’s bedroom. Wynonna had even dared walk without the help of her walker since it was just a door down from her own room. This, of course, was protested by Nicole and Waverly both. They ended up spending more time arguing about it than it ended up taking Wynonna to get to the room but in
the end she had won and that was all that mattered to her.

Nicole had let Waverly and Wynonna sit next to one another at the head of the bed so they could go over the Constitution together. Nicole had taken to laying across the bed near their feet. She was going over the book Waverly had brought from the library that had various rights and laws outlined and explained in it. It was completely boring to read but she figured that was the best way she could help. She didn’t think she had any right to say what they should put into the Constitution so she was just trying to help where she could.

This setup had only lasted about a half an hour because Waverly had asked to see the book Nicole was looking through because she wanted to look something up. This ended up with her reading page after page which meant she had stopped helping Wynonna. Wynonna whined that Waverly wasn’t helping so Nicole had moved up next to her to try and offer her opinion on what Wynonna was writing and suggesting. This didn’t last long and Wynonna decided she needed a break so she reached for the love letters between her parents and her hot cocoa.

Now Nicole was editing and rewriting some of the addendums in the Constitution. She was completely immersed and had barely noticed that the sisters were both lying near the foot of the bed reading the love letters and exchanging giggles. It wasn’t until she realized she was getting a headache that she looked up from what she was doing and realized she was the only one working. She let out a heavy sigh and set down the huge pile of papers she had been skimming through. She folded her arms and scowled at the other two “Really?”

Wynonna looked to her right over her shoulder slightly and perked an eyebrow “What?”

Nicole motioned sharply at the two girls lying on their stomachs and giggling like teenagers and let out a huff “You two are acting like you’re reading a Teen Bop magazine while I’m the only one actually working on the Constitution so we can accomplish what we set out to do.”

Wynonna rolled her eyes and looked back to her sister. She made a face mocking what Nicole had just said before looking back to her friend and shrugging “Well did you finish it already? You’ve been working on it for what feel likes hours.”

“Seriously?” Nicole growled and narrowed her eyes to her friend. “You’re just going to make a joke out of this too?”

“Oh come on! When did you lose your sense of humor?” Wynonna frowned and moved now to gently push herself off her stomach. She moved very gingerly, as it definitely hurt to do so, but she eventually made it up to sitting.

Seeing Nicole was not amused and was about to go off on Wynonna, Waverly sat up very quickly, and put her hands up toward each woman to stop them from speaking again. “Okay how about this?” She looked between the others and once she realized she had their attention she dropped her hands and gave a nod “Let’s all go over what we’ve gotten for the Constitution quickly and then I will go fax it to the legal team. Then we can spend the rest of the night relaxing and reading the letters or whatever.”

“I’m okay with that but I’m not sure she-” Nicole threw her hand in the direction of Wynonna and shrugged “-can focus long enough. Do you even want to get this done any time soon?”

“Wow okay” Wynonna did not appreciate Nicole’s tone. She turned to face Nicole better and lifted her hand as if she were about to make a firm point “Forgive me for trying to enjoy a nice night with my sister and best friend for about five minutes. I had no idea I was being so offensive.”
“Offensive?” Nicole breathed out with a huff and rolled her eyes “More like annoying. Everyone has been working their asses off for more than a month trying to do everything we can to make sure what you started didn’t fall apart by the time you woke up. Now we’re so fucking close to getting it done and you’re just taking a vacation with your sister.”

“Vacation?” Wynonna’s eyes fluttered and her head shook as her entire face twisted in genuine offense. “You think being blown up is a vacation?’

“Guys!” Waverly yelled suddenly to cut off a rebuttal from Nicole. She looked between the two of them and gave her head a quick shake. She let out a huff and folded her arms over her chest. “Why in the Hell can’t you two go five minutes without yelling at each other? It’s so frustrating being around you two.”

“She’s being annoying!” Nicole growled with a motion toward Wynonna.

“She’s got a stick up her ass!” Wynonna mimicked Nicole’s gesture and tone.

“You two need to knock it off” Waverly growled and pointed firmly at the both of them. She narrowed her eyes and fixed them both with a glare before her head shook slightly. “You two used to work so well together and now it’s like you don’t even know how to talk to one another. So whatever it is that’s put up this wall between you needs to be resolved or this will never work.”

She slid off of the bed now and took the pile of papers off of Nicole’s lap with a growl. She then stormed over to the door then stopped to turn back and look at the others again “I’m going to go fax this to the legal team then go for a walk. When I get back you better be out of my room because I want to go to bed and forget this day ever happened.” With the last of her words she turned and continued storming out of the room.

“Waverly, don’t-” Wynonna’s protest to her sister was not heard as the younger sister disappeared from the room. She let out a heavy sigh and looked back over to Nicole with a motion toward the door “Look what you did. You upset her.”

“So none of this was your fault?” Nicole perked an eyebrow and folded her arms across her chest.

“No” Wynonna said with in a tone as if that was obvious. “You were the one throwing a fit about the fact that we weren’t helping you.”

“So you admit it you weren’t helping” Nicole nodded once as her eyebrows rose on her forehead.

“Okay fine I was enjoying a moment with my sister where nothing was wrong. There were no politics involved, no injuries, no impending doom, no…” She sighed and motioned to Nicole with a roll of her eyes “…weirdness. It was a moment where I got to forget that my entire world is a shit show.”

Nicole felt her gut twist with guilt now. She knew it had to be hard for Wynonna and maybe she shouldn’t have gone off like she did. But none of this had been easy on her either. Add in the weirdness Wynonna had mentioned and it had all been completely unbearable. She let out a bit of a sigh and her arms unfolded from across her chest “I know all of this sucks balls. Maybe I should have approached it in a different way but…” She shrugged a little and motioned weakly toward Wynonna “…I get snippy when I don’t feel like I’m being heard and you and I have not been hearing each other at all lately.”

“I know this entire situation is whack” Wynonna said with a slight nod as her tone softened. “And maybe we’ve been using each other as punching bags for our frustration because we know that no
matter what we will always still be friends.”

“Will we, though?” Nicole blurted out the question before she could help herself. When she realized what she had done her eyes went wide in surprise. She looked as shocked at her words as Wynonna did.

“Wh-what…” Wynonna’s eyes fluttered in surprise as she tried to process what she had just been asked. She stared in near horror at her friend for a few long seconds. She finally managed to cough out a breath and gather herself enough to continue speaking. “What is that supposed to mean exactly?”

“It means something has changed, Wynonna” Nicole breathed out a heavy sigh, sounding almost defeated as she did so, and gave a slight shrug. “I am so sick of dancing around it. I have been completely terrified to face it head on because I am scared about what it could mean. I used to think it was because I couldn’t handle the emotional ramifications but I’ve realized now it’s because I am petrified about losing you in my life if something goes wrong.”

The honesty of Nicole’s words made Wynonna’s heart flutter. She had to look away from her friend now because the look in her eyes was just too much to deal with. She knew exactly what Nicole meant. Accepting what was happening between them meant putting herself at risk for pain and she was not sure it was the type of pain she would be able to come back from.

Nicole watched Wynonna look away and avoid eye contact. She waited for her friend to say something, anything, to indicate she understood. What she wanted to hear was that Wynonna felt the same but at this point she would take just knowing that Wynonna heard what she was saying. But when a response did not come after a long pause between them Nicole let out a frustrated sigh and opened her mouth to let her best friend know exactly how irritated she was at her silence.

The rant never came, though. Instead Wynonna spoke up just in time to cut her off. “I know what you mean. There's more at stake now than ever before.” Her tone was soft and her eyes finally lifted to look back at her friend. She gave a single nod and fixed a look in her eyes that spoke volumes about how deeply she understood what Nicole had said. “I'm so afraid to lose you that I'd rather push you away so at least it was my doing when you walk out of my life.”

“I'm not going anywhere” Nicole's voice trembled with a hint of pain caused by Wynonna's words. She shifted on the bed so she was sitting next to Wynonna now. She then reached for her hand and took it gently in her own. “I've been with you this far already. What makes you think I'm going to walk away now?”

Wynonna gave her head a slight shake. Her eyes dropped to where Nicole held her hand and she let out a sigh “Everyone I've ever loved has left me. Momma, daddy, even my grandfather…” she looked up at Nicole now and shrugged “It's only a matter of time before you and Waves follow suit.”

“They died, Wynonna” Nicole's heart nearly broke at the sight of her best friend looking so wounded. “They would still be here if it wasn't for outside forces. They didn't choose to leave you.” She frowned and let out a soft sigh “I promise you that neither myself nor Waverly are planning on willingly leaving you.”

“You say that now” Wynonna mumbled and rolled her eyes. She sighed heavily and gave her head a shake “It's only a matter of time before I mess it all up and you decide I'm not worth it.”

“I have seen you make just about every bad decision a person can make” Nicole mumbled but held a slight amusement in her tone “and I'm still very much by your side.” She reached for Wynonna’s chin, using her fingers to guide her face up until their eyes met, and gave a smile when they did
“This is where I want to be.”

“Are you sure?” Wynonna perked a skeptical eyebrow “Because I am really great at fucking everything up and I just-”

She was cut off when Nicole leaned down and pressed her lips to her mouth. It caught her by surprise and she froze for a split second. Then, as if it was the most natural thing in the world, her reflexes took over and she returned the kiss.

It was light and tender but there was no mistaking its depth. Nicole was relieved when the momentary hesitation passed Wynonna and she returned the kiss. It had been risky but she knew they had to stop fearing risk and start taking chances. So she put herself out there first in the hope that Wynonna would be less afraid and it seemed to be working.

The kiss didn't last too long, a few tender seconds, and when they parted Wynonna was smiling. She almost looked shy which was definitely a first for her. She gave her head a shake as her eyes met Nicole's before letting out a soft laugh “Why the Hell did you do that?”

“You know damn well why I did” Nicole said with a roll of her eyes. “For the same reason you're afraid to lose me and the same reason we've been bickering for days. Because you had a stupid epiphany during your coma and you just couldn't keep it to yourself.”

Wynonna let out a soft almost guilty sounding laugh at that. She pointed at Nicole now with slight amusement in her eyes “So you did understand what I said to you that night?”

“Well not at first!” Nicole huffed and let out a laugh. “We really do need to work on your communication skills when it comes to this shit.”

“What shit?” Wynonna acted clueless now, even shrugging slightly.

“No” Nicole pointed firmly at Wynonna and shook her head. “No way. You're not gonna sit there and pretend you have no idea what I'm saying so that you don't have to talk about it.”

“Talk about what?” Wynonna asked now in a playfully sing song tone as a smirk slid over her lips.

“God damn it, Wynonna Earp! Be an adult for five seconds” Nicole growled the words but there was more amusement than anger behind them. When Wynonna just looked at her with a playful look of cluelessness in her eyes Nicole let out a laugh. She moved quickly to playfully tackle Wynonna back into the mattress behind them, effectively pinning her to the bed, but doing so in a way that she did not hurt Wynonna too badly with the movements. Now holding herself above her friend she smirked down at her “If you don’t stop playing coy I’m gonna dangle spit over you.”

“Oh real fucking mature” Wynonna growled with slight annoyance in her tone. Her annoyance was accompanied with amusement, though, and she finally broke and allowed a smile to take over her lips. She gave her head a shake and tried to give a firm scowl at Nicole in an attempt to sound serious but she was just too amused by it all at the moment “Also, so not fair pinning me down when you know I can’t fight back.”

Nicole just shrugged and in a very Wynonna-type way she smirked and spoke in a cocky tone “Gotta use whatever advantage you can get. Sucks to be you.”

Wynonna didn’t like being mocked very much and it showed by the scowl on her face. She let out a huff and tried to fold her arms but was stopped by Nicole’s knees on either side of her holding them against her tightly. This made her wiggle quickly to try and free a limb. When she did so she tweaked her sore muscles and incision sites and immediately let out a loud groan. “Ouch, damn it.
This is so unfair, Haught!”

Nicole felt bad that Wynonna had hurt herself. She frowned and rocked back and to the side. She pulled herself off of Wynonna completely and sat at her side with concern on her face “I’m sorry I didn’t mean for you to get hurt.”

“I deserved it” Wynonna grumbled as her arm reached across her torso. She took in a slow breath and let it out very carefully before her eyes focused on Nicole beside her. She saw the way Nicole was looking at her with such concern and she felt her heart flutter. No one in their life had cared so genuinely for her like Nicole did. She let out a sigh and reached up to put her hand against Nicole’s cheek. She gave her a soft smile before speaking softly “You’re right. I have been avoiding talking about what needs to be talked about.”

“Well so have I” Nicole admitted now with a little shrug. She reached up and put her hand over the one of Wynonna’s that was against her cheek. She closed her eyes and drew in a deep breath before slowly letting it out. She smiled and after a moment of relishing in the feeling of Wynonna’s touch she slowly let her eyes flutter open. Her smile didn’t fade and she nodded slightly “But it seems like we’re both on the same page so—”

“Can we just not talk about it?” Wynonna asked with a soft laugh before Nicole could finish her thought. Her hand moved slowly from Nicole’s cheek to her shoulder before moving along her arm. She grabbed hold of her hand when she reached it and just gave her head a shake “You know I’m not good at emotional crap so can we just skip it?”

“No we can’t” Nicole said with a shake of her head. She was speaking softly because she did not want Wynonna to think she was trying to start a fight but she also knew she had to be firm. They had to clarify it so there was no more confusion between them because it had been tearing them apart. She drew in a deep breath then let it out quickly as if she were surrendering her dignity before she gave a nod “So I’ll just put myself out there so you don’t have any questions. I’m in love with you, alright?”

“God damn it” Wynonna grumbled and eased herself up onto her elbows. She reached her hand up and slid it to the back of Nicole’s head. She pulled her head down while leaning up into the motion until their lips once more came together in a kiss. This one was more firm. This one was immediately more passionate. There was no doubt behind the meaning of the kiss. With the kiss she made sure Nicole knew she echoed the sentiment of the words she had just spoken.

Nicole was surprised by the quickness and strength of the kiss. But she didn’t hesitate to return it. She melted into it easily and let herself get lost in the feeling of their lips and tongues dancing together as if they had done it countless times before. It was almost breathtaking how much intensity was coursing through the kiss they were locked in.

Wynonna pulled back from the kiss as quickly as she had pushed into it. She licked her lips to sweep in the last bit of Nicole’s essence into her mouth as a smirk came to her lips. She lifted her eyes to meet Nicole’s and she gave a slight nod of her head “Ditto.”

The dreamy smile that had been lingering on Nicole’s lips faded when Wynonna spoke. She gave her head a shake and let out a heavy sigh. “You’re fucking infuriating.”

“Don’t make me say it” Wynonna whined out as her lip pushed out into a pout.

“Fine” Nicole lifted her hand in a motion to indicate she wanted Wynonna to stop whining. When Wynonna gave a triumphant smile Nicole just rolled her eyes but smiled very slightly “For now. But you’re going to have to eventually.”
“Mmm, probably not” Wynonna smirked and gave a playful shrug of her shoulders. She lifted her hand and used her finger to tap at the end of Nicole’s nose with a self-satisfied grin on her lips. “Because you love me and will let me get away with whatever I want.”

“I’m going to kick your ass” Nicole growled and quickly stood from the bed. She turned to storm out of the room but was stopped by Waverly coming into the room at the exact moment. She nearly plowed right into her but was able to stop before they collided. She looked surprised and she let out a soft laugh “Shit, Waves, I nearly trampled you!”

“Woah, where’s the fire?” Waverly’s eyes went wide too. She had put her hands up to brace for impact and when it didn’t happen she gently brought them to rest on Nicole’s arms. She used her grip on Nicole’s arm to push her to the side so she could look passed her to the bed. When she saw her sister sitting there with a smirk on her lips she quickly looked back to Nicole. She perked an eyebrow at the girl then motioned to her sister “Are you still fighting?”

“No we’re fine” Nicole rolled her eyes and turned to look back at the bed. When she saw the stupid smirk on Wynonna’s face she shook her head and let out a soft laugh. She was so annoyed but at the same time she was completely amused. It was always like that with Wynonna. No matter how upset Nicole could get at her she always found a way to make Nicole laugh.

“Good!” Waverly seemed pleasantly surprised at the news that they were not still fighting. She gave her hands a clap then moved by Nicole toward the bed. “Now let’s call it a night because I am absolutely pooped.”

“Great idea” Nicole said with a nod. She motioned to Wynonna and gave a look as if to tell her not to say anything to Waverly yet before she gave another nod “Why don’t you two have a little sister slumber party and I’ll retire to my own bed.”

“Don’t be silly there is plenty of room” Waverly said as she climbed into her bed and patted the mattress next to her.

“No, no I think she’s right” Wynonna said with a nod, giving Nicole an acknowledging wink, before looking to her sister. “How about just you and I tonight? We can tuck each other in and read more of the love letters until we pass out.”

“You sure?” Waverly eyed her sister for a moment then looked to Nicole. She perked an eyebrow curiously before looking back to her sister “You two promise you’re not still fighting?”

“Cross my heart, babygirl” Wynonna’s face was devoid of all smirks or indications that she was lying. “I just need a little Earp girl time.”

“And I have an early morning anyway” Nicole motioned behind her in a vague gesture to a place that was anywhere else but the room where she stood. “So you two stay up late and have fun. I am going to call it a night.”

“Okay” Waverly pouted slightly but it faded quickly to a smile. “Thank you for all your help today.”

“It’s my pleasure” Nicole said with a genuine smile and a nod. She glanced at Wynonna and felt her heart flutter. She bit her lip and looked away quickly “You two have a good night.”

“You too” Waverly said with a little wave.

“Sweet dreams, Haught” Wynonna said as a smirk came over her features again. She very blatantly looked Nicole over head to toe before giving the girl another wink.
Nicole rolled her eyes and quickly turned away so neither of them could see her blush. She left the room in a hurry as her head shook quickly side to side. She would be more annoyed at Wynonna if she wasn’t so completely filled with relief. It hadn’t been easy, or ideal, but they had finally faced their fears and been open with each other. Well, Nicole had. Wynonna had gone about it in her own Wynonna kind of way but at this point that was more than Nicole could have ever asked for. She was just glad it was out in the open and now they could move forward toward whatever came next.

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It's not my fault you couldn't understand me through the biscuit

Surprisingly enough Nicole was able to sleep that night. Actually, she slept better than she had in a long time. Too long. She had not realized just how heavily denying her feelings for Wynonna had been weighing on her. Now, though they were not completely out of the woods with everything else going on, she did at least feel light enough to sleep. In fact, she didn’t even remember falling to sleep. She had gone back to her room, sat on her bed to reminisce about what had just happened with Wynonna, and the next thing she knew it was morning.

She had gotten up early with a smile on her face. She made quick work of showering, humming as she did so, and then readying for the day. She did not exactly have plans but she was going to try and get back into her routine of being a Royal Guard. She was going to do sweeps of the grounds, relieve guards for breaks, and even sit down and try to reduce the amount of manpower they had at the cabin. The men she had brought with her had not seen their families since they had arrived. She felt they were secure enough now to let a few of them leave. Maybe she would start to rotate their shifts so they could all eventually see their families.

She was already running this idea through her head as she stepped out of the bathroom that was attached to her room. She was dressed but her hair was still wrapped up in a towel to dry as she walked over toward where her brush sat on her dresser. She reached for it and out of the corner of her eye she caught the shape of someone in the room.

Without hesitation she grabbed the brush and whirled around with it in hand. She lifted it toward whoever was standing there as if it were a real weapon and she could do actual damage with it. Her eyes were wide and though she had been startled she tried not to look as such as her eyes narrowed on the figure.

Wynonna sat on the edge of Nicole’s bed with amusement painted all over her features. She didn’t even try to hide that fact that she thought Nicole’s reaction was completely hilarious. She just smirked at the girl and motioned to the way she stood with the hairbrush thrust out like a knife “I give you an A for reaction time but you really disappoint in the area of intimidation. What are you going to do? Brush me to death?”

“Shit, Wynonna” Nicole rolled her eyes and immediately deflated her stiffened stance. She dropped her arm that held up the brush and gave her head a shake. She smirked very slightly and let out a relieved laugh as she took a step closer to her friend now that she knew she wasn’t a threat. “You need a bell. How long have you been sitting there?”

“Long enough to hear you humming in the shower and then proceed to unleash a string of obscenities that, quite frankly, makes me proud to know you when you knocked over everything in the shower” Wynonna laughed softly then motioned for Nicole to come closer with a pat on the bed beside where she sat.

“Firstly, those showers are barely big enough for a child” Nicole lifted her finger as if she were making a fair point. “Secondly, you sat here and listened to me shower? You’re such a creep” She let out a playful laugh as she moved now to the bed. She sat beside Wynonna without hesitation and offered her a smile. She drew in a deep breath to continue what she had been saying but that attempt was cut off by the sudden presence of Wynonna’s lips.

Wynonna had been thinking about Nicole all night. It was weird that someone she had known basically her entire life could now be the only thing she thought about but that's exactly what was happening. It was like an exciting new chapter had just started and she could not wait to see what
unfolded. So instead of waiting, because Wynonna was not patient at all, she had decided to take matters into her own hands. Or lips. Whatever.

So she waited for Nicole to sit before she leaned up into her quickly. Her hand wrapped around the back of Nicole’s head and she pulled her into a deep kiss. It came so naturally. It was so bizarre to think she could transition to this type of thing with Nicole so easily and yet here they were, kissing yet again, as if it was some type of habit already.

The kiss was short and when Wynonna pulled back she was smiling. She caught the look of surprise on Nicole’s face and she let out a soft laugh as her hand dropped away from the back of her head. She gave a casual shrug at her friend and bit back a smirk “Couldn’t help myself. The towel really got me going…” She motioned now to the way the towel was still wrapped around Nicole’s wet hair.

Nicole’s eyes fluttered as if she were coming out of a dream. She had not expected the kiss and her mind was swirling a little bit from it. In a good way. Then, just like that, she registered what Wynonna had said and her hand lifted to her head. She immediately blushed when she realized she still had the towel on her head. She shook her head and quickly got off the bed “Well you snuck up on me! I didn’t expect you to see me all….” She motioned sharply at the towel and frowned. “Oh come on” Wynonna let out a laugh and waved her hand to the side like she was batting away Nicole’s obvious embarrassment. “You have seen me in much more compromising positions. Also, remember that time I shaved your eyebrows off while you were sleeping when you were fourteen?” She bit her lip as she tried to fight off a laugh at the memory. Her eyes looked over her friend and she gave a nod “That was a total look for you.”

“Wynonna” Nicole groaned and rolled her eyes. She reached up now to undo the towel. She pulled it from her head and gave a little shake as her red wavy locks were released. She tossed the towel over the back of a nearby chair then reached up and ran her hand back through the slightly damp strands.

Wynonna perked an eyebrow at what Nicole had just done. It was so normal, taking your hair out of a towel, but somehow now it looked different. It looked enticing. She had always known her best friend was good looking. Hell, she called her a variety of nicknames that eluded to the fact that she was attractive. But now? Well now she was realizing just how drop dead sexy Nicole was. She bit her lip and motioned with her hand the length of Nicole’s body as she stood there “Did you have to go and do that?”

“Do what?” Nicole perked a eyebrow and looked down over herself. She was wearing jeans and the tank top she wore under her button up that she liked to wear when she was woking. Her hair was a mess because, well, she had not brushed it yet. When she did not see what Wynonna was referring to she shrugged and looked back at her friend. “Stand here?”

“No. The whole…” Wynonna motioned to her own head. She then mimicked, very over dramatically of course, the motion of tossing her hair back. She then gave a little shake of her shoulders and head as she winked and ran her hand slowly back through her hair. Once done with the charade she frowned and motioned at Nicole again “…thing!”

“I did not do that!” Nicole laughed out in amusement at Wynonna’s enactment of the type of slow motion sexy girl entrance into a room that you would see in basically any male-driven movie. “I think your pain medicine is making you delusional.”

“Jokes on you I’m not on any pain medicine” Wynonna mocked Nicole’s self-righteous tone. She then let out a sighed laugh and gave her head a shake. “In all seriousness though the way you shook
your hair out was kind of sexy.”

Nicole just rolled her eyes to try and fight the fact that she was blushing. She turned away from Wynonna now and went over to the mirror that was over her dresser. She lifted the brush she had been holding the entire time and started to run it through her hair. She caught sight of Wynonna watching her in the mirror and a smile came to her lips “You think I’m sexy?”

Not one to ever admit anything, Wynonna just shrugged her shoulders. She watched Nicole for a second longer before a smile took over her features and she let out a soft laugh “You ain’t the worst thing to look at.”

“You’re so charming” Nicole grumbled softly as her eyes focused back on herself in the mirror. She took a few more moments to brush through her hair before she was satisfied with it. After setting down her brush she turned toward the bed again. She walked over to it but stopped before reaching it. Instead she turned to the chair nearby and reached for the button up shirt she had laid out there before her shower. As she slid it over her arms her eyes focused back on Wynonna “Are you ever going to say what you really mean or am I going to have to always pry it out of you?”

“You already know the answer to that” Wynonna said with a smirk as she watched Nicole dress. It was, again, something so natural. It was something she had seen her friend do more times than she could count. Yet today as Nicole’s fingers moved over the buttons, fastening them in place one by one, she felt a stirring in her stomach. She bit her lip again and her eyes blinked a few times as she looked away. She was starting to realize that when they had kissed the night before they had opened some sort of Pandora’s box and now all of the feelings she had been stuffing back were raging forward. It was almost unbearable.

“Well will you at least answer me one thing?” Nicole, blissfully unaware of Wynonna’s yearning since her eyes had been on her buttons, asked now as she finished with her shirt and looked up at her friend. “What was that kiss all about?” She motioned between the two of them now to indicate the one they had shared a few minutes prior.

Wynonna let out a soft laugh in a sound that told Nicole the answer should be obvious. She motioned to Nicole and gave a vague sort of shrug and nod “You know…” She huffed then motioned to the door of Nicole’s bedroom toward nowhere in particular then again nodded. She was nodding so much she looked almost like a bobblehead doll. It was as if she were trying to nod the words loose from behind her tongue.

Nicole just gave a roll of her eyes. She knew Wynonna hated all things personal. She hated talking about them. She hated acknowledging them. She liked to pretend that the only thing going on with her, ever, was sarcasm. But she had never anticipated Wynonna would shut down like this. They had always been able to talk. Wynonna was more open with Nicole than anyone else in the world. Yet here she was bobbing her head around like she had a spring for a neck.

“You know what?” Nicole said firmly but in a calm tone as her eyes locked in on Wynonna. She wanted her to see the seriousness of what she was about to say. “I think it goes without saying that I am one of the most patient people in the world. Being your friend has tested that patience throughout the course of my life. But I think it’s about time you get your shit together.” She put her hands on her hips now and gave her head a single shake. “Because I am not going to play a guessing game when it comes to….” She motioned from herself to Wynonna just once “…whatever the Hell this is.”

Nicole moved now passed Wynonna toward the door of her bedroom. She was not mad. She just had things she would rather be doing than standing there trying to coax a single honest thought out of Wynonna Earp.
“Wait! Shit, Haught, okay!” Wynonna lunged to try and stop Nicole but the sharp movement caused her sore abdominal wall to flinch in pain. She let out a grunt and breathed out through gritted teeth “Come on, man. I can’t come after you as quickly as I’d like so will you just wait a fucking second.”

Nicole turned around slowly. She felt bad that she had obviously caused Wynonna to hurt herself but she tried not to show it. Instead her face was devoid of anything but slight annoyance when her eyes landed on her friend. She gave a single shrug and motioned to Wynonna as if silently telling her to go ahead.

Wynonna let out a heavy sigh and she rolled her eyes. She put both hands against the mattress and, after drawing in a deep breath to brace herself, she pushed herself up from sitting. It took a few seconds but she was finally able to get to her feet. She then let the breath she had been holding out slowly before her eyes focused on Nicole. She offered her an almost apologetic smile and her head shook just once “Nicole Sugar Tits Haught-”

“That’s not my middle name” Nicole tried to sound unamused but a smile flickered at the corner of her lips.

“Nicole Sugar Tits Haught” Wynonna repeated with a flash of a smirk before it faded to a more genuine smile. “I am scared to fucking death about it but also…” She let out a sort of defeated sigh and she motioned to where Nicole stood and shrugged “This is happening, alright?”

Nicole’s stance softened. Her hands dropped from where she held them on her hips and her eyes widened a bit. She looked Wynonna over slowly then after a moment took a step toward her. She bit at her lip to try and fight off a smile because she did not want to look too excited about what she thought Wynonna was saying. She perked an eyebrow and tried to sound as casual as she could “What is happening?”

“For the love of-” Wynonna growled in annoyance because she knew what Nicole was doing. She was a professional at pretending to not understand so the other person had to say it first. Damn Nicole for having finally learned the oldest trick in the Wynonna playbook. She pushed a smile onto her face and drew in a sharp breath through her nose. It wasn’t that she wasn’t completely sincere about it. It was the fact that she had to say it out loud that she was struggling with. It went against her genetic code to be serious. She gave her eyes a roll and let out another heavy sigh.

Nicole was fighting off her own amusement as she watched Wynonna struggle to spit out the words. She would feel bad about it if Wynonna hadn’t tortured her into confessing her feelings first. This was just a little payback.

Finally, seeing Nicole was not going to budge on this, she motioned sharply with her hand toward her friend “We got feelings for each other so we are gonna do that thing that people do when they have feelings for one another.”

“Oh are we?” Nicole’s amusement was rising by the second. She perked an eyebrow at Wynonna and pretended to be skeptical about the idea. “So that’s it? You just decide this without even asking me? Who do you think you are? The Queen of England?”

Wynonna couldn’t help the short laugh that popped out of her mouth. Nicole Haught had finally learned the art of sarcasm. It was about time. Wynonna had only been trying to teach the girl her entire life. Her head shook as a smile moved over her features “Will you please come over here and kiss me now? If you wait for me to come to you we will be here all day.”

It was only about four steps and Nicole had been tempted to make Wynonna do the footwork but she figured she had tortured her enough. Though it had been in a very indirect way, Wynonna had
finally been direct enough about what she meant and that was good enough for Nicole. So she gave in and finally closed the gap between them. She slid her arms around Wynonna gently and drew their bodies together until there was no space between them. She gave a single nod as she looked into Wynonna’s eyes and a smirk came to her lips “Was that so hard?”

“Fucking excruciating” Wynonna said with a serious nod as her arms lifted to slide around Nicole’s neck. “I’d rather be in an explosion again.”

“Not funny” Nicole’s smile dropped from her face.

Wynonna rolled her eyes and gave a soft smile “Ease up, Haught. You got the girl.”

Nicole’s smile returned slowly and she let out a soft sigh. Her head nodded and she leaned down the short distance to catch Wynonna’s lips on hers. The kiss was gentle, full of tenderness, and it lasted only a couple seconds. When she pulled back her smile returned “You realize you’re going to have to eventually start talking about the mushy stuff with me, right?”

“Pfft, maybe on my deathbed” Wynonna mumbled.

“Enough with the death jokes” Nicole grumbled. She leaned in and kissed Wynonna once more before stepping away from her completely. She took a few steps back and, knowing that Wynonna could not chase her, she smirked before stating seriously “You have to tell Waverly. I’ll see you at lunch!” With that she turned and left the room.

“What?” Wynonna’s eyes went wide with shock. She took two quick steps toward where Nicole had disappeared before the pain in her stomach stopped her. She groaned and wrapped an arm around her midsection. She gritted her teeth and scowled at the doorway of the room “Damn it, Haught. I’m going to kick your ass when I see you next.”

Realizing she was alone and the threat was empty she let out a sigh. She looked around Nicole’s empty room and considered for a moment pulling a prank on her. But she gave up the thought and moved to her walker. She gave a shake of her head as she grabbed it and let out a sigh. Nicole was right. They had to tell Waverly before she found out some other way. She would be absolutely devastated if the two people she loved most weren’t the ones that told her the news. Now Wynonna had to have another serious conversation and that did not sound fun. Being honest with her feelings was turning out to be a pain in the ass.

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A soft knock came to Waverly’s door and she looked up from where she sat at her desk going over some papers. She smiled very softly in the direction of the noise and nodded even though no one else was in the room “Come in!”

The door was pulled open by the guard standing watch outside the room and slowly Wynonna moved into the doorway. She gave a little smile to her sister as she came into view. “There you are” She said as she moved painstakingly slowly.

“Here I am” Waverly repeated with a laugh as she got to her feet now. She felt so bad for her sister. She knew that having to move slowly and ask for help had to be killing her. Wynonna was a proud person so this entire healing process was probably frustrating. Hopefully it would be a little humbling, too. “I haven’t left my room all morning, though, so if you were looking for me than you must not have been looking very hard.”

Wynonna rolled her eyes but smiled because Waverly was right. She had not been looking too hard.
She had been walking slowly toward her room with dread filling her every nerve. She did not want to do this. She wanted her own personal thoughts and feelings and emotions to stay hers and not share them with anyone. It had worked up to this point in her life. She had no idea why that suddenly had to change. Stupid near death experience making her confess things.

“Well I went to see Nicole before she headed off to do whatever it is she does for a living…” Wynonna said casually as she reached for Waverly’s hand when her sister drew close and offered it to her. “Then I thought I’d come back here and see if you wanted breakfast.”

“You know what she does for a living” Waverly laughed softly as she helped Wynonna over to the bed. She watched her sister lower herself to sitting then gave a nod. “Should you be walking around so much without someone with you?”

“I went down the hallway” Wynonna waved it off with a flick of her hand. “There were two guards watching me the entire time. If I would have fallen they would have been there. Besides…” She shrugged now as her hand came to rest on her sore stomach “…the doctor said that my only limitation is my pain. My incisions are all healed and stuff. So it’s up to me how hard I want to push. I’m basically just regaining my strength at this point so, you know, no pain no gain.”

Waverly just gave her head a little shake before turning away from her sister now. “Well I still want you to be careful.” She moved to her desk and picked up the tray of food she had been eating off while working. She brought it back to the bed and set it down next to Wynonna “I had breakfast brought in for us so we can keep working on the Constitution this morning. I got the revised version back from legal not too long ago. They made a few suggestions so I thought we could go over them.”

“Well look at you being all prepared and shit” Wynonna huffed out a laugh and motioned to the food. At the mere sight of the food her stomach gave a growl. She was starving. All this walking had really help build her an appetite. So she reached for one of the biscuits that had on the tray and lifted it to her mouth. She looked up now and smiled as crumbs fell all over her lap and her cheeks puffed out from how much of the biscuit she had shoved in her mouth.

“You are the ruler of an entire country. Sometimes that blows my mind” Waverly said with a breathe of a laugh and a roll of her eyes. Yes she knew Wynonna was actually really good at being Queen but sometimes her maturity level dipped back to that of a twelve-year-old and she was reminded that her sister would always be a kid at heart.

“Niffole un I arf lalling” Wynonna mumbled through the mouthful of food.

Waverly puffed out an impatient sounding laugh now and moved back to her desk “Want to try that without food in your mouth?” She gathered up the papers she had been looking over and moved back to the bed. She figured it would be easier for the both of them to work from the bed than having to try and squeeze a second chair around the desk.

What Wynonna had said with her mouth full of food was that Nicole and herself were dating. She had said the words clear and precise without any hints and subtlety. It just so happened that they were muffled by food. But she had told her sister, right? So it counted? That’s the defense she would use when Nicole asked her about it later.

When she finally swallowed and cleared her mouth she spoke again but did not repeat herself “I said I wouldn’t be the ruler for much longer.” She avoided eye contact because she knew Waverly would be able to see she was lying. Instead she looked at the Constitution her sister held and motioned to it “How’s it looking?”
Waverly thought it was peculiar that Wynonna did not have any sarcastic comeback to her remark. Instead she seemed to be all about business. She perked an eyebrow at that because, well, that was not Wynonna’s style. She could be serious when the time called for it, sure, but to dive right in like that was not normal. She sat next to her sister now and eyed her very suspicously before giving her head a shake “They said it looks good. They made notes regarding a few missing things but for the most part it seems to be a good start.”

“Cool” Wynonna gave a nod then looked up at her sister. She drew in a deep breath before letting it out slowly. Her tone was serious as she stared at Waverly now “We’re close, babygirl. Can you believe it?”

“No. I can’t” Waverly said honestly. She couldn’t believe that just over a month ago they had all agreed this was the best course of action and now they were close to getting it done. She also could not believe how serious her sister was being. No jokes. No sarcasm. The most obnoxious thing she had done was stuff the biscuit in her mouth. That was it. Something had to be wrong.

Wynonna reached out and took a hold of Waverly’s hand. She gave it a gentle squeeze before lifting it to her lips. She kissed at her knuckles just once before another long exhale slipped from her lungs. She had to admit that being so close to ending the Monarchy and living a free life had already started to lend relief to her entire being. Add in the fact that Nicole and herself were no longer fighting their feelings and she felt lighter than she ever had in her entire life. The only thing weighing her down now as the fact that she had to tell her sister. For some reason she was afraid Waverly would not take the news well.

“Waves, listen-”

“Your Majesties” The guard outside the bedroom door burst into the room just then. His face was stoic but his tone urgent. “There is an unauthorized aircraft in the area. I have been directed to escort you both to the safety bunker. Come with me.”

“Are you kidding me?” Wynonna groaned out. Of course right when she had just built up the courage she would be interrupted.

Waverly just stood from the bed now with a nod. She turned and offered her hands to help get Wynonna to her feet. “Wait, how much time do we have? Wynonna can’t walk it will take us forever.” She glanced at Wynonna and shrugged “No offense.”

“I’m a fucking snail, I get it” Wynonna waved Waverly off because she was not at all offended. She knew she was slow. She couldn’t make a run for it if her life depended on it. “It’s fine. I’ll just be a decoy while the rest of you make your escape.”

“Not funny” Waverly rolled her eyes then looked at the guard. “Can you carry her?”

“He is not going to carry me!” Wynonna argued as she got to her feet. “I have a wheelchair in my room!”

“Go!” Waverly said quickly to the guard and motioned for him to get the chair. She then turned and started to help Wynonna slowly toward the door. “Do you think it’s the Hardys?”

“I don’t know, Waverly” Wynonna said softly. Honestly, she was actually terrified but she wanted to be strong for her sister. “It’s probably just some dumb civilian that didn’t know this was restricted air space.”

Waverly nodded even if she didn’t believe it. She was pretty sure it was her worst fear coming to life.
She was so afraid that they would be sitting comfy cozy in the cabin thinking they have won when they would suddenly be attacked in retaliation. It would be the perfect time to strike. They would never see it coming.

Just as they got to the bedroom door they were nearly knocked over by a very serious looking Nicole. “Oh good there you are. Here-” Without another word she bent down just enough to slide one arm around Wynonna’s waist and the other under her legs. With one swift motion she scooped the woman into her arms. She glanced down to Waverly once she lifted Wynonna off her feet and gave a nod “Follow me.”

“Woah, hey” Wynonna let out a bit of a grunt when Nicole not-so-gently swept her into her arms. She scowled at her as her arms lifted to slide around Nicole’s neck “How about you warn a girl next time? That kind of hurt.”

“Would you rather be dead?” Nicole offered with a scowl of her own.

“No, but damn, if you’re gonna The Bodyguard a lady you should at least warn her!” Wynonna caught Nicole’s eyes for a split second and she smirked. She knew Nicole was in work mode but she could not fight the fact that she was kind of turned on by how easily Nicole had swept her off her feet. Both literally and metaphorically.

Nicole caught the smirk and she felt her body warm. Damn it, Wynonna. This was not the time! She gave her a warning glare that silently told her to behave as they rounded a corner toward the stairs that would lead them to the underground bunker.

“Do they know what kind of aircraft it is?” Waverly asked with a bit of panic in her tone as they headed down the stairs quickly.

Nicole just shook her head slightly “All they said was it entered the restricted airspace and did not respond to any of the radio calls for them to turn back so…” She shrugged as they hit the bottom floor and headed down the corridor toward the bunker door.

Waverly bit her lip as she followed beside Nicole and her sister. She was trying not to worry but that was growing harder by the moment. They were surrounded by at least fifteen of the guards that had all congregated in the corridor to the bunker. As they moved closer to the door the men closed in behind them as if forming a human barrier to keep them safe on their journey toward the bunker. It was actually making the situation worse. They were all being so serious.

As they approached the door the last guard standing there moved out of the way. He turned and punched in the security code that opened the door. Once it slid open he gave a salute to Nicole and dipped his head to Wynonna and Waverly.

Nicole headed in and immediately moved to one of the cot-like beds. She slowly leaned down to be able to set Wynonna there. Once she had her arms free again she reached for the radio on her waist “Jack and Jim are in the barrel. Commence lockdown.”

The door slid behind them quickly. There was beeping from the code being put in on the outside. There was then a noise that sounded like an airlock being sealed. Then it was quiet. Nicole turned to Waverly now. She put a hand to her cheek and turned her face so she could look at her “Are you alright?”

“I’m fucking terrified” Waverly admitted with a shake of her head.

“It’s protocol” Nicole said as softly and calmly as possible. “I am sure it’s nothing.”
“Dumbass with a new pilot license and no sense of direction” Wynonna chimed in from the cot behind Nicole. “I’m sure we will be out of here in ten minutes.”

Nicole nodded in agreement and let her hand drop from Waverly’s face. “Wynonna’s probably right, Waves. Nothing to worry about.”

“And what if it’s more serious than that?” Waverly said with a frown as her arms folded across her chest.

“Then we are safe” Nicole said with a nod. She looked from Wynonna to Waverly now and a relieved look came over her features “You two are safe. That’s all that matters.”

Waverly bit her lip. She did not want to cry but it was growing harder not to. She was scared. She was tired. She just wanted to live in a world where the threat of someone killing them was gone. She let out a sigh and moved over to sit on the cot across from the one Wynonna sat on. There was only about ten feet between the cots. It was a small space but it was enough for the three of them. Still, she was sure she would grow claustrophobic if she had to stay in there too long.

Nicole moved now to sit next to Wynonna. She turned to face her and both hands lifted to cup her face gently. She eyed her for a few seconds then spoke very gently “Are you okay? I didn’t mean to hurt you when I picked you up. I just knew we had to hurry.”

“Totally fine” Wynonna offered Nicole a soft smile. Their eyes met and they lingered there for a moment before she let out a laugh and pulled her head from Nicole’s hands. Not that she didn’t love looking into Nicole’s eyes but it was kind of intimate and her sister was right there. “It was pretty hot, anyway. Being manhandled like that.”

“Oh my god” Nicole rolled her eyes and shook her head because, well, Wynonna once again could not take anything seriously. As infuriating as it could be it was also amusing. Of course she would be making jokes at a time like this. She lifted her hand and gently brush some of Wynonna’s hair off her eyes in a gentle motion that did not go unnoticed by Waverly. “I’ll remember that for next time.”

Waverly was watching the two of them together very closely. They had gone from bickering and not being able to be in the same room to sharing long gazes overnight. Something had definitely happened between them. She perked an eyebrow at that and before she could stop herself she was blurting out the words “You guys finally figured it out, didn’t you?”

“What?” Both Wynonna and Nicole coughed out in a unified panic.

Before Wynonna could spit out a quick denial, Waverly had lunged at them. She wrapped her arms around the other two women and pulled them together in a tight group hug. Wynonna’s eyes went wide and she grunted out softly “Okay this is happening.”

“Waves, Waves” Nicole grunted out through labored breaths. “I can’t breathe.”

“My boobs are smushed against yours and its weird” Wynonna chimed in through a groan.

“Oh, shoot!” Waverly gasped and quickly pulled back. Her eyes went wide and she stared in horror at her sister “I didn't hurt you did I?”

“Just the ladies” Wynonna grumbled as her hand slowly rubbed back and forth over her own breasts.
Waverly let out a laugh and her joy at the news returned. She looked between the two of them again and let out a happy sigh “I am so happy for you two.” Then a thought occurred to her and she quickly frowned and swatted at Wynonna’s shoulder “When did you intend on telling me?”

Wynonna’s eyes went wide and she gave her head a quick shake. She pointed at her sister then looked over at Nicole with a panic in her eyes “I definit-”

“You didn’t tell her?” Nicole grunted out with a shake of her head. “You had all morning!”

“You were gonna make HER tell me?” Waverly motioned toward Wynonna but looked at Nicole. “I probably would have died of old age before she told me!”

“I thought you’d want to hear it from her! She’s your sister!”

“Guys!” Wynonna cut in to stop their bickering. She looked between the two of them then focused on Waverly with a shrug “I did tell you.”

“Did you send it by carrier pigeon because I haven't gotten that yet” Waverly breathed out a laugh. “Trust me I would remember if you told me this!”

“It's not my fault you couldn't understand me through the biscuit” Wynonna mumbled with a shrug as if to say Waverly had dropped the ball on that.

Waverly coughed out an indignant laugh. She stared at her sister with complete disbelief. She didn’t know why she was surprised but she was. Wynonna never ceased to amaze her with how casual she could be about important things.

Nicole let out a sigh and looked at Wynonna with a blank look of unamusement. “You tried to tell her with your mouth stuffed full of food? How did I not see that coming?” She gave her head a shake and a soft laugh escaped her lips. That was a classic Wynonna move. It was her favorite way to deliver bad news. Like when she had to flush Waverly's pet goldfish because she thought it would be fun to dye the water in the bowl pink and ended up killing the fish.

“Honestly, that's on you” Wynonna said with a serious nod at Nicole. “Rookie mistake.”

“Or you're an adult and need to stop with the shenanigans” Nicole grumbled with a roll of her eyes.

“Don’t hold your breath” Waverly mumbled at Nicole’s notion that Wynonna should just act like an adult. She let out a very soft laugh and focused back on her sister. A smile came over her features now and she let out a very light sigh “But just so you know I am very happy for you two.”

Wynonna rolled her eyes. This was already way too mushy for her liking.

Nicole, on the other hand, gave Waverly a very gentle and appreciative smile. She would never tell Wynonna but her sister was key in helping her face what was going on between the two of them and for that she would be forever grateful.

“So how’d it play out?” Waverly asked with a bit of intrigue in her tone. She perked an eyebrow and looked back and forth between the two women before a smile came over her features. “I want all the details! Who confessed first?” She immediately shook her head and motioned toward Nicole “Nevermind, it was obviously you. Wynonna would rather eat glass than talk about feelings.”

“You’re damn right I would” Wynonna grumbled with another roll of her eyes. “Speaking of, can we be done speaking of this?”
Nicole gave her head a shake and reached her hand out to take Wynonna’s. Her eyes focused on her friend very softly, in the same way they always had when she was trying to talk sense into Wynonna, and yet it was a brand new way she was looking at her as well. A more soft way. More genuinely tender. Waverly hadn’t thought that was possible but she was seeing it right before her eyes in that very moment and it made her heart swell.

“We’re stuck in this bunker for a little while with nothing else to do, Wynonna. Would it really kill you to talk about it? I mean, come on….” She motioned across the small space to Waverly and shrugged “It’s your sister. She will never judge you for having an emotion other than sarcasm. Besides, look at her. She is happy for us!”

Wynonna lifted her lip at the corner in slight disgust at the thought of having to have a real, meaningful conversation about emotions. That sounded terrible. She didn’t even care if it was her sister. She hated all things personal. At least she would go to her grave pretending she did. In reality she was still having a bit of a hard time grasping everything that had happened. She needed a little more time with herself, with just Nicole, figuring it all out before she went and paraded it around the world.

“It’s okay” Waverly could see the look on her sister’s face and she knew that pushing was not a great idea. Besides, she knew that Nicole would spill all the juicy details the next time they were alone together anyway. So she just shook her head and gave a dismissive flick of her hand to the side. “We can talk about something else.”

“Yeah like how long we’re gonna be down here” Wynonna eagerly changed the subject as soon as she got the chance. She was grateful her sister had picked up on how uncomfortable she was. Her eyes focused back to Nicole now “Isn’t it weird we haven’t heard anything yet? I feel like we should have at least been given an update.”

Now that Wynonna had pointed it out, Nicole gave a nod. She realized it had been long enough to receive an update since they had been secured in the bunker. She got to her feet now and slowly moved toward the doorway where they had entered. “You’re right” She motioned to Wynonna then turned to look at the panel of buttons near the heavy door. “They should have checked in by now.”

“Does that mean something is wrong?” Waverly’s smile was gone and once more her face was plastered with worry. Nicole just shook her head. She honestly had no idea. Protocol was to update every fifteen minutes. She leaned down a bit to look at the buttons on the panel and after scanning the options she found the call button she was looking for. “Maybe I’ll see if I can get someone’s attention.” She pushed the radio button a few times then straightened up and waited.

“Can’t you just…” Wynonna motioned in the direction of the walkie talkie radio on Nicole’s hip and gave a shrug.

“This doesn’t work down here” Nicole tapped the radio she wore now before motioning around the bunker. “This thing was built back during the Cold War Era when everyone was afraid of nuclear bombs. The walls are military grade. No waves of any type can penetrate….”

“Not a good enough reason to use the word penetrate…” Waverly mumbled with a smirk.

This made Wynonna snicker. She looked at her sister and gave her a playful nudge with her shoulder and a wink to show she was proud of the joke she had just made.

Nicole rolled her eyes and fought off a smirk. The Earps never passed up the chance to make a joke.
and she wouldn’t have it any other way. “They built an in-house communications system that’s two way. There should be a guard in the other comms room sending us updates.” She frowned now and reached for the button again. She gave it another push then glanced around the panel more carefully to see what other buttons she recognized. It had been quite a while since she had been briefed on the security bunker and she was trying to remind herself what every button did now.

“So either the guard is not doing his job” Wynonna said in a sort of bored, annoyed tone “Or they’re all dead and we are stuck down here like sitting ducks.”

“They’re not dead” Nicole glanced over her shoulder from where she was hunched over looking at buttons. “I am sure everything is fine. They probably just-

Nicole was cut off by the unmistakable sound of an explosion. All three of the girls stiffened in surprise. Waverly clung to Wynonna. Nicole stood upright and reached for her gun at her hip. Wynonna’s arm slid around her sister and pulled her close. They all froze in place and waited. They waited to see if they had just heard what they all thought they had just heard. They waited for a radio call. They waited for anything at all.

When nothing more came, Nicole slowly exhaled the breath she had drawn in and held. She lowered her hand away from her hip then focused her eyes on the sisters. “There is no need to panic. I am sure that was just-

A rumble this time. Then a pop. Then the lights in the bunker started to flicker.

Nicole’s eyes went wide. She was trying to remain calm but she knew this was not a good sign. She turned back to the panel of buttons she had been looking at and searched frantically now “Okay I know there is a manual override sequence here. I just need to remember…”

The lights flickered again. Waverly squeaked out in fright and pulled Wynonna closer for breathing out softly. “Wynonna…”

“I know, babygirl” Wynonna spoke tenderly as she held her sister tight. Her eyes moved about the bunker before landing on Nicole. She gently touched a kiss to the top of Waverly’s head before speaking again softly “It’s going to be alright. Nicole is gonna get us out of here.”

“Shit” Nicole hissed under her breath. She thought she had remembered how to override the door and get them out of the bunker but nothing was happening. Every time she touched a button it seemed there was no power behind the panel. Nothing was responding to what she was doing. She gritted her teeth and stood upright again. She looked around and tried to remember if there was an emergency escape hatch. Then she remembered how far underground they were and she felt stupid at the thought.

The lights flickered again. Nicole moved quickly over to the sisters where they sat on the cot and knelt down in front of them. Her hands moved to lay on each of their knees and she gave a slight nod. “I am sure it’s fine.”

Just then a thunderous knock at the door sent an echo roaring through the hollow bunker. All three of the girls screamed out in fright.

Nicole jumped to her feet, drew her gun, pointed it at the door, and prepared to shoot. If this was it, if this was the moment they finally came for the Crown, she was ready. She had trained her entire life for this. She was going to go down fighting. She was going to die protecting her family. Whoever was on the other side of the door was dead wrong if they thought they could storm the cabin and kill the Earp sisters without resistance. They obviously didn’t know just how much Nicole Haught loved
these girls. And as she focused her sight on the doorway she started to pray that love would be enough to keep them safe.

~.~.~.~.~.
Let’s just make fun of this shitty horror movie before we pass out

Nicole stood unmoving as she held her aim at the door. Her eyes were focused. Her hands were steady. Her heart was also slapping unbearably hard against her ribcage. Her lungs were burning with the sheer speed at which she was drawing in deep breaths and letting them out. All other sound was drowned out as she stood there prepared to go down fighting for the people she loved.

Then after a moment another knock came to the door. This one was far less intimidating as the first had been. It was soft. There were three little knocks then it stopped. Then only a moment later there were two more knocks. Another pause. Then a series of a few more knocks.

Nicole’s gun lowered and she perked an eyebrow at the sound. They did not sound threatening at all. In fact it kind of sounded like whoever was on the other end of the door was trying to communicate.

“Morse Code!” Waverly said excitedly at the exact moment Nicole had realized it.

Nicole nodded and turned back around to Waverly with a bit of relief flooding her face. She holstered her gun now “I don’t think we are under attack.”

Waverly stood now as she listened to the knocks. She nodded along with a few of them as her eyes narrowed in concentration. After a moment she looked at Nicole and snapped her fingers “I need something to write on.”

“Wait, you know Morse Code?” Wynonna let out an impressed sounding laugh.

“I have an affinity for language” Waverly mumbled as if that should have been something Wynonna already knew. She then turned back to Nicole and smiled graciously as she took the small pad of paper and pencil that Nicole kept in her breast pocket. She moved to a chair that was set up at a little counter near the back and leaned over it. She listened carefully and after a moment she started to write.

“How come you don’t know Morse Code, Haught?” Wynonna gave a teasing shove against Nicole’s leg where she stood near the cot and let out a laugh.

“I do. Kind of…” Nicole looked down at Wynonna and gave a sort of awkward shrug. “I know the basics of it but it just never stuck with me.” She frowned and lifted a hand to the back of her head, rubbing almost nervously through the shorter strands of hair there as if she were a child who had just been caught doing something bad. “I know I should really study it for situations such as this.”

“I’m teasing” Wynonna frowned very slightly at Nicole’s reaction. She had not meant to sound like she was a boss scolding her employee. She had just been teasing her. She reached out now and placed a hand on the back of Nicole’s thigh as that was what was at arm’s height with how Nicole was standing near her. “Hell, I don’t even know it. So if Waverly hadn’t been with us we would have been screwed.”

“All clear!” Waverly, who had been focusing on the taps, whirled around now with a smile on her face. She pointed to the paper she held, where she had written the message, and nodded. “All clear. Gen blew. Repair in work.”

Nicole let out a visible sigh of relief and looked down at Wynonna with a smile. Her heart leapt happily in her chest because they were safe. Wynonna was safe. That thought sent a little shiver through her spine. That was the most important thing to her. She reached down and offered her hand to Wynonna and when it was taken she gave a squeeze before looking back at Waverly “Okay so the
generator that powers the bunker blew. I’m guessing we have…” She looked around and after a moment shrugged “Two or three hours of emergency backup power before it runs out.”

“Wait” Wynonna pulled at Nicole’s hand as an indication she wanted to stand. She grunted as she pushed off the cot but did not fight when Nicole helped her the rest of the way. She then drew in a deep breath to push down the pain that had pulsed through her before she shook it off and focused on Nicole “We’re going to be stuck in here for three hours?”

“Hopefully not” Nicole mumbled with a shrug. “But that generator was ancient. I’m surprised it turned on at all. It was a main safety concern when we first got here and I told them they needed to update it but-”

“Do we have anyone that knows what they are doing?” Wynonna cut Nicole’s explanation off because, honestly, it was not her fault that the generator was old.

Nicole just shrugged again and motioned vaguely behind her toward the door “There are Aircraft and Motor Infantry mechanics in the Army that Dolls could probably send out. Other than that….” She frowned and gave her head a shake “I don’t think anyone currently at the cabin knows how to fix it.”

“Shit” Wynonna let out a growl and looked at the door. There were still tapping sounds coming from it because, well, they had not let the other person know they had gotten the message. She groaned and put a finger to the side of her head and closed her eyes. “Waves, tell them to stop that. Also, could you send them a message?”

“Yeah, totally” Waverly nodded once then moved to her sister. She put a hand on her back and leaned over with concern on her face “Are you okay?”

“I never took my pain meds this morning and I’m a little sore” Wynonna admitted softly. Her eyes opened again and she gave her sister a soft smile. “But it won’t kill me. Tell them to get Jeremy here. He is a fricken genius. He will know what to do.”

Waverly nodded very quickly at that. She touched a kiss to the side of her sister’s head before moving to the door. She knelt down in front of it and used one of the rings she always wore to tap lightly against the door to send the message to the other side.

Nicole frowned in concern now. Her hands moved to rest on Wynonna’s hips. She spoke softly so that Waverly could not hear “Why don’t you take a seat? I’ll see if I can find something for you to take.”

“I’m not glass. I won’t break under stress” Wynonna hissed out at Nicole. When she saw the way Nicole immediately looked hurt she let out a sigh and lifted a hand to gently rest against her cheek. “Shit, I’m sorry. None of this is your fault. That was messed up of me to take it out on you.”

This surprised Nicole. Wynonna had taken her anger, stress, annoyance, and countless other emotions out on Nicole countless times in the past. Not that it was right but it was just kind of a normal thing. Nicole didn’t really take offense to it. The thing that surprised Nicole was how quickly Wynonna had just apologized for it. Not only apologized but owned up to it without it having to be pointed out. It made her heart flutter. Maybe Wynonna was turning a corner and taking what Nicole had said seriously. She was acting like an adult. It wasn’t huge but it was a great first step already.

“Wynonna” Nicole spoke now firmly but softly to let her know that she was speaking from a place of concern and not anger. “If there is anyone in the world that I know is not made of glass it is you. But that does not mean you are not human made of flesh and bones, okay? It just so happens those
flesh and bones were blown up and they need time to heal. So…” She leaned in now and touched a gentle kiss to Wynonna’s forehead then motioned toward the cot “Take a seat. Rest those flesh and bones for when we are really gonna need them.”

Wynonna wanted to be annoyed at Nicole. She wanted to fight back and make a sarcastic remark about how she was Queen and not Nicole but she just couldn’t. There was something about the way Nicole was looking at her, the tone that she was speaking in, and the way her touch was so gentle that just shut that defense mechanism down. Nicole fucking loved her, for whatever reason, and now that she knew it she was starting to see it more with each interaction they had.

So she just gave a nod and without fighting she sat. She offered Nicole a soft, sideways smile as she settled on the cot. “Thank you” She whispered because she did not want Waverly to see this moment. It was for them. It was tiny, a morsel of human decency really, but it was also a moment that meant more now than ever before and she didn’t want anyone else to share in it but the two of them.

“Okay they called Jeremy. He is going to try and walk them through the repairs over video chat while he is on the flight over here” Waverly approached her sister now with a little nod. She could see Wynonna was in pain and she sat gently next to her. She put her hand on her back and rubbed lightly “We’re gonna get out of here soon.”

Wynonna just waved her hand to the side in a motion of pushing away Waverly’s worry. “I’m not too concerned. Besides, when was the last time that you forgot all about running a country?” She smirked now at her sister and gave a shrug “This is kind of like a vacation, right? No responsibilities, no media, no scandal. Just us gals hanging out!”

“Drugs!” Nicole called out happily from somewhere in the bunker. The bunker was not huge. It was basically a narrow corridor with the cots on either side of it. The walls were plain but had a lot of shelves built in. The shelves were empty but it seemed they had been put there in case of extended stays. There was a chair in the corner at the end that sat in front of the counter where Waverly had taken down the message. Other than that there wasn’t much more going on. So the fact that Nicole was now being heard and not seen was a bit confusing.

“Where are you?” Waverly let out a laugh as she looked around in an attempt to pinpoint where Nicole’s voice had come from.

Nicole appeared suddenly from a door that was just to the left of the bunker door. It had been completely unmarked and blended right into the walls of the bunker itself. She stepped through the small opening, having to duck her head to do so, and gave the girls on the cot a smile. She held up a few bottles that she had found and gave them a shake “They’re old but medicine doesn’t expire.”

“Are you sure?” Waverly perked an eyebrow at that because, well, the last thing she wanted was for her sister to get sick from taking something that had gone bad.

“Who cares. Gimme” Wynonna reached her hands out toward Nicole, opening and closing her fingers quickly in a gesture that said she wanted what Nicole had.

Nicole moved over to Wynonna now. She read each bottle carefully then shrugged and held down the one that indicated it was a pain reliever. “I didn’t find any water in the storage but I can go look again” She motioned to the tiny door she had just come out of with a nod. “I am sure there’s some back there that I missed.”

Wynonna didn’t even respond. She popped the lid off the pill bottle, dumped out a few, read the label, then shrugged and tossed all the pills she had in her hand into her mouth. She didn’t even
struggle to swallow them. Then she smiled up at the other two with a nod “No turning back now.”

“Wynonna you shouldn’t have taken that many” Waverly grumbled with a frown on her lips.

Wynonna just shrugged. She turned now on the cot, lifting her legs from the floor and using them to nudge at Waverly’s hips “You’re cute and all but you gotta move so I can lay down.”

Waverly rolled her eyes but did not hesitate to get up. She watched Wynonna settled herself back on the cot before giving her head a shake. She leaned down and kissed her forehead once before nodded at her sister “Just try and rest. I’m sure we will be out of here soon.”

Wynonna nodded against the flat pillow of the cot as her eyes closed. She drew in a deep breath and let it out very slowly. She knew that regaining strength to her muscles would be a slow and painful process but she was already over it. She hoped the pain would start to fade soon because she had shit she wanted to do.

Nicole frowned as she watched Wynonna for a moment. She could see she was still in pain. A soft sigh left her lips and she glanced over at Waverly who had moved to stand beside her. She gave a shrug then motioned behind her again “I guess we can go see what’s in storage and make a list of the things we should replace?”

Waverly glanced at the little door that had closed again and was practically invisible. She nodded just once then motioned to Nicole to go ahead of her “How did you know that door was there? You can’t even see it!”

“I know every security detail of this entire cabin” Nicole said with a soft laugh as she found the tiny door handle that was the same color as the wall and pulled it open. “It’s kind of my job.”

“Oh, right” Waverly said with a roll of her eyes and a soft laugh. She still forgot that Nicole was responsible for keeping them safe. It kind of amazed her that Nicole could run their security so flawlessly. She made it look nearly effortless.

Wynonna kept her eyes closed and waited for the other two to quiet down. She could hear soft ramblings but nothing too loud. That was good. She had a huge headache Maybe if she napped she would wake up to them being released from the metal coffin they were currently sitting in. She let out a sigh and rolled to her side. All things considered it could be worse. She had to remind herself of that every now and then. When it came down to it she really was grateful to be alive. She had a lot to live for. That thought lingered in her head now as she slowly felt herself drifting off to sleep.

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“Ouch! Shit!” Nicole hissed loudly as Wynonna stirred on the cot.

She wasn’t sure how long she had been asleep. All she knew was her body was sore from the stiff cot. She rolled over now and when her eyes came open it was dark. She blinked just once, thinking maybe she had gone blind from the expired medication, then slowly sat up on the cot. She could see two small lights near the door of the bunker and she shook her head in confusion before speaking “What the Hell is going on?”

Waverly turned her head at the sound of Wynonna’s voice. She smiled softly, though it was hard to see in the dim light of the flashlight she was holding, and gave a nod “Oh good you’re not dead.”

“Unfortunately” Wynonna mumbled then motioned to where Waverly was focusing her light on Nicole who was hunched over in front of the panel of buttons next to the bunker door. “What is
“Oh. So obviously we ran out of emergency power” Waverly said very calmly as she motioned to the darkness around the bunker. “But we found these flashlights in storage and, luckily, they still work.”

Wynonna let out an impatient sigh and motioned for Waverly to spit it out.

“Well someone is grumpy” Waverly mumbled. She then motioned into the light with the hand not holding the flashlight and nodded “So Jeremy is here. He said the generator is completely destroyed. They are currently in the process of finding another one. But since this cabin is in the middle of nowhere it’s going to be a few hours. Until then…”

“Fuck!” Nicole hissed and pulled her finger away from the panel of buttons and put it in her mouth. She sucked on it for a second then pulled it out of her mouth and into the path of the light that she was currently wearing around her head. She inspected it then shook her head before focusing back on the panel.

“She’s trying to override the circuit or something?” Waverly shrugged and looked back at Wynonna. Her eyes had adjusted to the darkness so she could see her sister faintly in the dim light from the flashlights.

Wynonna nodded and her eyes focused on Nicole “You know how to do that, Haught?”

“Obviously not or I’d be done” Nicole grumbled before carefully using whatever tiny tool she was holding to poke at another wire. “But Jeremy told me what to look for so I’m trying to find it.”

“Wait, you can talk to Jeremy?” Wynonna stood up from the cot now looking a little hopeful that the communication system was up.

“Morse Code” Waverly gave a little wave as if to remind her sister that was how they had been talking through the door.

Wynonna gave a disappointed sigh and moved slowly over to where Nicole and Waverly were now. She saw her sister was sprawled out on the floor with papers spread all about in front of her. She then noticed that Nicole had stripped off her button up and was now in her tank top. She perked an eyebrow at this. For some reason seeing Nicole’s dimly lit arm muscles with a slight sheen of sweat on them instantly sent a twist to her gut. Damn maybe she had been gay for Nicole this whole time.

Shaking the thought off she motioned to her sister now “Can I help?”

Waverly just shrugged. She pointed her flashlight down to the papers she had spread out in front of her now “I’m trying to read these blueprints for the bunker but it’s impossible. I don’t understand the notes. I’m not even sure I’m looking at the electrical layout.”

“If there’s no power to the bunker than how are you expecting to override the access panel?” Wynonna asked in a soft tone so as not to sound like she was being sarcastic. She was genuinely curious as to how that was going to work.

“The panel is wired to the main power of the house” Nicole mumbled from where her face was just inches from the panel. “It’s a safety measure. But because the wiring was so old as soon as we opened the bunker door it fried some of the relays. So until we figure out which ones are burned out we are stuck in here even if they get the generator up and running.”

“Can’t they just…” Wynonna motioned to the door with a shrug “Blow their way through it or
“It’s military grade, Wynonna” Nicole looked back over her shoulder now. The headlamp she wore focused on Wynonna and she just shook her head. “It’s meant to withstand a nuclear bomb.”

“Okay, well…” Wynonna shrugged again. “Drill? I mean, come on, they have like those huge oil drills or whatever. There has to be something that exists in the world that can get through that door.”

“Maybe” Nicole nodded then looked back to the panel. “But that would take hours too. So right now this is our plan.”

Wynonna let out a soft sigh and looked around the bunker. Her eyes had adjusted to the darkness and she could see very slightly. She put her hands on her hips as her eyes scanned around. She was trying to see if maybe there was something they had missed. Doubtful, considering Nicole was very thorough when it came to shit like this but, hey, what else did she have to do.

“Are there any more flashlights?” She asked Waverly after a moment.

“Here” Waverly pulled out the one she had been keeping between her legs and lifted it to her sister. “I was going to save it incase either of these two run out of batteries.”

“I’ll only use it a minute” Wynonna assured her as she took it. She turned it on then immediately started to move around the bunker. It was slow but the space wasn’t too big so it didn’t take her long to make a full circle around the walls. Her hand was dragging along against the cold metal walls as she moved. She was feeling for any hidden compartments. If the storage door had been hidden maybe there was another secret opening somewhere.

Silence filled the bunker now. The only sound was the occasional hiss of pain from Nicole being zapped by the wrong wire. After a few minutes of finding nothing more Wynonna moved back to the other girls. She slowly lowered herself to kneeling and focused her light into the toolbox that Nicole had been working out of. There weren’t many tools, it was just a basic set, but it seemed to have the essentials. She then looked up at the panel that Nicole was focused on and shrugged “Can I take a look at that?”

Nicole let out a sigh of defeat and backed away. She motioned to the panel and shrugged “Be my guest. I have no idea what I am looking for anyway. Besides…” She closed her eyes a few times in long blinks and nodded “…I’m getting a headache. I think I need a break.”

“Take five, Haught” Wynonna said gently as she approached the panel. Her eyes lingered on Nicole a moment and she felt her gut twitch again with a pang of desire. Why in the world was sweaty Nicole so damn sexy to her? It was the weirdest thing. She was discovering all these desires that had been lying dormant until just recently. If she was being honest, it scared her, but it also completely intrigued her.

She shook the thought away because now was not the time. Although, if Waverly weren’t there and she was not sore she was almost certain she would be spending her time banging Nicole instead of trying to fix the panel. She smirked at the thought. That was the first time she had outright admit, to herself at least, that she wanted to be physical with her best friend. Which was weird, again, but also pretty comforting. At least she knew she had not been wrong in realizing she was in love with Nicole.

She had to once more shake the thought away and focus on the panel. She blinked once then directed her flashlight toward the wiring that Nicole had exposed. She used one of the long tools Nicole had handed her to poke around and she immediately realized she had no idea what she was
looking at. There were far more wires than she had expected. They were all different colors and sizes. Some were bundled together and some were twisted around others. She let out a sigh now because she knew she would be no help at all.

Then she saw something. She wasn’t sure how, because the flashlight was not very bright, but her eyes had caught something that looked familiar. She smirked slightly and turned to Nicole who was sitting to her right drinking out of a water bottle they must have found in storage “Hey, Haught, you ever hotwire a car before?”

Nicole let out a huff and glanced to Wynonna with an annoyed look on her face “You and I both know the answer to that question is no.”

“Well I’m going to try something” Wynonna said confidently now as her eyes dropped to the tool set near her feet. She took a second to look them over then grabbed the one she wanted. She then looked back to the panel.

“Wait, woah, hey” Nicole moved quickly and grabbed Wynonna’s wrist to stop her hand from moving any closer to the wires. “What are you doing?”

Wynonna shrugged and pulled her wrist out of Nicole’s grasp. She looked between Nicole and Waverly then back to the panel “Look, Sugar Tits, we’re stuck in here and, no offense, but you haven’t made any progress. So it’s time to take a risk. It will either work or we will still be stuck in here. So why the Hell not?”

“What if you do irreparable damage?” Waverly chimed in now and moved close enough to look over Wynonna’s shoulder.

“Then they drill us out” Wynonna offered casually then started to move her hand back toward the wires.

“Wynonna I really don’t think-”

Nicole was cut off by a loud beep that filled the bunker. All the girls looked around at the sound. Then there was a short pause of nothing. Nicole frowned and she looked back at Wynonna again. Her mouth had just come open to scold her about taking a dumb risk when the bunker door slid open.

“Holy shit!” Waverly’s eyes went wide. A rush of cool air filled the bunker as light from the doorway poured in.

The men on the other side of the door, including Jeremy, all looked completely stunned. They stared at the opening for a moment before the guards rushed inside. They looked around the darkness then focused on Wynonna and Waverly “Your Majesty are you alright?”

“Cool as a cucumber” Wynonna said with a cocky smirk. She dropped the tool she had used and made a show of wiping her hands together as if brushing off the dirt from all the hard work she had done. She gave the guards a little wink as she strutted by them and out the door.

“What did you do?” Jeremy asked with bewilderment in his eyes as Wynonna exited the bunker.

Wynonna shrugged and motioned behind her now “I saw a black wire and I cut it.”

“Black. Of course” Jeremy breathed out a sigh that held of a bit of distress as if he should have known that.
Nicole rushed out now and over to Wynonna. She put her hand on her back and looked Wynonna up and down quickly “That was so fucking stupid. What if we would have been stuck in there forever?”

Wynonna rolled her eyes. Now who was being overdramatic? “Well we aren’t. That’s the thing about risks, Haught. The bigger the chance that something can go wrong also offers a bigger chance of reward. Gambling 101.”

“You’re an idiot” Nicole whispered as a smile came over her features. She wrapped her arms around Wynonna and pulled her into a tight hug. She wanted to be mad but, honestly, she couldn’t be. What had just happened was the very definition of who Wynonna Earp was. She did everything her way without pause for concern. It was one of the best things about her.

“Thank you” Waverly rushed over and joined in the hug now. She gave a tight squeeze to her sister then pulled back with a smile. “I didn’t want to freak anyone out but I was starting to get really claustrophobic in there.”

“Plus it was hot as Hell” Nicole added with a laugh as she pulled out of the hug too. “I felt like I was breathing my breath over and over again.”

Wynonna motioned to how Nicole had stripped out of her button up shirt and she gave a smirk “Damn, I should have waited to see if you would have taken off your pants next.”

Nicole blushed and gave her eyes a roll. Under any other circumstance she would have just been mildly annoyed at her best friend for making a joke. Now, though, she knew that there was more behind that joke and that’s why she blushed. She knew that comment was a thinly veiled hint that Wynonna was definitely trying to see her naked.

“Okay” Waverly lifted her hands toward both girls to indicate she was putting a stop to whatever banter was about to come from the two of them. “This is not the place for your…” She motioned between them, then perked an eyebrow to silently indicate she was talking about their newfound romance, and then nodded toward the guards standing nearby. “Let’s just get out of here.”

“Buzzkill” Wynonna mumbled as a smirk filled her features.

Nicole ignored Wynonna and nodded in agreement to Waverly. She put her hand on Wynonna’s back and motioned now for Waverly to go ahead of them. “I feel like I need a shower and a nap.”

“I feel like I need an entire pizza” Waverly said with a laugh as she started down the long corridor that would lead them back into the main part of the cabin.

“Can’t we do all three?” Wynonna chimed in now.

“I think that’s definitely possible” Nicole nodded with a smile. The other two gave sounds of agreement as they all moved slowly now. It had been quite a long day and they were all exhausted. But at least they would have a fun story to tell at holiday parties now. If they were normal people with normal lives this would have never happened. But they were Royalty. Luckily that would only be true for a short time longer. After today they were all yearning for a boring life more than ever before.

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Nicole stared into the foggy mirror that had one clear streak through it where she had wiped her hand. She was tired and it showed. The day had been draining. Though they had not done much, having been stuck in the bunker most the day, it had been stressful. Nicole felt wiped out. She
wanted nothing more than some food and to pass out in bed for the night.

She let out a sigh as she finally exited her bathroom and moved to her closet for some clothes. She decided she was going to wear her most comfy pajamas, go grab some food from the kitchen, see what the others were doing, then call it a night. A nice early night is exactly what she needed.

She had just made it to her closet door when she heard a soft whistle come from behind her.

“Ooh la la. I like the towel” Wynonna said with a smirk after whistling at Nicole.

The sudden whistle and following words had startled Nicole. She whirled around quickly, wide eyes like a deer caught in headlights, as her hand clutched to her heart. She blinked a few times and as she realized it was Wynonna, she let out a heavy breath of a laugh “God damn it, Earp. Keep sneaking up on me like that and you're gonna send me to an early grave.”

Wynonna let out a soft chuckle from where she sat on the bed “At this point you should just expect me to be in here so that's on you.”

“Oh right. I forgot assuming I'm alone in the privacy of my own bedroom was a mistake” Nicole rolled her eyes as she turned back to her closet now to find her pajamas. She took a moment to gather the clothes then walked over to the bed to set them down. She perked an eyebrow curiously at Wynonna “So what brings you here this time?”

“Wow now I need a reason to suddenly appear in your room?” Wynonna asked in an annoyed huff.

“No but you usually have one anyway” Nicole said in a matter-of-fact tone as she reached for her pajama bottoms. She stepped into them one leg at a time and pulled them up under the towel that still hung to her body as her eyes focused on Wynonna. “Did we decide where we're gathering for dinner? Cause I'm starved.”

“Funny you should mention that” Wynonna lifted a finger now as if making a point. She turned and slid along the bed to the opposite side where there was a small table. On that table was a tray. She motioned to it almost proudly and gave a smile “I had them bring us some pizza already so we could eat when you were done showering.”

Nicole perked an eyebrow at that. It wasn't a huge gesture but it was thoughtful and Wynonna was not always good at being thoughtful. She gave a smile and nodded once “Sounds good. Is Waverly almost done? Cause I'm not sure I can wait on her.”

“Yeah she’s not joining us” Wynonna bit her lip now because she wasn't sure how Nicole would take that news.

“Why not?” Nicole asked with a little shake of her head. She took her pajama top now and turned her back on Wynonna. She let the top of her towel drop now, exposing her bare back for a moment, before working the shirt over her arms and head. Once she pulled it down in place she removed the towel completely and moved to toss it on a chair near her bathroom door.

Wynonna arched an eyebrow slowly as her eyes landed on Nicole's bare back. Her tone, still slightly damp, enticing bare back. She didn't blink. She just stared at every inch of skin she could before it disappeared under the shirt. Her heart raced in her chest and the twist of yearning tightened once more on her stomach. It was growing more and more obvious just how badly she wanted Nicole.

When Nicole turned back around after tossing the towel onto the chair she saw Wynonna staring. This immediately made her blush. The two of them had changed around each other so many times before without thinking twice about it. Now, though, she knew Wynonna was staring for an entirely
different reason and it was kind of hard to adjust to. Accepting that her best friend was now looking
at her with desire was just a little hard to believe.

Wynonna realized that Nicole had caught her staring and instead of smirking at her and saying
something sarcastic she bit her lip and looked away. She was starting to realize the lines between
friendship and romance were quickly blurring. So she cleared her throat and motioned to the pizza
again “Well, see, you and I haven't really had any significant hang time recently so Waverly agreed
to do her own thing tonight.”

Nicole perked an eyebrow curiously at the news. She slowly let her eyes take in Wynonna's features
and body language in an attempt to pick up on any subtlety about what exactly that meant. After a
moment of not seeing a sure sign that Wynonna had alternative motives, she smiled and walked over
to the bed. She sat across from Wynonna and gave a nod “So you just wanted a good old fashioned
late night hang session?’

“Basically, yeah” Wynonna gave a smile and nod when Nicole seemed to be on board.

“Basically?” Nicole huffed out a laugh at that. “That's Wynonna speak for…” She cleared her throat
and mimicked Wynonna now “…sure believe that simple explanation because I meant something else
and I'm about to drag you into something once you agree to the basic plan.”

Wynonna gasped at the impression of herself. Firstly she was totally offended that Nicole had just
called her out. Secondly it was an awful impression. Didn't sound like her at all. She huffed now and
motioned to the pizza “Haught, seriously, I have no other plans! Besides…” She motioned now
toward her midsection that was sore and shrugged “…My range is limited at the moment.”

Nicole still held a skeptical look. Wynonna was trying too hard to explain it away. She eyed her
friend carefully as she hummed out softly “Mhm, okay, I'm just gonna say I believe you because that
pizza smells amazing and my stomach just rumbled so hard it hurt. So can we eat now?”

“Sure, but first-” Wynonna started and gave Nicole a wide smile.

“I knew it” Nicole mumbled and laughed gently as she moved off the bed and around it toward the
pizza. “What is it, Wynonna? I'm too pooped for shenanigans tonight.”

“You know what?” Wynonna let out a huff and folded her arms. She frowned at Nicole and shook
her head “Forget it. I was just going to ask you to put in a movie first so we didn't have to get up
after we ate but nevermind. I just wanted to have a nice night in with you.”

“Wait” Nicole felt bad that Wynonna looked genuinely upset. She frowned and moved to kneel by
the bed in front of where Wynonna sat. She eyed her carefully and when she spoke it was in an
apologetic tone “I'm sorry. I didn't know you were being serious. You're never serious.”

“Yeah, well…” Wynonna rolled her eyes and looked away from Nicole now. She drew in a deep
breath as if gathering the nerve to say something hard. She then slowly looked back at the other
woman. When she saw the tender look of concern in Nicole's eyes she let out the breath she had
drawn in. “Look, I heard you, okay? I'm not awesome with feelings and emotions. They make me
wanna gag. But I heard you and you're right. I need to get my shit together like an adult and start
saying what I mean so…” She let out a defeated sounding sigh and motioned vaguely at the pizza “I
was trying to like, I dunno, have a date night I guess? Fuck that sounds dumb.”

The shock that moved through Nicole was almost palpable. This was the last thing she ever
expected. Wynonna Earp had taken what she had said to heart and, even more so, put in an effort to
follow through on it. She almost didn't know how to respond. She coughed out a surprised laughed
as a smile came over her features “You planned a date for us?”

Wynonna rolled her eyes and looked away from Nicole because she felt really exposed and vulnerable at the moment. She was going to have to ease into showing emotions and being open. She just gave a little single shoulder shrug at Nicole’s inquiry and sighed “Not a date. A date night.” She motioned to the pizza then to Nicole, smiling very slightly when their eyes met, before giving a nod “Just some time for you and I.”

Nicole could tell that Wynonna was uncomfortable so she would not make a big deal out of it anymore. She just gave a nod as she tried to fight back her growing smile. “I like that idea” She finally said as she stood now from where she had been kneeling near Wynonna. She moved over to the tv in her room and picked up the remote. She then moved back to the bed and climbed in beside Wynonna. She settled her back against the wall behind them and pointed the remote at the screen “Okay do we want a comedy or horror tonight?”

“Aren’t they the same thing?” Wynonna quipped with a soft laugh. She was grateful that Nicole had changed the subject. She knew that the road to feeling completely comfortable with all this personal stuff would be long but she was willing to try. For Nicole. If she was being honest, she wanted it for herself, too. Once the threats were gone and she no longer had to put up a certain image to the public she wanted to be able to be a fairly normal person. Being normal included relationships. She wanted to be able to act like a normal person in a romantic relationship so she would start working on it now.

“You’re right. Horror it is” Nicole nodded as she picked the first decent looking horror movie that she could find on Netflix before setting down the remote. She knew they would end up eating and passing out quickly so it didn’t really matter which one they watched. She then turned and offered Wynonna a crooked smile “Now for the love of god will you give me some pizza before I start chewing on your arm?”

“Oh, so you’re a biter, huh?” Wynonna said with a teasing smirk as she put a few slices of pizza on a plate and turned to hand it over. She eyed Nicole up and down slowly, smiling at how beautiful she was, before she turned away to get her own pizza.

“Wouldn’t you like to know?” Nicole replied with a smirk of her own. She didn’t even look at Wynonna. She knew if she looked at her she would blush. So she kept her eyes on the screen as she lifted the pizza to her mouth.

Wynonna was impressed because Nicole usually blushed and collapsed down on herself when Wynonna made sex jokes. But now she was standing up to it. Which was intriguing. She liked Nicole suddenly having the confidence to tease right back. It twisted the ever growing knot of desire in her stomach up a little tighter. She was not sure how long she would be able to think about Nicole in this new way before it became too much of a distraction.

A silence fell between them as they ate. Both of their minds were racing. They had known each other longer than most people. They had spent countless nights together just like this, eating and watching a movie, so there was nothing uncomfortable about it. There was, however, a new energy between them and they were both trying to figure it out. There were so many new things to learn about the other. There was an entirely new dimension to form and develop in their relationship. They were both working out how to navigate through it naturally.

The silence lingered for a few moments mainly because they were both finally eating. The movie played softly on the screen but neither of them really seemed to be paying attention in favor of downing the pizza they had. Nicole finished first and after wiping her hands on the napkin she had she put her plate on the bedside table to her left them glanced over at Wynonna. She smirked very softly at her then cleared her throat to speak “How’s the pizza?”
“Okay, this can’t be weird or I’m going to freak out and retreat” Wynonna said with a sigh as she set her plate to the side too and looked at Nicole. When she saw Nicole looking a little confused, she sighed and motioned between them with her hand “Like no small talk or whatever. Let’s just act like we always did before because if this thing is going to change our friendship than it’s not worth it to me. So…” She shrugged and motioned again vaguely toward nothing in particular “…Let’s just make fun of this shitty horror movie before we pass out.”

“Fair enough” Nicole lifted her hands in a signal of surrender to show she would not fight Wynonna on this. Instead they fell quiet next to one another and immediately started to avoid eye contact. This made Nicole sigh and her head gave a slight shake “Except it is going to change our friendship, Wynonna.” She turned to face Wynonna now, reaching out to take a hold of one of her hands, and giving it a soft squeeze. “The friendship we have is still gonna be there but there’s something else too so…” She just shook her head slightly and offered Wynonna a gentle smile when she finally looked over “…it’s going to take some time for us to adjust.”

“But I don’t want it to take time. I just want to have what we’ve always had with the added bonus of making out and all that shit” Wynonna waved to the side and rolled her eyes. “Can’t we just be normal and add in kissing?”

Nicole let out a very soft laugh and shook her head slightly “You can’t rush through this. In fact, I am all for us taking this slow.” She bit her lip now, almost nervous as to how Wynonna would react to that.

“Slow?” Wynonna perked an eyebrow slightly. She eyed Nicole carefully to see if she was being serious. When she realized that Nicole meant it, she bit her lip softly and nodded just once “I mean, yeah, I guess we can do that. But, uh…” She shook her head now and laughed her next words nervously “…can I ask why?”

“Well…” Nicole was surprised that Wynonna didn’t seem to be completely against the idea of going slowly. She spoke carefully now to ensure they were both on the same page “I just want to make sure we’re both comfortable with each other and everything that comes along with…” She motioned now between herself and Wynonna with a little shrug “…this.”

“You mean sex?” Wynonna fought off a smirk because she was almost sure that would make Nicole blush.

“Uh…” Nicole did blush but she also shook her head and pushed through Wynonna’s blatant attempt to fluster her “…I mean, yes, that is one of the many things I am referring to. But I was also talking about-”

“Because I’m totally comfortable with the sex part” Wynonna cut Nicole off quickly. She realized she had kind of blurted it out and looked a little surprised at herself. She quickly let out a airy laugh and rolled her eyes at herself as she added casually “Just so you know.”

Nicole perked an eyebrow at how quickly Wynonna had rambled out the words. She was surprised by it. Not that she was surprised that her friend liked the idea of sex. She knew her well enough to know how much her friend enjoyed sex. The fact that she had already come to the decision that she was ready for it with Nicole was what had been a surprise. Nicole puffed out a laugh and gave a single nod “Okay, well, I’m very happy to hear that but I am not sure I’m ready.”

“Oh” Wynonna frowned and looked a little hurt by the words.

“Not that I don’t want to!” Nicole scrambled quickly when she saw Wynonna kinda flinch with offense. She shook her head rapidly and squeezed tightly to the hand of Wynonna’s that she held
onto. “I definitely want to. But I have my concerns about your physical health…” She motioned now toward Wynonna’s torso that was still sore and healing. She shrugged and bit her lip, hoping Wynonna would not get defensive now.

“I get it. I’m not exactly in top form at the moment” Wynonna laughed softly and gave an almost shy looking shrug. “But, hey, as long as we can still make out until I get the all clear?”

Nicole was so relieved to see Wynonna was not upset. She quickly nodded in agreement at Wynonna’s request, laughing out very lightly now “That is something I can promise you.”

“Then I think a little waiting won’t kill me” Wynonna shrugged and tried to look as if she were annoyed at the idea. She wasn’t. She was more than excited at the prospect of having a few makeout sessions with Nicole while they waited to be cleared for more. The wait would be worth it. Now she was excited about that. Because when the time finally came she knew it would make that moment all the better. So, for the first time in her life, she was willing to wait for something she really, really wanted.

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I think loving someone makes you brave

It had been a week since the bunker incident. It had ended up being an experimental unmanned aircraft that a few students at a local university had sent on a test flight. They had not known the airspace was restricted because they were civilians so they did not have access to the super secret information pertaining to restricted airspace. Basically it had been a huge misunderstanding. They were mad when their craft had been shot down but once they heard they had threatened the Queen they were all too happy to apologize and swear to be more careful when plotting out their next flight path.

Nicole and Wynonna had decided since Wynonna was still Queen they did not want wind of the two of them dating to get out. So they had agreed to act professionally around everyone else and keep their private life to themselves. Well, Waverly got to see it too, much to her delight, but that was to be expected with how close the three of them were.

It was working out well. It gave Wynonna the chance to still be in charge and still put on her stern, hard-ass facade. But when they were alone? Wynonna was surprisingly tender. She had really meant it when she told Nicole that she was going to try and take this seriously. It meant the world to Nicole that Wynonna was actually following through.

Today, however, was all about business. Wynonna was going to be making her first appearance since waking up from the coma. She was going to be doing a press conference to announce her plans to abolish the Monarchy. This just so happened to coincide with the start of Doc and the Hardys trials. It was a very carefully thought out move. Rosita had wanted to do it this way to hopefully get all the media attention over and done with in one quick bang. It was smart and Wynonna had loved the idea immediately.

Their first stop for the day was the courthouse where the trials were to be held. Wynonna, being Queen, had final say in what was to happen to the traitors but she had no real interest in that. She made the stop for the sole purpose of being spotted supporting her legal team. They had an iron clad case and they were all confident the jury would make the right decision on the verdict. Once the verdict was reached Wynonna would be contacted about the punishment. She had already given her legal team the rundown of what she wanted. Life in prison for everyone found guilty. Anyone who had taken the plea bargain and provided them information in the case would get five to fifteen years. By then she would be so far out of the spotlight retaliation would be pointless.

There were cameras everywhere as they arrived at the courthouse. Nicole easily snapped into work mode and had one arm around Wynonna as they shoved through the crowd and into the building. Dolls was there as well, since he had to testify, and he had accompanied Waverly in right behind them. Once inside, Nicole stood just a few steps behind the Earp Sisters as they addressed the press and answered questions.

It was a quick stop but Nicole was already concerned about Wynonna’s health. She had gotten to the point where walking was only slightly uncomfortable and she no longer needed the walker but that did not mean her stamina was what it used to be. Nicole hoped that by the end of the day Wynonna would not be in too much pain. She would have to make sure to check on their way from the courthouse to the Palace where the press conference was to be held later in the day.

After answering the media questions they were all ushered to a secure back office to wait. They had to wait for Dolls to send his team ahead and make sure there were no threats on the road. The day of the trial had already sparked a few protests in the main downtown area of Purgatory and they wanted to be sure that there were no hazards set up for them on the road to the Palace.
Nicole thanked the polite young lady she had been talking to at the door who had provided the room before turning away. She headed toward where Wynonna and Waverly were seated around a table chatting lightly. She gave them both a soft smile as her hands reached down and offered them each a water bottle she had just gotten from the young lady “Dolls said it will be about a half an hour to make sure the roads are secured. Apparently there was a fire started downtown in the name of the House of Hardy so…” She just shrugged and let out a sigh.

Wynonna half shrugged as she took a drink from her water. Once she was finished she handed it up to Nicole without a second thought “We knew this was a possibility. It doesn’t matter how well liked the people in power are. There are always going to be people who oppose them.”

“I still don’t like it” Nicole grumbled and took a sip out of the water bottle as well. She then set it on the table before moving to finally sit in the chair next to Wynonna.

“Even if there is a threat they are outnumbered” Waverly added now with a little nod. “The entire Ghost River Triangle Army is out there protecting us on our way. They’d be dumb to try anything.”

“Plus the entire Royal Guard is securing the Palace” Wynonna chimed in now as her hand reached over to lay against Nicole’s leg. It was a simple gesture, already a habit, and it went unnoticed by the sisters.

Nicole, on the other hand, was keenly aware of every move they made in public. She reached down and grabbed Wynonna’s hand. She gently removed it from her leg and offered an apologetic smile “We are not at home.”

“Oh come on no one is even in here” Wynonna huffed and motioned around the empty room. There was one other person in the room besides the three of them. It was one of Nicole’s men and he had his back to them in favor of watching the door. She nodded at the back of the guard as if to make her point and reached her hand back toward Nicole’s knee “Relax, Sugar Tits.”

Waverly snickered slightly. Wynonna had started with that nickname to annoy Nicole. It had now turned into her little pet name for her. She was not much for the typical names that couples gave one another like babe or baby. She much rather call Nicole the most annoying thing she could think of, especially around others.

Nicole rolled her eyes at that. She gave Wynonna a firm glare as the lack of amusement she felt was painting all over her face. “The fact that you’d risk being seen with your hand on my leg is so obnoxious. We agreed no couple stuff around other people.”

“Who cares?” Wynonna laughed out softly and squeezed Nicole’s leg tightly. “After the press conference today it’s not really going to matter anyway. We can do whatever the Hell we want.”

“Does that include you finally coughing up those three little words you’d rather die than say?” Nicole smirked now slightly because she knew it annoyed Wynonna when she brought up the subject of her dancing around admitting she loved Nicole.

“Alright I am going to go…” Waverly stood now and looked around. She bit her lip and pointed toward the guard standing watch. “Anywhere but here.” She moved away quickly. She hated when they bickered about this because it was always so uncomfortable. She loved them both and agreed with both their points of view so she had decided to remove herself from the conversation whenever it came up.

Wynonna rolled her eyes and pulled her hand away from Nicole’s leg now “Why do you even care? You know how I feel about you. We’ve talked about it. It’s the entire reason we are even…” She
motioned between the two of them with a quick huff from her nose.

“It just blows my mind, Wynonna” Nicole said with a quick shake of her head. “You’re so serious about this that you’ve actually been surprisingly romantic with me. I mean, when we’re alone, you show me an entirely different side of yourself and it’s amazing!” She smiled very fondly as she thought about how tender Wynonna was. She sighed out sadly now and focused her eyes back on Wynonna “And I love that side and I am so grateful I get to see it. I am so happy you’ve given me so much more of yourself to love. But I don’t understand how you can act so sweet to me and yet still have such a hard time putting it all into words.”

“I’m not good at expressing shit!” Wynonna barked loudly. When she realized her voice had filled the small room she bit her lip. She shook her head at herself then looked back to Nicole with a scowl “I am an actions speak louder than words type of bitch, Haught. You've always known that and this is no different. Quite frankly you pushing me about it is really starting to make me second guess this whole thing.”

“That’s really fucking weak” Nicole hissed as she stood up from the table now. Her fist slammed against the top of the table in frustration and her eyes fixed Wynonna with a glare. “Stop hiding behind that excuse and get over yourself.”

“Okay, ladies” Waverly rushed over when she saw the other two starting to get heated. She push her hands on Nicole’s shoulders and stepped between them. She nodded at Nicole when she was able to catch her gaze and offered her a calming smile. “Why don’t you go call Dolls and go for a walk. Come back when we are ready to leave?”

Nicole huffed out in frustration and rolled her eyes. Waverly was right. She knew it. But she couldn’t help but still feel a little wounded at the fact that Wynonna was being so damn stubborn over something as stupid as three little words. Three words they both already knew were true. Why couldn’t she say it? Better yet, why did it matter so much that she did?

Waverly pushed lightly at Nicole to get her to move. She watched as the girl stormed out of the small room. As the door clicked closed she looked back to her sister. She rolled her eyes and let out a disappointed sigh “I can’t stand watching you two fight over this all the time. It’s worse than when you two weren’t talking about it at all.”

“Well she’s just being…” Wynonna motioned toward where Nicole had left the room and grunted “...petty! She fucking knows how I feel. I have no idea why she needs the satisfaction of hearing it.”

“The same way you need the satisfaction of feeling it through sex, Wynonna” Waverly said gently as she slowly sat next to her sister. “You both know it’s true, alright? You two would not have jumped in head first like this if you didn’t believe it was completely, unabashedly true. But there is a certain level of security that comes along with having the truth reinforced to you.” She reached out and lightly laid her hands over Wynonna’s. “You’re still scared she’s gonna wise up and realize you’re not worth it, right?”

Wynonna perked an eyebrow at her sister and tried to act like she had no idea what she meant.

Waverly didn’t buy it and she shook her head in response. “Well she’s terrified you’re going to come out of the lingering coma haze or whatever and realize you were never actually in love with her at all.”

“I’m not in a coma haze” Wynonna huffed and motioned now to herself. She gave a shrug “I don’t even know what the Hell that means!”
“She’s scared of losing you” Waverly said plainly. “If she loses you she not only loses the woman she loves but her best friend in the entire world. So she’s scared and when you’re scared like that you rationalize things in weird ways. She thinks you realizing you had feelings for her was brought on by some weird coma dream and its effects are going to wear off and she will lose you.”

“You don’t think I’m scared?” Wynonna let out a frustrated sounding sigh. “I have just as much to lose. I’d lose my best friend, too.”

“I know” Waverly said with a little nod. “You know that. She knows that. There is no mystery involved when it comes to what’s at stake for you two in this, okay? But fear isn’t a rational thing. It feeds off your biggest insecurities. So…” She sighed now and nodded just once “…hearing you say you love her would help some of that fear go away.”

Wynonna shook her head and looked down at her hands that were resting under Waverly’s. She knew she was being a little immature but she was scared too. What if she admitted it, said it out loud, making it real, and then Nicole decided to leave anyway? She let out a sigh at the thought. That would absolutely be her undoing.

When her eyes lifted she saw Waverly watching her. She rolled her own eyes at that and spoke gently “I get it. You’re totally right that it would be nice to have a new sense of security to help push the fear down. But…” She shrugged now and her eyes saddened just a little “I don’t think I can give her that until I feel that sense of security, too. Does that make me selfish?”

“It makes you cautious” Waverly said with a single nod. “I think that’s a good thing, though. I’ve never seen you cautious about anything besides me.” She laughed very lightly at that “I think that means you really, really do love her Wynonna. So maybe you could give in first and tell her. I have a feeling it won’t kill you.”

Wynonna puffed out a laugh at that. She shook her head as a soft smile lingered on her face “It might not kill me but it sure as Hell would be easier if I didn’t feel so damn insecure myself.” She curled her lip up at the corner now in slight disgust “When did I become such a scaredy cat?”

“On the contrary” Waverly lifted Wynonna’s hand she had been holding to her lips and kissed very gently at the back of it. “I think loving someone makes you brave. You just have to believe it, too.”

Wynonna rolled her eyes again because this emotional conversation had gone on far too long. She nodded to let Waverly know she had heard her then pulled her hands out of her sister’s grip “You know it would be a lot easier to be brave if I was getting laid. I am like fricken Wonder Woman after an orgasm.”

Waverly laughed and gave an amused shake of her head. She stood from the table now and offered her sister a half-hearted shrug “You gotta take that one up with the doctors.”

“But I wanna boneeeee” Wynonna whined as she drew out the word.

Waverly turned away from her sister now still laughing “I am sure I will hear all about it when it happens but I am done thinking about you and Nicole having sex for now. I’m going to go find her.”

Waverly didn’t have to go far. Nicole was pulling the door open just as Waverly reached it. She let out a little sound of surprise after almost running into her then laughed at herself. “Shit, Waves, I almost took you out.” Her eyes lifted passed Waverly now to where Wynonna sat at the table still. Her smile faded and she spoke more seriously now “I was just coming to get you two. It’s time to head to the Palace.”
Waverly had assumed as much and had already moved out into the hallway of the courtroom. She gave the guard assigned to protect her, since Nicole could not protect two people in a crowd at once, a smile then motioned for him to lead the way.

Nicole waited for Wynonna to reach the door. She did not offer to help her because she was still annoyed at her. Besides, she was walking just fine on her own now. She just motioned for Wynonna to move into the hallway and once she did Nicole followed right behind her with a hand on her back.

Again they were greeted by cameras as they left the building. They lowered their heads and quickly made their way to the cars that were waiting for them. Once inside, the driver took off, and they were on their way. Waverly was sitting next to Wynonna with her guard across from her. They had two rows of seats that faced each other in the cars. The Royal Motorcade vehicles were set up that way. It was weird but they had gotten used to it.

Wynonna eyed Nicole across from her now. She reached out and set her hand on Nicole’s knee gently “Nicole can we talk for like a second?”

“After the press conference” Nicole mumbled. She didn’t even look away from the window that she was staring out of as she reached her hand out and pushed Wynonna’s hand from her knee.

Wynonna frowned and opened her mouth to try again but was stopped by Waverly this time. Her sister took hold of her hand and gave it a squeeze. When she looked over at her she was met with a head shake and Waverly mouthing the words ‘Just wait.’ Wynonna huffed and gave up. Great, more waiting. She loved waiting. It was her new favorite thing, apparently. God she couldn’t wait to never have to wait for anything again in her life. Stupid patience. It was so unnecessary.

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The rest of the car ride was silent. Once they arrived at the Palace they were whisked in through a back door and quickly briefed by Rosita. She had already written a speech and told them that there would be no questions to answer this time. All Wynonna had to do was get in front of the cameras and read off the index cards. Once that was over with Rosita would handle any inquiries from the press.

Wynonna stood now just to the side of the stage where the podium that she would stand at stood. She let out a heavy sigh and glanced down to the cards Rosita had handed her. Her gut twisted with nerves. The last time she was supposed to give a speech she had been blown up. It was hard for her not to be a least a little intimidated by this moment.

Nicole was standing just behind Wynonna. Her eyes were scanning the area. She was in work mode. It was like a switch for her. It didn’t matter her mindset beforehand. As soon as she was in a situation where she had to protect The Queen it was just automatic for her.

As her eyes swept around she landed on Wynonna and could immediately tell she was nervous. This made her feel instantly guilty. She should have been lending her support in the car ride over not giving her the silent treatment. What a terrible girlfriend she was. She let out a sigh and leaned over Wynonna’s shoulder now so she could whisper in her ear “Just breathe. You got this. Waverly and I will be right there with you.”

Wynonna couldn’t help the small smile that crept over her face. It wasn’t much but it was those exact small things that made Nicole impossible not to love. She always knew just what to say and just when to say it to make Wynonna feel like she could take on anything. Nicole was her true strength. Maybe Waverly was right. Maybe loving someone made you brave.
Just as she turned to thank Nicole she heard her own name being announced from the stage. There was a round of cheers and applause and she knew it was time. So after drawing in a deep breath she put on her Queen face and slowly walked out toward the podium.

Nicole and Waverly followed right behind. The lights from all the camera flashes was blinding and all three of the girls winced at the intensity. It was a miracle none of them ran into anything or walked right off the stage because there was definitely a moment of temporary blindness.

But Wynonna made it to the podium without incident. Waverly stood just behind her at her left and Nicole to her right. She glanced at each of them, gave them a nod, then looked out over the crowd. She lifted her hand and immediately all chatter and flashbulbs stopped. The room was plunged into a silence so thick it could have been cut with a buzzsaw.

She smirked at that. She would miss that power for sure. But this was all for the best. So she cleared her throat and looked down at the speech that Rosita had prepared for her. She read the first few lines and although they were eloquent they just weren’t her. So instead she turned the cards over and looked back up at the crowd. Without looking away, her hand reached back in search of her sister. When she felt Waverly’s hand slide into hers she smiled and it was like something inside her genetic coding took over as the words began to flow.

“For over four centuries the House of Earp has taken pride in overseeing the fine country that is The Ghost River Triangle. The family has seen the people of this great land go through every up and every down and come through it all with strength and integrity. It has always been the top priority of my family to make sure that the people of this land are protected and taken care of in a way that shows everyone just how much the heart of the Earp family bleeds for you. We have taken pride in being in the forefront of technology, science, healthcare, and charity throughout the world and we will always do what we can to make sure that continues for centuries to come.”

She glanced now and Waverly and the two of them shared a brief smile. Then with a nod she looked back over the crowd that had gathered. “Today is a day like no other in the history of my family and this country. Today will begin the reshaping of history. All that has happened over the course of the last two months has tested the citizens of this nation more than I ever wanted you all to be tested. It has also taken a larger toll on my family’s legacy than I could ever say. That is why I am here today. I want to usher in a new era. I want to be sure that the power hungry jealousy and vengeance that has plagued this country’s leadership will become a thing of the past. The incredible residence of this amazing country do not deserve the strife it has surely caused you all.”

She licked her lips and realized her mouth was dry. She really wished she had some water. Good thing this was the last speech she would ever have to make. At least she hoped as much. She cleared her throat and continued. “After countless hours and endless nights discussing the future of this country and its people with the top advisors in the world’s politics I have finally come to a conclusion that I know will benefit the entire nation. From this day forward there will never again be a Monarchy rule in The Ghost River Triangle.”

This got a gasp from the crowd. The chatter started immediately. People were whispering their thoughts. Some were talking at full volume. The entire room was filled with people discussing what it all meant.

Wynonna quickly cleared her throat to call for attention again. The room did not get silent like before but it did get quiet enough that she could be heard clearly so she quickly continued. “The Ghost River Triangle will become a democratic country. There will be a Constitution of rights, laws, privileges, and guidelines for all citizens to follow. All positions of power will be elected into office and held in check by an unbiased council from varying walks of life. Everything will be put to vote
before it is put into action. This country is now yours, fine citizens, so treat her well.”

Another uproar was heard. Wynonna could tell she was losing the room. So she quickly grabbed the mic, leaned into it, and nearly yelled so her voice would boom over all other noise in the room. “Effective immediately I am no longer The Queen. The title, the Crown, the Royalty in this country no longer exists. I will act as interim-president until a proper election can be held at the beginning of the year. Thank you.”

The room erupted now. There were flashes of light from the cameras. There were shouts from people asking questions or wanting clarification. There were people yelling that they supported the decision and even a few that were outraged by it. Nicole quickly turned and put herself between Wynonna and the crowd. Her arm slid around Waverly as well and she started to guide them toward the side of the stage.

Once they were safely out of the auditorium where the announcement had been made and back into the private corridors of the Palace Nicole finally stopped. She let the girls go then glanced over her shoulder. She let out a heavy sigh and looked back at the two of them with a shake of her head “Are you two alright?”

“Peachy” Wynonna gave a thumbs up although she looked a little frazzled.

“That could have gone better” Waverly said with a nervous laugh. “A lot of people sounded upset.”

“Yeah, well, tough tits” Wynonna brushed her hands on her pants as if dusting herself off before she straightened again and looked at her sister. “It is what it is. No turning back now.”

“Haught, what’s your twenty?” The radio on Nicole’s shoulder blared out now suddenly.

Nicole jumped in surprise then laughed at herself. She turned away from the other two and grabbed her radio. She pushed the button to speak as she looked around “Uh, west corridor at the rear of the auditorium. It’s empty.”

There was a pause of a few seconds before the radio came on again. “The motorcade entrance was bombarded by protesters. We are securing another pick up location. Stay put and await further instruction.”

“10-4” Nicole said into her shoulder. She turned around and let out a heavy sigh. “Well that’s just perfect. Did you two hear that?”

“I told you it could have gone better” Waverly said in a sort of sing-song tone.

Wynonna waved Waverly off and gave a roll of her eyes. She turned to look at Nicole now and motioned for her to step closer to her. Nicole gave her a hesitant look and she couldn’t help but laugh very softly at that “I’m not going to sneak attack you or anything. I was going to thank you for what you said before my speech. It helped.”

Nicole’s skeptical look softened and she moved over to Wynonna now. She gave her a soft smile as her hand reached out to rest against Wynonna’s arm “Well you looked nervous and I felt bad for being grumpy earlier. I should have been more supportive.”

Wynonna gave a wave to that as if knock the words out of the air. Her head shook as her hand reached up now and took hold of Nicole’s gently “I should be the one who is apologizing. I’ve been a downright ass hat about it all. I think I’ve just been dealing with so much at such a high stress level that this tiny thing got escalated above where it should be on my stress chart and it’s been freaking me out.”
Nicole couldn’t help the smile that was growing on her face. She felt her heart racing. She was pretty sure Wynonna was about to give in and say the three words she had been dying to hear for a week now.

“Nicole, I want you to know-”

“Long Live the House of Hardy!” A shout came from down the corridor. It was empty so it easily bounced off all the walls in a violent echo.

Nicole whirled around in the direction that it had come from. About two hundred feet away she saw a man storming toward them with a gun pointed straight out in front of them. Without hesitation Nicole drew in gun from her hip. “Freeze! Don’t come any closer or I’ll-”

The man fired three shots before Nicole could finish what she was saying.

The shots echoed around the empty corridor. There was a scream from Waverly and then silence again. Nicole, who had somehow reacted at the speed of light when the gun was fired and jumped in front of Wynonna, landed like a ton of bricks on the carpet of the corridor floor. She felt the breath go out of her lungs. Her entire body went warm and then everything went black.

Suddenly there were members of the Royal Guard surrounding the man. There were other people that had heard the shots and came running to see what had happened. Suddenly the silence was gone and the corridor was filled with sound.

Wynonna didn’t hear any of it. She rushed over to Nicole’s lifeless body and fell to her knees. She didn’t know when she had started crying but she was already sobbing by the time she scooped Nicole’s head into her lap. Her head shook and through blurred vision she tried to focus on Nicole’s face “No! No, you do not get to die on me like this do you hear me!?”. She looked up and around and though she could not see anything through her tears she called out to whoever was nearby “Somebody help! Get a doctor or a nurse or a god damn dentist! Just, please, help me!”

Waverly knelt on the other side of Nicole. She was crying too. She was not crying as hard as Wynonna but her face was still tear soaked. She looked over her fallen friend and her head started to shake “Quick, Wynonna, do CPR or something! Save her!”

“I don’t know how to” Wynonna cried out and looked back down to Nicole. She cradled Nicole’s head in her arms, hunching over it as if trying to hug it, as she felt her body tremble with sobs. “You do not get to die protecting me, god damn it. I did this so you could die doing something stupid like hang gliding with me. I did this because I fucking love you and I want to spend the rest of my life annoying the ever living shit out of you. Do you hear me?” She was whispering against Nicole’s ear the best she could with how she had her head cradled against her torso now. “Do you fucking hear me, Haught?”

Nicole coughed.

Wynonna straightened up and looked down at Nicole’s head in her lap with wide eyes. “Nicole? Holy shit, Nicole?”

Nicole coughed again. Then she groaned. Then her lifeless arm twitched and she reached slowly for her chest. She blinked her eyes open and was greeted with a red faced Wynonna looking down at her. She frowned and her head shook ever so gently against where it was resting on Wynonna’s legs “Did you really just tell me you loved me for the first time when you thought I was dying?”

“Oh my fucking god” Wynonna laughed out through her tears and wiped quickly at her face. “Of
course you heard that.”

Nicole gave her a weak smile then turned her eyes to the right. She saw Waverly looking at her with wide, teary eyes and her head shook again “You heard her say it, right?”

Waverly laughed out and nodded quickly before lunging at Nicole. She wrapped her arms around her and gave her a tight hug “I will remind her she said it if she ever denies it.”

Nicole groaned into the hug but wrapped an arm around Waverly anyway. She held it for a moment before pulling out of it. The hug had pulled her up to sitting and she reached down to her chest now. She watched her fingers poke into each of the bullet holes that had ripped through her Royal Guard uniform and into her bulletproof vest before looking up at Wynonna with a nod “You better not make fun of me for taking my job too seriously ever again.”

Wynonna laughed again. Her eyes were drying up now that she knew Nicole was not going to die. She shook her head as her hand swiped across her cheek to wipe away a few tears “I will always make fun of you for being a tight ass but I am so glad you are.” She cupped Nicole’s face now before leaning over her. She touched her lips not too lightly against Nicole’s in a kiss that told her just how glad she was that Nicole was alive.

Nicole’s hand lifted to the back of Wynonna’s head in a gesture to keep her there for the kiss. Her lips parted and immediately allowed her tongue to flicker gently across Wynonna’s lips. Her heart was racing, her chest hurt, her head was swimming, but mostly all she felt was complete love. She wanted Wynonna to feel that love too. So she kissed her deeply and passionately and didn’t care who was around to see.

The kiss lingered for a few long seconds. Waverly cleared her throat and gently gave a nudge to Nicole’s shoulder “Guys, people are starting to stare.”

This caused them to finally break apart. Nicole blushed slightly as she looked around and saw all the eyes on her and Wynonna. She bit her lip and cleared her throat before using an arm to shoo the people who had gathered nearby “There was an assassination attempt, people! Surely you have more interesting things to be doing.”

Wynonna smirked slightly because she did not care if people saw. Honestly she had no idea why they had tried to hide it in the first place. To look more professional or something. But now, who cared. In a couple months she would out of leadership, out of politics, and out of the world’s eye view for good. Hopefully.

“Haught, are you alright?” Dolls had heard what had happened and rushed over as soon as he could. He knelt down near Waverly and his eyes scanned over Nicole.

Nicole just gave a weak thumbs up then reached her hands out to indicate she wanted help standing. Dolls took one hand and Wynonna took the other. They quickly got Nicole to her feet. Waverly brushed off Nicole’s back while Nicole brushed off her front. She looked once more at the holes that had been blasted open in her vest and her head gave a shake “I guess I put the uniform to proper use on my last day ever wearing it, huh?”

This got a laugh out of everyone. Dolls clapped his hand against Nicole’s shoulder and gave her a proud nod “You just took a bullet to save your Queen. It’s what I’ve been training my entire life to do. How did it feel?”

“My boobs hurt” Nicole said honestly.
Wynonna laughed out and moved her hand now over Nicole’s chest to cover the hole that had been made over where her heart was. She looked up at her with a soft smile “How’s your heart feel?”

“Never better” Nicole whispered softly. She slid her arm around Wynonna’s waist and pulled her in close. She gave her a sideways hug then looked over at Waverly. She reached her hand out for her now and when Waverly didn’t hesitate to take hold she gave a nod “Now can we get the Hell out of here?”

“We’re getting you checked out at the hospital first” Dolls said seriously as they moved down the corridor now.

“I just want to go home” Nicole whined out gently.

“It’s protocol” Dolls said with a single nod. “You might not be Royal Guard anymore but you’re still Army and Army has a strict protocol about this.”

Nicole rolled her eyes then glanced at Wynonna. Wynonna didn’t fight it, though. She agreed. She thought it couldn’t hurt for Nicole to be checked over by a doctor just in case. She motioned to Dolls and nodded just once “You heard the man, it’s protocol.”

“Oh god now you sound like me” Nicole said with a soft laugh. She sighed and relented with a nod “Fine but only because protocol saved my life.” She glanced down at the holes in her chest and let out a soft sigh. She smiled as she silently sent a thank you to her father who had always preached to her the importance of following protocol. She had fulfilled the duty passed on to her by him and she knew he was smiling down on her that day. Her greatest purpose in life had been realized. All her training had been worth it. She protected The Queen. Most importantly she had protected the woman she loved and her best friend. She would do it again in a heartbeat if she needed to but she hoped she would never have to again.

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I have the emotional range of a gnat but also I love seeing you sweat

It was the day after the press conference, the day after the assassination attempt on Wynonna, and Nicole was in her room relaxing. At least she should have been relaxing. The bullets that hit Nicole in her chest had caused severe bruising and the doctor had suggested she take a few days to let them heal. Since it was just a suggestion, and she had felt worse pain, Nicole had decided to forego what the doctor had said and went about her business as usual. So now she sat hunched over the desk in her room going over what felt like mountains of paperwork.

The room was silent. She had turned off her phone, taken off her radio, and told the guard outside her room that no one was to disturb her. Why they still had guards outside their rooms was one of the reasons Nicole needed some time to work. She was now tasked with figuring out the fate of the members that had worked for her on the Royal Guard. Who knew that abolishing the Monarchy would carry so many responsibilities?

Nicole let out a sigh and pinched the bridge of her nose. She was starting to get a headache. Maybe she should take a break for a bit. She blinked a few times then widened her eyes in attempt to focus on what she had just been reading again. All the words were blurring together.

“What are you doing?” Wynonna’s voice suddenly broke through the silence. When she saw Nicole jump at the unexpected noise, she smirked. There was something so satisfying about sneaking up on someone and scaring them. It was one of life’s small joys.

Nicole shook her head and let out a breath of a laugh as she turned to look at Wynonna who stood at the door with a pleased smirk on her face “How did you get in here without me hearing?”

Wynonna just shrugged and took a slow step toward Nicole now “I have my ways.”

Nicole nodded in agreement and turned back to her papers. Even though the men of the Guard were no longer held by law to protect Wynonna they were all still there. They were all still loyal. That made Nicole swell with pride. She really did have a good team. It would be sad to see some of them go.

At that thought she let out another sigh and shook her head as she grabbed one of the papers from the desk “Can you tell me why we suddenly can’t afford to keep everyone from the Royal Guard as a paid protection agent?”

“Can we talk about that later?” Wynonna took another step toward Nicole now. She had closed the space between them and was now leaning against the desk right next to Nicole’s right arm. She gave a little nudge with her hips and smirked again. “I have something else I want you to do.”

“Oh yeah?” Nicole perked an eyebrow and looked up from the paper she had been looking at to Wynonna who was perched against her desk. She eyed her very carefully and when she saw the unmistakable look of mischief in Wynonna’s eyes she let out a very soft breath of a laugh “And what exactly would you rather me be doing?”

“Me” Wynonna said in a very matter-of-fact tone as the smirk on her lips grew.

Nicole puffed out a laugh and her head shook slightly “You know we can’t until you get-”

“The all clear from a doctor” Wynonna cut Nicole off and lifted a piece of paper that she had been holding out of sight until that moment. She gave a single nod of her head and glanced between Nicole and the paper a few times.
Nicole’s eyes dropped from Wynonna’s face to the paper in her hand. She blinked a few times as if she were having a hard time understanding what was happening. After a moment a smile came to her lips and her eyebrows lifted curiously as she looked back up to Wynonna “You got cleared by a doctor? When?”

“Yesterday at the hospital” Wynonna set the doctor’s note down on the desk now before her eyes focused in on Nicole. She licked over her lips before her right hand reached out and gently used a single finger to trace a slow line along Nicole’s arm “I figured since we were already there for you, and I had some time to kill, I would get checked out. Seems like as long as I am not in any pain I am good to go.”

“Really?” Nicole asked quickly. She then realized she might have sounded a little too excited and she cleared her throat and tried again, more calmly “I mean, really?”

Wynonna nodded just once. She slowly perked a single eyebrow and looked Nicole up and down. She once more licked over her lips before speaking again, this time much lower and much more seriously, as she lifted her right leg and slowly moved it across Nicole’s legs. She smirked as she settled in her lap with a nod “Really.”

That was all Nicole needed to hear. She quickly wrapped her arms around Wynonna’s waist and pulled her against herself tightly. She then pushed up out of her chair, lifting Wynonna off her lap just enough to be able to set her on top of the desk. Now standing with Wynonna’s legs around her waist she leaned in and captured her lips in a hungry kiss.

Wynonna was surprised, and pretty impressed, by Nicole’s sudden movements. She wasn’t going to fight them, though. Truth was, she needed this more than she would ever admit. She had known and trusted Nicole for most of her life and there was no question to her about how loyal Nicole was. But herself? She needed this moment, with Nicole, to form an entirely new type of bond so that she knew she could trust herself. So that she could give herself over fully. Because Nicole deserved that much, at the very least.

As she returned the heated kiss Nicole had started, she let out a soft moan against her lips as her hands reached down and immediately started to pull at the buttons of the shirt Nicole wore. She tried, to no avail, to pry them open without popping them from their threading. Instead she ended up ripping the threads, causing the first few buttons to fall from the shirt.

Neither of them seemed to care. Her shirt was the last thing that Nicole was worried about. She was focused on the task at hand. So as her mouth feasted hungrily, her tongue wrestling against Wynonna’s, she let her hands take over. She reached between them and easily used her fingers to pop the button of Wynonna’s jeans open before tugging down the zipper in one swift movement.

By the time her jeans were open, Wynonna had practically ripped Nicole’s shirt open, shoved it off her shoulders and down her arms, to where it was now trapped at her elbows. She now let her hands roam freely along Nicole’s exposed torso and back from where she sat on the desk. She broke the kiss now in favor of tasting new skin. She kissed hungrily down Nicole’s neck and across the top of her shoulder. Each kiss was accompanied by a scrap of her teeth, which caused little grunts to rise from Nicole’s lips.

“You’re going to leave marks if you’re not careful” Nicole mumbled as her head leaned to the side to allow Wynonna the freedom to kiss along her neck. She let out a happy sigh as the sensations from the kisses shivered through her nerves. She opened her eyes and glanced to the side now where Wynonna was doing her work “I bruise easily so be caref- OUCH!”

Wynonna had clamped down against Nicole’s neck right under her ear. She smirked and pulled back
to look at the other woman with satisfaction in her eyes “I’ll mark all over you if I want. Now shut up and kiss me.”

Nicole nearly growled at that. Her hand came to the back of Wynonna’s head, using it to pull her into a fierce, ravenous kiss. Her hands moved back down to where she had been working at Wynonna’s jeans and she started to peel them down off her hips as best she could with how Wynonna was still sitting on the desk.

Wynonna broke the kiss again. This time in favor of looking down at where her jeans were bunched at her waist. She put her hands down on the edge of the desk and pushed up slightly, lifting her ass just enough to give space for the material to be worked off.

Nicole didn’t hesitate now. She grabbed hold of the bunched material and pulled it under her ass then down her legs until it bunched at Wynonna’s ankles. She didn’t wait for Wynonna to kick the material away before she stepped close again and reached for the bottom of her shirt. She pulled it up quickly and when Wynonna lifted her arms to allow the garment to be removed, Nicole smirked. It seemed they were both completely done with waiting.

As Nicole tossed the shirt to the floor her eyes naturally dropped to Wynonna’s body. She wanted to take in all the new skin she had just exposed. She wanted to soak in the beauty of her physique. But as her eyes landed on Wynonna’s stomach she felt her breath hitch in her throat. She realized now that she was seeing the scars caused by the explosion for the first time. She blinked once and reached slowly now to let her fingertips trace along the longest scar gently.

Wynonna looked down at the touch. She gave her head a little shake when she saw the obvious concern in Nicole’s face. She reached her hand up under Nicole’s chin, using it to lift the woman’s eyes from her stomach to her own gaze. When their eyes met she spoke softly but firmly “Please don’t stop.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it” Nicole said without hesitation. Her head shook slightly as she spoke but her eyes did not leave Wynonna’s. Her gaze was serious as she kept her voice low “You’re beautiful and seeing those scars reminded me of just how true that is.”

“Shut up” Wynonna said with a shake of her head. Her hand moved to the back of Nicole’s head before her fingers curled in the short hairs there and gave a light pull. “Don’t ruin the mood.”

Nicole gave her head a shake as a small smile came to her lips “You realize I’m going to say stuff like that to you all the time, right?”

Wynonna gave a roll of her eyes and breathed out a laugh “You wouldn’t be you if you didn’t. But we were kind of tearing at each other’s clothes like three seconds ago so the sweet nothings vibe just doesn’t go along with that.”

“Fine” Nicole gave her own roll of the eyes before leaning in to kiss at Wynonna’s mouth. It was quick but it was short. She pulled back again as her hands moved down Wynonna’s body before scooping under her ass. All she needed was a firm tug and Wynonna had slid off the desk and into her arms. She smirked at the other woman now as she turned from the desk and headed over toward the bed.

“Shit, Haught” Wynonna let out a groan of a laugh before leaning in to place a few random kisses to Nicole’s neck “It’s really fucking sexy that you can lift me like that, you know?”

Nicole let out a laugh as they reached the bed. She set Wynonna on her back then moved to crawl up and over her without hesitation “Who knew you had a daddy kink.”
“Okay, wow, no” Wynonna lifted her hand and pressed her palm into Nicole’s face to physically, and annoyingly, stop her from leaning in for another kiss. She shook her head and as she removed her hand she closed her fist, leaving just her pointer finger lifted. She pointed at Nicole with a quick shake of her head “I will never, ever, call you daddy so don’t get your hopes up. I just like being manhandled every now and then and so don’t go get it twisted.”

“How, Wynonna Earp, queen of the jokes, has a line and it is drawn during sex?” Nicole laughed out in disbelief. She gave an amused smirk as she stared down at Wynonna from where she held herself over her “I would have bet my life that sex was when your joke game is strongest.”

“Shut your damn mouth” Wynonna growled and grabbed onto Nicole’s chin. She squeezed so Nicole’s lips pursed out a little before giving a nod “Much better. If your mouth is not being used for kissing then I don’t want to hear from it. Got it?”

Nicole laughed through her smooshed face but did not argue. She just nodded then pushed against Wynonna’s hand until she was freed in favor of allowing Nicole to kiss her again. Their lips crashed together and once more the hunger took over. Their lips and tongues pulled and lashed as their desires started to boil over.

It seemed that they both were on the same page now. No more joking, no more talking, and most excitedly no more waiting. As their lips feasted and their hands tugged at remaining clothing they fell into a natural rhythm. Though they had never been together in this way it seemed as though they had been practicing for this moment their entire lives. As if fate had put them together so long ago just so they could share this moment of perfect, unbridled, unified passion.

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A quiet had fallen around the room as their tired bodies finally fell from each other’s embrace. Neither of them knew how long they had spent tangled in the other and, honestly, neither of them cared. None of that mattered. Nothing outside that very room mattered at the moment. All that had been of any urgency between them was giving into and exploring the new found urges that had surfaced recently.

Now as they laid there, both physically spent but emotionally recharged, the silence around them seemed peaceful. It was as if that moment they had just created and shared together had been the one thing needed to achieve perfect balance in the world. How long it would last, neither of them could guess, but in the moment neither of them cared. What they had just experienced was all that was important in the moment.

Nicole was lying on her back, a soft smile on her lips, as her fingers traced lazily through Wynonna’s messed hair from where she lay against her ribs. She let out a happy sigh as the feeling of complete peace consumed her in that moment.

Wynonna’s hand laid gently at Nicole’s left hip bone. Her eyes focused on her fingers gently sliding up and down along the soft skin there. Her ear pressed to Nicole’s ribs focused on each beat of the heart that lay just below. Each thud sent a warm sensation through Wynonna. Nicole was alive. She had sacrificed herself to save Wynonna just a day earlier, and yet, she was still alive. Wynonna wanted to make sure to never take that for granted.

Nicole’s eyes moved from where they had been blankly staring at the ceiling above her. She turned her head and let her eyes focus on the top of Wynonna’s head. She smiled very softly because, honestly, she could never have dreamt that the two of them would have ever ended up this way. It still blew her mind that her best friend was apparently meant to be her greatest love all along. The thought was almost too crazy to grasp, and yet, there they were laying together after one of the most
intense experiences of Nicole’s life. The thought made her smile and she gently dipped her chin just enough to place a soft kiss to the top of Wynonna’s head.

Wynonna lifted her head at the feel of the kiss. Her eyes lifted to find Nicole’s and when she saw the woman smiling that dopey little happy smile she got when all was right in the world, she couldn’t help but smile herself. She rolled onto her stomach now, letting her bare chest come to rest against the left half of Nicole’s torso. She propped her right elbow up on one of the pillows next to Nicole then placed her head in her hand. Her smile held as she stared at Nicole as if she was seeing her for the first time. Everything between them was unarguably different now and as much as Wynonna had been terrified of change she was now more excited about it than she would ever admit.

“What’s going on in that head of yours?” Nicole asked with a light breath of a laugh as her right hand lifted to Wynonna’s head, pushing some of the messy hair off her eyes and behind her ears. She was glad to see Wynonna smiling. The last thing she wanted was to think Wynonna had regretted what they had just done and changed her mind about everything.

“So you want to get married?” Wynonna blurted out softly.

“What?” Nicole’s eyes went wide and her smile dropped into a surprised look. She blinked a few times as if she was processing what had just been said. She then let out a sort of sheepish laugh in an attempt to hide how surprised she was. She shook her head once and tried to answer with a joke “Wow a few good orgasms and you’re ready to get hitched? I thought I was the lesbian here.”

Wynonna rolled her eyes and used her left hand to lightly jab at Nicole’s stomach. “I didn’t mean…” She motioned between herself and Nicole a couples times and shrugged “...specifically. I meant in general. Like is that something you want in life?”

Nicole perked an eyebrow now in curiosity. She eyed Wynonna carefully and when she could not read her facial expression to figure out what the Hell she was trying to get at, she just shook her head. “Uh...I mean, I don’t really know. Why?”

Wynonna just shrugged and her eyes looked down at where her free hand lightly laid next to one of the large bruises on Nicole’s chest caused by the bullets the day before. She took a moment to think about what she wanted to say, how she wanted to say it, and after a moment her eyes moved back up to catch Nicole’s awaiting gaze. “I’ve been reading the letters between my parents and my mom never wanted to get married. She always thought she’d travel the world and if she found love it would be with someone just like her. No need to get married if they were just living their lives together each day, doing what they loved, with who they loved.” She shrugged again as her hand reached out to lightly tap at Nicole’s lips “And I get that, you know? Hell, even as Queen I never planned on getting married just to spite everyone who told me it was my duty.”

Nicole nodded just once but didn’t really know what to say. She was still kind of surprised at the subject matter. Wynonna kept thoughts like this to herself. The most serious relationship she had ever had in her life had lasted barely a month and she had done it as a dare. She wasn’t one to ever consider a real relationship before let alone talk about a commitment like marriage.

“Anyway” Wynonna used her hand to bat through the air like she was pushing the subject away once she saw that Nicole seemed to be a little uncomfortable. “I asked because I realized I had never really asked you what you wanted in life. Like, yeah, you wanted to serve in the Army and then serve on the Royal Guard but, like…” She puffed out an attempt at a light-hearted laugh and rolled her eyes “Do you have any other goals or whatever?” She shrugged at the question before a thought occurred to her and she added quickly “I’m asking as your best friend and not your….” She motioned between the two of them again and gave a sheepish smile. “It’s strictly curiosity mixed with bad timing on my part. I’m going to blame it on the post-orgasm hormones.”
Nicole’s face softened as she watched Wynonna struggle to lighten the mood and step away from the potentially emotionally heavy conversation she had almost started. She smiled very gently as her hand moved back through Wynonna’s hair. She gave a single nod as her eyes focused on the woman laying naked against her. “Well, since its my best friend asking me and not my girlfriend, I-”

“Girlfriend?” Wynonna perked an eyebrow and narrowed her eyes. She could not decide if she liked the sound of that. After a moment she gave her head a soft shake “Do we really have to label it?”

Nicole rolled her eyes but smiled because she could have guessed Wynonna would have reacted like that. Instead of being annoyed, or hurt, she just let out a soft laugh “That is a different conversation entirely. I just wanted to make you squirm a little.”

“You’re cruel” Wynonna pointed at Nicole firmly but a laugh slipped from her lips. She had taught Nicole far too well. She only had herself to blame.

“Anyway” Nicole waved her hand in the air a few times before focusing back on Wynonna with a nod and a more serious face. “You’re right, most of my life has been centered around my duty to serve and protect. I haven’t really put much thought into things like marriage because I didn’t prioritize anything other than you.” She rolled her eyes at how that might have sounded and added quickly “And Waverly and the Royal Family. You know what I mean.”

Wynonna nodded just once as a soft smile flickered at the corners of her mouth. It seemed they were both trying to engage in conversation about the subject at hand without making it sound too heavy or serious. This was definitely new territory for them.

“But since you asked…” Nicole continued when she saw Wynonna listening and not interrupting for once. She shrugged as her smile grew but her tone remained level “…I think that now that I don’t have a duty to uphold it is definitely something I would like to put more thought into.”

Wynonna fought off a smile because that was the most casual way Nicole could have answered that question. It was an answer very much like one she would construct herself. Roundabout with no real affirmation. She had definitely rubbed off on Nicole over the years and she was pretty damn proud of that.

She sat up now and slid to the end of the bed. She reached down to the floor to pick up the first article of clothing she could find. It just so happened to be Nicole’s button up. She smirked as she slid her arms into each side then let the rest of the material fall loosely around herself as she stood from the bed.

“Where the Hell are you going?” Nicole asked with a puff of a laugh as she pushed herself up into a sitting position now. She eyed Wynonna wearing her shirt and fought off a smirk of liking. The girl looked damn good in her shirt.

“Geez, so damn clingy. Typical lesbian.” Nicole called out toward the bathroom as if her point was better than Wynonna’s. She smirked to herself as the bathroom door was half-heartedly kicked closed. She could not express how relieved she was that their friendship seemed to be exactly the same as it had been before all of the emotions and feelings had gotten involved. Her greatest fear had been losing Wynonna in her life. Now she could look forward to continuing her life with Wynonna by her side just like she always had. Now, though, she got to see her naked and that was an unexpected bonus.
A few moments passed before Wynonna came back out of the bathroom. She gave an almost shy smile when she realized that Nicole was still in bed, still naked, and waiting for her return. She had to take a moment of pause in the doorway of the bathroom to remind herself that this was not scary. This was a good thing. There was no one in the world that would protect her heart more than Nicole Haught would.

“Whatcha thinking about?” Nicole asked delicately when she saw Wynonna lean against the bathroom doorway in thought. She could see on Wynonna’s face that her mind was racing and suddenly she began to worry. Had it all been too much, too soon? Was Wynonna going to regress and shut down again? Had she realized that this was a huge mistake?

Wynonna immediately saw the panic on Nicole’s face. She shook her head slightly as she pushed off the door frame and moved back toward the bed. Her eyes never left Nicole and as she reached the side of the bed again she gave a very soft smile “Just getting used to the idea that this is really happening. It’s really you and it’s really me.” She climbed onto the bed now and slowly, on her hands and knees, moved to crawl over Nicole’s body. She smirked down at her for a moment before letting out a breath of an unbelieving laugh “We are in love and we just had sex. It’s fucking insanity.”

Nicole felt her heart leap into her throat at Wynonna’s words. It was the first time Wynonna had acknowledge, out loud, without thinking Nicole was dying, that they were in love. She bit her lip to fight the huge smile that was taking over her features as she gave a nod. “Hard to believe, isn’t it?” She slid her hands slowly up the back of Wynonna’s bare thighs and over her ass before bringing them to rest at her hips.

Wynonna nodded just once as the smile on her face started to fade. Her brows creased together and a look of real concern took over. She took a moment to look into Nicole’s eyes, to really see deep within the girl she had known her entire life, before she found the strength to whisper out the words she had been afraid to admit to herself “I’m fucking terrified this won’t work and I’ll lose you forever.”

Nicole’s own smile faded as her head quickly shook back and forth. She sat up a little more against the headboard of the bed, bringing her face now within just an inch of Wynonna’s. One hand left her hip in order to cup gently against Wynonna’s cheek. She stared just as intensely into Wynonna’s eyes as she had just a moment earlier and when Nicole finally spoke it was quiet but with a conviction she had never shown before “You will never lose me, Wynonna Earp. I was meant to be by your side until the day you die and nothing is going to change that, do you hear me?”

“What if we do this and you end up hating me?” Wynonna huffed out now as a frown took over her features. She moved to sit back now, her ass resting on Nicole’s thighs, as her hands dropped between them. Her eyes moved with her hands and she watched as her fingers nervously pulled at the ends of the material of Nicole’s shirt that she wore “There’s a reason I’ve been single most of my life, Nicole. It’s not because no one was good enough to marry the next-in-line for the Throne.” Her eyes lifted slowly now and when they reached Nicole’s awaiting gaze she felt herself tremble as the words quietly slipped from her lips “I’m fucking incapable of love.”

“You’re absolutely incredible at love” Nicole breathed out firmly. Both hands were now cupping Wynonna’s face. She used the hold she had there to make sure that Wynonna could not look away from her as she spoke to her without a single ounce of hesitation “I’ve grown up with you and have always been in awe of the way you love. The way you loved your mother. The way you loved your father. The way you continue to love Waverly every day.” She shook her head just once as if the idea of Wynonna being unable to love was the craziest thing she had ever heard. “You are careful and meticulous with your love. You don’t just give it away. You keep it close to your chest, hold it
tightly, and only allow those worthy of it to see it. But once you do? Once you decide to love someone…” She trailed off and let out a happy sigh as a smile lifted on her lips “...well that is something indescribable, Wynonna. I’ve never known anyone that loves as fiercely and passionately as you do.”

“You’re just saying that be-”

“And the fact that you love me?” Nicole wouldn’t let Wynonna interrupt her now. She needed her to believe what she was saying was true. Because it was. Every word of it. “It’s a gift I could have only dreamt of, a gift I am not sure I am worthy of, but will be sure to cherish until the moment I breathe my very last breath.”

Feeling tears starting to form in her eyes, Wynonna quickly shook her head and looked away. Nicole was too good to her, to good for her, and she had no doubt she would fuck this up eventually. But she would take every moment she could get with the most incredible person she had ever known. So she rolled her eyes in an attempt to push away the tears and let out a very soft laugh as she looked back at Nicole now “That was way too cheesy, even for you, Haught.”

Nicole let out a laugh as her thumbs passed under each of Wynonna’s eyes in an attempt to sweep away the tears she saw waiting to spill out. “It’s one of the reasons you love me.”

Wynonna laughed out too and gave her head a shake. She leaned forward to place a quick kiss against Nicole's lips before rocking back to sitting on her thighs. “I guess if you weren’t being cheesy I'd start to doubt whether you were being sincere.”

“I'm gonna remember you said that the next time you complain about my cheese” Nicole smirked as her hands moved back to rest against Wynonna's waist. Her eyes flickered down over the way her shirt sat open on Wynonna, exposing just enough skin to taunt her, and gave a slight nod of her head as if agreeing silently with herself that it was a damn good look.

Wynonna perked an eyebrow at the way Nicole had just looked at her. The way her eyes took in every inch of exposed skin caused goosebumps to raise on Wynonna. No one had ever looked at her the way Nicole was in that moment. No one had been able to make her feel beautiful the way Nicole was in that moment.

Nicole’s eyes lifted and she realized Wynonna was watching her. She bit her lip shyly and gave a shake of her head. She leaned in and placed a tiny kiss against Wynonna's chin before letting out a happy sigh as her eyes now locked with Wynonna's gaze. Before she could stop herself she was whispering a request for the one thing she wanted most in the world “Be my girlfriend.”

Wynonna’s entire body went warm. Her heart somehow raced faster than it had been at the way Nicole had just been looking at her. The way her eyes took in every inch of exposed skin caused goosebumps to raise on Wynonna. No one had ever looked at her the way Nicole was in that moment. No one had been able to make her feel beautiful the way Nicole was in that moment.

Wynonna's entire body went warm. Her heart somehow raced faster than it had been at the way Nicole had just been looking at her. She bit lightly at her lower lip before letting out a long breath “You're so annoying. You know that, right?”

“Come on, Wynonna. I know you don’t care but I-”

“Of course” Wynonna cut Nicole off quickly. She smiled very softly at the surprised look that spread over Nicole’s face. Her head shook in amusement as a hand lifted now to push some of Nicole's hair off her face before nodding slightly “Of course we're girlfriends, dingus.”

Nicole laughed out half in relief and half happiness. Her head shook slightly and her eyes rolled at how annoying Wynonna could be. “Why are you like this?”

Wynonna gave a casual shrug and shake of her head “I have the emotional range of a gnat but also I
love seeing you sweat.”

“You don’t have the emotional range of a gnat” Nicole huffed in frustration. “I am going to break your habit of pretending you can’t feel. So if you can’t handle that then you better dump me now” She gave a very matter-of-fact nod as a smirk came to her face. She knew Wynonna was used to being in charge but Nicole was ready to challenge her every step of the way.

Wynonna just shook her head as a sigh escaped her lips. She knew Nicole was right. She needed to work on accepting her feelings and emotions. She needed to work on expressing them. Most importantly, she knew Nicole deserved that. So she would try. “Give me time, Nicole. This is new to me.”

“I know” Nicole spoke softly as a hand lifted now to tuck some hair back behind Wynonna’s ear. Her gaze was tender as she looked at her oldest friend and she offered a very sincere smile to her “Just remember that although a lot has changed there is one thing that remains the same…. She grabbed one of Wynonna’s hands now and placed it over her beating heart. She nodded firmly as she pressed her hand tightly over Wynonna’s, ensuring that the woman felt each beat as she spoke “...it’s just me.”

Wynonna nodded and her eyes fell away from Nicole's. The intensity in her gaze was too much. So she let her eyes fall to where her hand was pressed to Nicole’s heart as she drew in a shaky breath. Nicole was right. She was always right. This was something she could do because she would have her best friend by her side the entire time.

Nicole knew all of this stuff was hard for Wynonna. She had always kept her feelings locked up tight. She wondered why that was. Maybe it had to do with the fact that she had grown up in a Royal Family. They were always being watched and everything they said or did was scrutinized. Maybe Wynonna had been told to keep herself in check so no one could over analyze anything about her. A frown came to Nicole’s lips as she thought about that. It had to have been awful being told not to express anything your entire life. That just made Nicole respect Wynonna all the more. For as much as she hated being Royalty and all that came with it, she had managed to uphold a large part of the standards placed upon her.

“Will you do me one last favor?” Nicole broke the silence that had fallen between the two of them now. She could tell Wynonna had reached her limits for deep and meaningful shit for the day so she wanted to do something to lighten the mood again. When Wynonna looked up curiously at Nicole’s request, Nicole smirked very slightly as her hands started to slide up the back of her shirt slowly “Please wear my clothes as often as you can. I can’t even put into words how sexy you look right now.”

Wynonna laughed at the unexpected sentiment from her girlfriend. Girlfriend. That was still weird to her. Not because it was a girl, or because it was Nicole, but because she had never had a relationship with a status like that. She quickly shook that thought away and returned the smirk that Nicole was holding on her lips “You have post-sex brain where you think everything about me is sexy. Guaranteed when I’m stealing your only heavy winter coat when you need it most you will be rethinking this conversation.”

Nicole laughed and opened her mouth to argue but Wynonna quickly cut her off.

“But it’s too late!” She said with a wicked grin sliding over her lips as she lightly tapped Nicole’s nose with her finger. “You already gave me permission so get ready to always be freezing your ass off!”

Nicole just rolled her eyes and fought off a smirk. She was enjoying this brand new version of
Wynonna. She was more carefree, more light hearted, and probably the happiest Nicole had ever seen her. It made her heart swell knowing that her best friend was happy. It was just a completely added bonus that she was the reason for the happiness.

She quickly moved her hands down and gripped tightly at Wynonna’s bare ass as the smirk that had lifted on her lips at Wynonna’s comment now grew a little more mischievous “Well as long as your ass is in tact I think I can manage a little cold.”

Wynonna jolted a bit at the sudden grip to her ass. She looked surprised for a split second before it faded into a smirk of her own. Her hands moved now to slowly slide up along Nicole’s sides as she focused a hungry look on Nicole “You like my ass, do ya?”

Nicole bit her lip as her head gave a single nod. Her hands squeezed both ass cheeks again and when she spoke it was deeper with a sense of desire rising in her tone “Your ass is top shelf.”

“Best of the best, huh?” Wynonna’s smirk was growing as her hands moved along Nicole’s torso, her fingertips grazing teasingly along the side of Nicole’s bare breasts, as her eyes darkened with desire.

Nicole again gave a single nod. Her tongue flickered over her lips once before her smirk returned “The kind of quality that you take all night to enjoy.”

“All night?” Wynonna perked an eyebrow in liking as she slowly started to lean into Nicole now. “Into the very wee hours of the morning” Nicole confirmed with a nod before her eyes slid shut and her lips reached out to accept the kiss she could see coming in her direction.

Wynonna let out a throaty moan as her lips captured Nicole’s slowly but hungrily. She had no idea how it had not been obvious before just how much sexual chemistry the two of them had. It was mind blowing to her now just how absolutely wild Nicole could drive her. It was a whole new part of Nicole that she was discovering and she was excited to dive deeper and deeper into this new adventure with her best friend.

Nicole’s hands moved now from Wynonna’s ass up along her back slowly. As she did so, she laid back, using her hands to pull Wynonna against herself. Soon they were both lying flat, Wynonna on top of Nicole, as their lips and hands continued to feast on and explore one another.

“Oh my god!” Waverly’s shriek of surprise suddenly filled the room out of nowhere. She had just barged her way past the guard outside the room insisting she needed to see Wynonna immediately. She whirled around now and slapped her hands over her eyes even though she was no longer facing the bed.

“Shit!” Nicole jolted up in surprise at the sudden appearance of another voice. In doing so she inadvertently sent Wynonna flying off of her and onto the floor with a thud. Realizing immediately what she had done, her eyes went wide, and she rolled quickly to her stomach in order to look over the side of the bed. “Shit, Wynonna, are you okay?”

“Oh my god!” Wynonna groaned as she grabbed at the back of her head from where she was now lying on the floor. The sheets from the bed had somehow tangled around her legs and torso in the fall. She looked up at Nicole with one eye open “Dude you need to work on your fight or flight response.”

“I am so sorry!” Waverly said over the commotion. She had no idea what was happening, as her back was to the other two, but she knew what she had seen when she walked in the room and that
was enough to warrant an apology.

“It’s fine Waves” Nicole mumbled as she whirled around on the bed and moved swiftly to put her feet on the floor. She lowered herself next to Wynonna and slid an arm around her gently “I am so sorry, Wynonna. She scared the shit out of me.”

“Well I sure as Hell hope she at least saw my bare ass as punishment for not knocking!” Wynonna hissed the words angrily as her head whipped in the direction of her sister and her eyes narrowed harshly. “Seriously, can’t I have any privacy?”

“I said I was sorry!” Waverly groaned out. “I didn’t know you two were having sex yet! I thought you were waiting.”

Wynonna’s scowl now turned to focus on Nicole. She flung her hand out to the side in a motion at her sister and huffed “You told her we were waiting?”

“No” Nicole shook her head quickly.

“I assumed” Waverly cut in quickly so Nicole would not be scolded by her sister. “Because of the fact that you were still healing.” She let out a sigh and spoke again before Wynonna could start into an angry rant “Look, I’m really sorry. You are totally right, I should have knocked. But are you two decent? Because, like, I really need to talk to you.”

“Hold on a second” Nicole mumbled before turning her attention to Wynonna. She frowned softly and whispered “Are you okay?”

“My head caught me and we both know how big it is” Wynonna waved it off then started to climb to her feet. She grumbled in annoyance at the sheet tangled in her legs and start to pull in an attempt to free it. This only caused it to pull tighter and she let out a frustrated huff. She gave up and sat on the edge of the bed before pulling a pillow lazily over her chest. She was covered enough.

Nicole felt bad that Wynonna had fallen. She also worried she had been hurt. But she could tell she was far too annoyed to talk about it. So she waited until Wynonna was settled on the bed before she moved toward the bathroom door where her robe was hanging. She made quick work of sliding it on and tying it closed before moving back to the bed. She cleared her throat as she sat on the side opposite Wynonna before giving a nod “You can look now.”

Waverly slowly turned as her fingers cracked open around her eyes. She was hesitant to look even though Nicole had given her the go ahead. She let out a sigh and spoke again before Wynonna could start into an angry rant “Look, I’m really sorry. You are totally right, I should have knocked. But are you two decent? Because, like, I really need to talk to you.”

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Waverly slowly turned as her fingers cracked open around her eyes. She was hesitant to look even though Nicole had given her the go ahead. When she saw through her fingers that both girls were sitting on the bed with nothing exposed she finally dropped her hand from her face and turned around quickly. She bit her lower lip sheepishly and let out a sigh “I really am sorry.”

Nicole shook her head and waved her hand to the side “Honest mistake.”

A soft smile came to Waverly's lips as her eyes continued to flicker between her sister and Nicole. Finally she let out a soft laugh and motioned at the bed almost shyly before asking “Did I interrupt the first time?”

“Oh my god” Nicole breathed out as a blush took over her features.

“What do you want, Waverly?” Wynonna grumbled out in frustration as she narrowed her eyes on her sister.

“Sorry” Waverly bit her lip again. “I am just really happy for you two.”
“Waverly! I’m naked and have a headache! What do you need?” Wynonna barked.

“So sorry!” Waverly squeaked out. She shook her head as if to focus herself. She let out a sigh before clearing her throat to speak “Okay, um, well the legal team was wondering if you wanted to proceed with the trials against Champ and Doc in the traditional way or the new way.”

Wynonna glanced at Nicole as if to ask her opinion. When Nicole just shrugged, Wynonna rolled her eyes and looked back at her sister. She just shook her head with a sigh “Does it matter?”

“Well…” Waverly shrugged and lifted both hands like a scale. “The traditional way has the Head of the Monarchy doing the sentencing without a real trial.” She had lifted one hand as she spoke the first option. She then looked at her other hand and started to lift that one, as if balancing the two choices as she described them “The new way is a trial by jury which means a longer process and a chance they could be found not guilty.”

Wynonna let out a heavy sigh. Because she had announced the abolishment of the Monarchy earlier than planned they were now in limbo when it came to a lot of legal proceedings. Did they follow the old or the new laws? It was all up to Wynonna to decide which way to go since she was the one still in charge.

Finally she shrugged and motioned lazily at Waverly with a vague flick of her hand “Would it be gross of me to just tell them to put the scumbags away for life?”

Waverly shook her head because, honestly, that’s what she wanted more than anything. She understood why Wynonna was tempted to just use her remaining power to get this all over with.

“No one would look down on you if that is what you decided” Nicole said gently as her hand reached out to take hold of Wynonna’s.

Wynonna looked down as Nicole’s hand took her own. She felt just a split second of comfort before she remembered that no one else could make this decision. As much love and support as she might have from Waverly and Nicole she knew it was only her that had the final word.

Just like that, the weight of the world was on her shoulders once again. She thought about it for a moment before glancing up at Nicole. Her heart warmed at the soft assurance she saw in her girlfriend’s eyes. She smiled at that before looking back to Waverly. With one firm nod she spoke with certainty “I think we all know what I’m going to pick.”

Waverly nodded quickly. There was no need for Wynonna to say it out loud. She was right, they all knew her decision already. So she went over to the bed and gave her sister a smile. She offered her hand out in a gesture of support. When Wynonna took her hand, Waverly nodded and looked between the other two women with a slight smile “One for all…”

Nicole smiled at Waverly’s words as she reached for her hand. As the younger girl took hold of the offered hand, Nicole looked at Wynonna with a nod before the two of them finished the statement together “...and one for all.”

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It had been about a year since Wynonna had announced the end of the Monarchy. A lot had happened, as was expected, and now it was all finally settling down. There had been an election where the citizens of The Ghost River Triangle had chosen who they wanted to lead the country. Wynonna had still been in charge through the transitional phase. She had overseen the election, any rule or law changes, helped to finalize the new Constitution, and made sure all changes were made as smoothly as possible. It had been a lot and she was more than ready to step down and let someone else take over.

There had been a large part of the country that had petition for Wynonna to run for President. She had politely but vehemently declined. Getting away from any sort of power at all was why she had done this in the first place. She wanted to be left alone to live her own life. Thankfully a few great candidates with fresh ideas had stepped forward and the country had accepted them as options to fill Wynonna’s oversized shoes.

Today was finally the day Wynonna, Nicole, and Waverly had all been working toward for over a year. It was the day she would finally step out of power and hand it over to the person the country had elected into the job. Wynonna was excited. She could not wait to wash her hands of all of this and disappear into the wilderness. She already had a house in the middle of nowhere. She wanted to be as far away from civilization as she could get.

The three women had all been busy tying up loose ends of their own. Waverly had spearheaded several projects that included finding employment for all of the staff members that had served in the Palace. She had started fundraising for scholarships for any of the staff members that might want to get a degree in order to find a job. She had also helped in preserving all of the history that came along with the Palace. It was going to be turned into a museum that held and displayed the entire history of the country.

Nicole had been tasked with setting up an agency that helped to protect all political dignitaries. The majority of the men and women that had served with her on the Royal Guard had been reassigned to protect the political candidates as they ran for all the various offices around the country. Once all of those positions were filled many of the remaining guards were offered jobs in either local police departments or other military branches. It was really important to her that all of them were taken care of as a way of thanking them for their service to the Crown.

Now the three of them readied themselves for the last day of their old lives. Nicole would no longer be Head of the Royal Guard. She was honestly excited by that. She would remain as head of the Agency of Protection and that was enough for her. Not being at risk of being shot sounded amazing to her.

Waverly had already adapted to life outside of Royalty. She was using the degree she had earned from college to do exactly what she had planned to do. She was running a museum of history. Sure, it was mostly her own history but that didn’t make it any less exciting. Plus, it gave her a chance to stay close to her roots. She was a little sad to be saying goodbye to being a Princess but only because it had been the only life she had ever known. She was excited to start a new chapter but determined to never forget, or take for granted, where she had come from.

Wynonna was preparing to walk off into the sunset with her middle finger raised in the air behind her. But, first, she had one last duty as Queen. Well, interim-president technically but everyone knew she was still Queen until the new leader was sworn into the position. That was exactly the duty she held now. She had to swear the new leader in. She had to officially give them the power. She had to
make a stupid ass speech in front of the entire country. She hated giving speeches. At least now she didn’t have to really watch what she said because it would no longer reflect poorly on her family or her leadership ability. She could say whatever she wanted now. At least that’s what she tried to convince Rosita of. It didn’t work but at least she had tried.

Wynonna sat now on a stage with a podium in front of her. The room was slowly filling with cameras and reporters all waiting to capture the moment. It was a huge moment in history and she was feeling a bit nervous. She let out a heavy sigh and looked down at the flashcards in her hands where her speech was written. Her last speech ever. God she loved the sound of that.

Nicole, decked out in her official Head of the Royal Guard uniform for the very last time, walked onto the stage and made her way over to the chair on Wynonna’s left. She sat down and immediately reached her hand out to touch at Wynonna’s back gently. She rubbed up and down slowly in an attempt to comfort and soothe her girlfriend. She leaned in and whispered very softly against her ear “Just speak from the heart. You give amazing speeches when you do that.”

Wynonna smiled very softly and glanced over to Nicole now. She took a moment to look the woman over once. She hated all things Royal but she had to admit Nicole had always looked smoking hot in that Royal Guard uniform. She bit her lip at the thought before bringing her eyes up to finally meet Nicole’s gentle awaiting gaze “What if my heart just wants to say ‘peace out’ and then drop kick the mic?”

Nicole rolled her eyes but smirked slightly in amusement. It was good to see all the stress of transitioning from a Monarchy to Democracy had not killed Wynonna’s sarcastic nature. Honestly, she was pretty sure nothing could. But knowing it would be fully intact once they started the next phase of their life was reassuring.

“You ready for this?” Waverly came onto the stage now with a bright smile. She sat on Wynonna’s right side and put a hand on her sister’s shoulder. When Wynonna looked at her she gave a single nod “You’re so close to being free, Wynonna. Aren’t you excited?”

“Jumping for joy. Can’t you tell?” Wynonna motioned to her very emotionless face and held it like that for a moment. She then softened her features into a smile and nodded at her sister “Words cannot express how excited I am, babygirl.”

“Good” Waverly reached down now and took hold of Wynonna’s hand. “I am so proud of everything you’ve done this past year. You made it happen.” She nodded seriously and gave her sister’s hand a tight squeeze. “You’re amazing, Wynonna.”

“We are” Wynonna said firmly and returned the squeeze her sister had given her hand with one of her own. She then reached her other hand toward Nicole and once it was taken she glanced between both of the woman on either side of her and smiled gratefully. She knew she would not have made it through any of this without them by her side. “We all made this happen. The three musketeers.”

Nicole and Waverly leaned into Wynonna now. They gently brought their foreheads to rest on either side of Wynonna’s. The three of them stayed like that for a moment. It was a simple moment reflecting the bond that had strengthened through this process. It was the three of them against the world and they had pulled it off. They had been battered, broken, and pushed to their absolute limits. But they had made it to the other side. Nothing in the world could tear them apart.

“Hi ladies!” Jeremy came onto the stage now and interrupted the moment. He had a bright, oblivious smile painted on his face. As the girls broke from their soft embrace he glanced at each one of them then nodded quickly “Isn’t this so exciting? I can’t believe I got invited to be on stage when the last ruling Queen of The Ghost River Triangle makes her final speech! This is such a historic moment!”
Wynonna let out a soft laugh at Jeremy’s excitement. He never frowned. He never even hinted at being sad. It was a lot to deal with sometimes but, mostly, it was something Wynonna was grateful for. She stood now and went over to him. She gave him a heavy pat on the shoulder then motioned to the seat next to Waverly “You are just as much a part of this as everyone else on this stage. You are very special to me and I wanted you to know that.”

“Gee, thanks” Jeremy said almost shyly. He bit his lip and tried to fight off a blush. For all his enthusiasm and excitement he was also a very shy person. It was an odd mix but Wynonna had grown very fond of the young man that had helped them figure out and break the supposed Earp Curse.

“It’s almost time” Rosita came onto the stage now looking a little stressed. She looked at the four people on the stage and frowned slightly “Where’s the last guest of honor? We’re about to start!”

“No need to call the calvary. I’m right here” Dolls rushed onto the stage now and sat next to Nicole. He brushed a hand over his freshly pressed Army dress uniform and gave his charming little smirk to Rosita. “Let’s get this thing rolling.”

Rosita approached the podium and called for the attention of the room. Flashes immediately started going off but the chatter that had filled the room stopped. She thanked everyone for coming and explained how the ceremony would proceed. Wynonna was to address the country, give a speech, do a special presentation, and then officially swear in the new president. She then informed the press that there would be no questions fielded by Wynonna but the new president would do a press conference directly following the swearing in. Once everyone in the room seemed to be clear on how it was going to go Rosita then turned and motioned to Wynonna. She gave her a smile and a nod indicating that she was up.

Wynonna let out a heavy breath. She gripped the cards where her speech was written and stood from where she had been sitting. She approached the podium and was immediately blinded by all of the flashes from all of the cameras. She winced slightly at the brightness and put on a forced smile. She took a moment to allow a few good shots then lifted her hands to call for the pictures to cease.

She smiled very slightly when the flashing stopped and took another moment to let her eyes adjust now that the lights had dimmed. She looked over the room and after a heartbeat or two she nodded and cleared her throat before speaking into the microphone. “Good morning and thank you all for being here today for this historic event. As you all know this day has been in the works for over a year and I am pleased, and relieved, that it is finally here. I know this country has been in a state of nervousness as we have gone through this transitional period. I can not thank the fine citizens enough for hanging in there.”

She paused and looked from her speech cards to the reporters and cameras. She nodded again as a very soft smile came to her lips “We made it, guys. You helped bring this to fruition as much as anyone else involved and for that I am eternally grateful.”

At the word grateful there was a round of applause. Wynonna’s smile grew in that moment because she realized that all of her doubts and fears had subsided. She had done the right thing and she had the support of the entire country. That was a relief she thought she might never feel so she took a moment to soak it in as the room clapped for her.

As the applause died down, Wynonna continued her speech. There was a lot of talk about the future of the country and the excitement everyone felt about this new chapter. She made some comments about trust and growth and ushering in a new era of advancement. Most of it was filler to make the people of the country feel good about what was happening. It was kind of boring but it was necessary to help ease any hesitation from the people. At least that is what Rosita had said.
Another round of applause was given the next time Wynonna paused. She once more waited for it to die down before giving her head another nod. “Now I know we are all excited to watch the new President be sworn in. Believed me, no one is as excited for that as I am.” She smirked and the crowd laughed. It was no secret that Wynonna wanted the Hell out of office. “But before we get to that I have one last official thing I would like to do as Queen.”

There was a bit of a hushed chatter now as surprise went through the room. No one knew what she was talking about or had any idea what she meant. Nicole and Waverly glanced at each other curiously from where they sat behind Wynonna. Nicole gave a questioning shrug at Waverly as if asking her what was happening. Waverly just shook her head and motioned for Nicole to pay attention.

Wynonna cleared her throat once more in a gesture to quiet everyone down. Her tone was more serious as she spoke again “As you all know there was rumored to be a curse on my family for over four centuries. It had plagued my family, and this country, and at times threatened the safety of the citizens that live here. Although we have come to find out that it was not a curse at all that does not mean the effects of what we all went through will ever be forgotten.”

She turned to her right and motioned to where Jeremy sat smiling behind her “Jeremy, if you’d please come up here.”

Jeremy’s smile faded. He looked surprised and immediately nauseous. He shook his head quickly and started to stammer “N-no. It’s okay. I-I would like to stay here.”

Wynonna laughed at the panicked young man “That’s fine I can do it there.” She reached into the podium and grabbed something off of the tiny shelf under the microphone before moving over to the chair where Jeremy sat. As he slunk down in his chair in an attempt to escape, Wynonna stood next to him. She brought out the small, flat box that was a few inches wide, and long, and opened it. Inside was a medal of some sort. She motioned with her head to urge Jeremy to stand before she started to talk loudly so that the people in the room could still hear her.

“Jeremy Chetri, to honor the service to your Queen and country, for your hard work in breaking the Earp Curse, I bestow upon you the honor of Silver Star” She pulled the tiny medal and ribbon from the box now and handed the empty box over to Waverly. She then motioned for Jeremy to stand once more.

He realized he was not going to get away with just sitting there any longer so with a blush deepening the color of his cheeks he stood. He gave his head a shake as he watched Wynonna pin the tiny medal to his dress shirt. “You don’t have to do this. I was just doing my job.”

“You saved my family. It’s the least I can do” Wynonna whispered once she was done pinning it in place. She gave him a smile then pulled him into a tight hug. This caused the room to explode with applause. Jeremy had become quite the little celebrity since word spread that he had solved the mystery of the curse and helped put the Hardy family, and Doc, behind bars.

Wynonna stepped back from the hug and motioned to Jeremy with a proud smile on her face. She let the room applause him for a few more moments before turning to look at him again. She gave a nod and motioned back to his chair. As soon as she did so, Jeremy plopped down out of relief. He hated being the center of attention.

Wynonna approached the podium again with a smirk on her face. She felt bad she had embarrassed Jeremy but only a tiny bit. As the room quieted down again, and the cameras finally stopped flashing, she once more took to the mic. “Special Agent Xavier Dolls will you please approach the podium?” She turned to her left now and motioned her hand toward Dolls.
Dolls knew better than to fight Wynonna’s wishes. He also was not shy like Jeremy. So he smiled brightly and stood immediately upon hearing his name. He approached the podium then stood stiffly, offering a salute to his commander in chief, before letting out a soft laugh.

“Cut that shit out” Wynonna mumbled to him with a glare before an amused smirk came to her lips. She then pulled a second flat box from the podium and turned it to face Dolls. She opened it to show him what was inside before she spoke “Xavier Dolls, to honor your service to your Queen and Country, in your swift actions to shut down any further attacks, I present to you the Silver Star.”

Another round of applause, and camera flashes, erupted as Wynonna removed the small medal and ribbon from the box. She set the box on top of the podium then worked quickly to pin it next to all of the other ribbons and medals on Dolls’ uniform. He really was a very celebrated and decorated soldier.

Dolls watched with a grin on his lips. He had been honored several times throughout his career for all the various achievements he had reached but none of them could even compare to this. The Silver Star was an absolute dream to anyone serving in the military. There was no higher honor as far as he was concerned.

Once she finished with the pinning she offered Dolls a soft smile. She then took his hand and gave it a few firm shakes before the two of them turned toward the crowd. They stood there shaking hands and smiling for the cameras for a few moments before Wynonna finally let him go and she gave Dolls one more nod “You are dismissed.”

Dolls moved back to his chair and as he settled back down Wynonna took back to the mic. She cleared her throat and looked over the crowd. She took a moment to pause, once more relishing in the moment she had just created, before drawing in a deep breath to help steady her nerves. She was almost done.

“Nicole Haught” She spoke into the mic and turned to her left. She motioned to Nicole with her hand and a warm smile took over her features as she looked at the surprise on her girlfriend’s face. “Will you please approach the podium?”

“What are you doing?” Nicole mouthed in silent protest as she shook her head firmly.

“Don’t you dare embarrass your Queen on her last day” Wynonna said with a smirk, which got a laugh from the crowd, as she nodded at Nicole again. “Just get up here.”

Nicole hesitated for another moment. She tried to read Wynonna’s mind to see if she could guess what she had up her sleeve. When that failed she let out a sigh and shook her head. It wasn’t until Waverly reached across Wynonna’s empty chair and gave her an encouraging nudge that she finally got to her feet. She took the single step she needed to bring herself up next to the podium. She stared at Wynonna curiously but did not say anything.

Wynonna gave Nicole a grateful smile before turning back to the podium. One more box came from the tiny shelf that was tucked away under the top of the podium. This box was not like the one that had held the Silver Stars. No this one was smaller. More rounded. Wynonna glanced down at it and then let out a heavy breath. When she spoke again it was in a tone more sincere than most people had ever heard her use in her entire life. It was the tone she used in private with the people she loved most. This was the tone she used solely for Waverly and Nicole.

“When my however many times great grandfather Wyatt was King he had a best friend who served by his side for the entirety of his reign. His best friend had saved his life once and to show his gratitude King Wyatt introduced a medal of honor to celebrate the deepest and fiercest level of
devotion to the Crown. To this day only one person has ever done what it takes to receive that honor and that was Wyatt’s best friend” She drew in a deep breath and when she released it her voice trembled slightly as her eyes locked on Nicole “Until now.”

Nicole shook her head quickly as she realized what was coming. This, like the Earp Curse, had been considered folklore. Rumors and chatter passed on from generation to generation as a way of making the family seem more interesting.

Wynonna opened the box now and revealed a very simple golden pin. It consisted of two long barreled revolvers facing each other with their barrels crossed in the middle. Under it was a little square piece of gold connecting the butts of the guns with an inscription on it. She smiled and took the pin out of the box. Her eyes focused on Nicole and she gave a single nod “Nicole Haught, for your unwavering loyalty and the actions you took in order to save the life of The Queen during an attempted assassination, I proudly present to you the most prestigious honor my family has to offer. I give to you the Golden Peacemaker.”

There was a moment where the crowd watching was stunned into silence. Most of them didn’t even know the medal existed. But as they realized what was happening the crowd erupted into a standing ovation as Wynonna worked to pin the award to Nicole’s uniform.

Nicole was fighting off tears. She had never given a second thought to her duty to save the Queen. It was all she had ever known. She did not think she needed to be thanked like this. Having Wynonna beside her, loving her and sharing her life with her, was all the thanks she could ever want. Knowing she had successfully protected both Wynonna and Waverly was all she needed to feel like she had fulfilled her duty. This was too much.

Wynonna finished pinning the small medal right above Nicole’s heart. She then glanced up and could see the tears in Nicole’s eyes. She let out a soft laugh and gave her head a single shake before pulling the woman into her arms for a tight hug. She whispered against Nicole’s ear, glad that the crowd was still applauding loudly so no one would overhear her words, “I love you, Nicole Haught. Thank you.”

Wynonna backed away from the hug then took a few steps away from Nicole. She motioned at Nicole with her hand, as if presenting her to the crowd, before she started to clap herself. She made her way back over to where Waverly was standing and clapping too. She looked at her sister and gave her a little wink. Had it not been for Waverly’s extensive research into their family’s history this moment would not exist. In her search to preserve everything about the Earps she had stumbled across a drawing of the pin and a picture of Wyatt presenting it to his best friend.

Nicole’s heart was racing as she stood there on stage listening to the applause. There were camera flashes going off all around her. It was a surreal feeling. She almost thought she was dreaming. She would never dream of this, though, because it was all too much so she knew it was real. She wanted to run but she wouldn’t. She would, for the first time in her life, just accept the fact that she was a hero. She had done her job. She deserved this.

Wynonna gave it a few more moments and as the applause started to die down she walked back over to Nicole. She put her hand on her back to let her know she was there and when Nicole glanced over Wynonna gave her a little wink. This was Nicole’s hint that she was done. She quickly moved back to take her seat. She drew in a deep breath and wiped a lingering tear from her eye as she looked over at Waverly. She leaned across the chair and whispered to her “Did you know about this?”

Waverly just smirked and gave a coy shrug before her attention turned back to her sister who had started talking again.
“Now, let’s swear in your new president!”

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The rest of the ceremony had been quick and the girls had all been rushed away even more quickly. They had a full day ahead of them. They had been allowed to change out of their official uniforms and Royal outfits in favor of some more comfortable, but still very nice, clothing. Their next stop was just as important as their first.

The ride from the Palace, which was now technically the Presidential Home, was full of Nicole and Wynonna bickering over what she had done. Nicole hated to be surprised like that and Wynonna knew it. That was exactly why she had done it. If Wynonna had told Nicole ahead of time she would have probably not shown up. So Wynonna was unapologetic about her actions then turned the blame to Waverly since she had been the one to find proof of the Golden Peacemaker and bring it to Wynonna’s attention.

Now, the bickering had ended and the three of them were sitting quietly in a very boring room. They had made their way down to the courthouse. Today was the day that Doc, Champ, and the other traitors were being sentenced. The trials had been longer than expected, mostly pushed back and delayed because of the transition of the country, but it was finally the day to sentence them for their crimes.

Wynonna had wanted to wait until she was no longer Queen for them to be sentenced. She wanted the men to know that the punishment they got was what the people thought they deserved and had not come from herself. If it was up to her they’d all be hanged. But she had worked on rising above her petty and selfish motives and was sure that justice would be served without her interfering in the process.

The three of them sat in one of the meeting rooms in the courthouse. They were alone. Well, there were two men in suits guarding the door but that was their job. They were the agents Nicole had assigned to protect Wynonna and Waverly since they were, technically, political dignitaries. They would be protected by the agency for life. Just like the Secret Service.

Wynonna sat at the end of the table in the room, her eyes scanning whatever paperwork she was looking over now. She had to officially sign and date a few things to make the transition legitimate. She was so over paperwork. If she never had to read another contract again in her life it would be too soon.

Waverly had her own stack of papers. She was checking, double checking, and triple checking the insurance policy for all of the artifacts that were going to be on display in the History Museum. It was set to open a few months from now and she had to make sure everything was protected. It was her lineage. It was her own personal history. There wasn’t anything more important to her.

Nicole was busy reading over the jailing procedures for the traitors. She had wanted to make sure all of them were separated. She wanted to make sure they had very little freedoms while they served their time. Well, if they did serve time. She was pretty sure they would all go to jail. She hoped as much. It was the least of what they deserved.

The silence in the room was broken when Wynonna grunted in disapproval as a paper she was reading slid from her grip and landed on the ground. Nicole glanced over, just for a split second, before looking back to what she was reading. She smirked in amusement because Wynonna was always dropping shit. She was sure that the woman had never gotten through a file of paperwork without at least one thing hitting the ground.
Wynonna scooted her chair out in a huff and quickly dropped onto her hands and knees near the paper. She was next next to Nicole’s chair and she glanced up at her as if expecting her to help her scoop up what she had dropped. When she didn’t, Wynonna smirked. This was perfect. She took what she held in her hand now and reached up toward Nicole “Haught, will you take this?”

Without hesitation, or looking up from her reading, Nicole reached her open hand toward Wynonna. She was so used to holding stuff for the girl that her hand moved without her even thinking about it. It was like a reflex. Her hand was just there, ready to take whatever it was Wynonna was giving her, without giving a second thought to it.

It took her a moment to realize that Wynonna had not handed her papers. Instead her hand closed around something small and round. This finally broke her gaze away from her own papers as she lifted her hand to look at what she held. She blinked a few times as she held the object in her open palm. She perked an eyebrow out of sheer curiosity and looked now at Wynonna who was still kneeling on the ground next to her “What is this?”

Waverly bit her lip and rolled the chair she was sitting in, on the other side of the table, around the end so she could now clearly see her sister on one knee in front of Nicole. She fought off a smile as she watched the scene unfold.

Wynonna laughed very softly and gave her head a little nod in the direction of Nicole’s open hand “Well do you want it or not?”

Nicole let out a confused huff if a laugh as her eyes dropped to what she held again. That is she realized what she was holding. “Oh my god!” Her eyes grew wide as she stared at the ring in her hand. She blinked a few times as if she was having a hard time focusing on the object she held. She let out a breath of a laugh that held an air of disbelief “Did you seriously just propose to me?”

“In her own Wynonna kind of way” Waverly chimed in now with a soft laugh. She was grinning ear to ear, her hands folded tightly together in anticipation, as she watched what was happening.

“Did you know about this too?” Nicole looked completely flustered now as her eyes shot a shocked look over to Waverly.

“Of course I did” Waverly said with a soft laugh. She motioned to Wynonna, still knelt beside Nicole, and nodded “I had to convince her it was a good idea.”

“It was a terrible idea!” Wynonna, feeling completely vulnerable and panicked, grabbed Nicole’s hand that held the ring and started to get up from her knee. “It was stupid, Nicole. Just forget it.”

“No!” Nicole quickly snatched her hand away from Wynonna so she would not take the ring back. She clutched the ring to her chest and focused her eyes back on Wynonna who was now standing beside her. “I want it. Of course I want it. Are you serious, though? Like, you really want to get married? Because I know you never wanted to and I am totally alright with that so don’t feel like you have to.”

She was cut off when Wynonna leaned down and captured her mouth in a deeply passionate kiss. Her hand gently cradled Nicole’s cheek as their lips lingered together for a few long moments. She wanted to make sure there was no more doubt in Nicole’s mind when she pulled away from that kiss.

Stunned into silence, Nicole’s lips curled into a dreamy smile when the kiss was broken. Her eyes lingered closed for a moment before she breathed out the breath that had hitched in her throat at the start of the kiss. When her eyes fluttered open she looked up at Wynonna with a dopey grin, giving her a single nod “Okay, yeah, fine. If that’s what your heart is set on.”
Wynonna rolled her eyes at Nicole’s lack of ability to be nonchalant. She smirked in amusement though because, for the second time that day, she had totally caught Nicole off guard and that was hard to do. She was pretty proud of herself. She moved now to sit back into her chair, rolling it back up against the table, before reaching out to arrange the pile of papers she had purposely messed up in order to pull off the proposal. “Glad you’re on board, Haught.”

“That’s it?” Waverly’s mouth dropped open in shock as she stared between the other two women. She let out a grunt of disapproval and gave her head a shake “No crying or happy squealing or jumping up and down?”

Wynonna smirked again and gave a shrug as she looked calmly from her sister to Nicole “Not our style, really.”

Nicole was fighting off a growing smile as her eyes shifted from Wynonna to the ring she still held and back again. She shrugged then looked up to Waverly “Did you really think we would cry?”

“You cried receiving an old golden pin that you didn’t even know existed before today!” Waverly threw out her hand in a motion toward Nicole as if she were making a valid point.

“Yeah, well, that surprised me” Nicole laughed softly. She took the ring now between her two fingers on her right hand and held it up. She inspected it for a split second then looked at Waverly again “Would it make you feel better if she slid it on my finger and I gasped in surprise then jumped into her arms?”

“Oh my god, yes!” Wynonna mockingly gasped in excitement and reached for the ring. “Come on, let’s do that!”

“No! Stop!” Waverly waved her hand between them quickly and gave an annoyed huff. “Now you’re just being obnoxious. Forget it.”

“What!?” Wynonna faked offense from where she had already positioned herself on one knee next to Nicole again. “You don’t want to share in our joy at this moment? Come on, isn’t even wearing it yet!”

“I can work up some tears really fast!” Nicole nodded in agreement as her hand reached out to Wynonna in a way that would allow her to slip the ring into place. She blinked a few times at Waverly as she fought off an amused smirk “Wait one second. The tears are coming.”

“You guys are assholes!” Waverly growled as she stood now and gathered the papers she had been going over before the proposal. “I was so excited for you two and so touched to be apart of this moment and of course you two can’t be normal. I don’t know what I expected!” With that she turned her back and started out of the room.

“Aww, Waves, don’t go!” Wynonna called out from her knee. She watched her sister storm from the room and once she was gone her eyes moved back to Nicole. She smirked and let out a soft laugh as she started to get to her feet now. “I wonder what she’s all worked up about?”

Nicole rolled her eyes at Wynonna but laughed as well. She watched Wynonna move to sit back down before she cleared her throat to gain Wynonna’s attention. When she looked at her curiously, Nicole twitched her still dangling left hand back and forth a few times “We’re alone now. You could at least do one traditional thing. I promise it won’t kill you.”

Wynonna rolled her eyes and moved back to Nicole. She took hold of her left hand a little too fiercely and put on a forced smile. She held the ring up now and let her eyes lock with Nicole’s
awaiting gaze. She gave a single nod, moved the ring toward her finger, then without warning dropped it on the floor. Her forced smile turned to a real smirk and she shrugged as she let go of Nicole’s hand “You already said yes. My work here is done.”

“You’re a fucking shit head” Nicole growled and spun in her chair toward Wynonna. She reached out her leg and kicked her right in the ass, gaining an amused laugh from the woman, before she turned back toward the table. She gave her head a shake and reached for the papers she had been reading before everything had happened. Her eyes dropped to the papers and she started to read again, leaving the ring that Wynonna had dropped to lay wherever it had landed.

Wynonna’s amusement at her own antics faded from her face as she sat in her chair and realized that Nicole was not frantically searching the ground for the ring. She frowned and let out an attempt at a casual laugh as she reached for her own papers now “You really just gonna leave it there?”

Nicole just shrugged. She didn’t even look up from what she was reading as she spoke “I already said yes. I don’t need a ring to prove it to people.”

Wynonna let out a grunt as her mouth dropped open in surprise. She knew Nicole was being annoying to get back at her for having been annoying but for some reason it was working all too well. She stared at Nicole in surprise for a few more moments before she let out a heavy breath through her nose, shook her head, and turned her focus back to her papers. “Fine, I don’t care. Leave it there.”

“Fine” Nicole said with a shrug. She fought a smirk off now. She knew she had gotten under Wynonna’s skin.

“Fine” Wynonna repeated. Her eyes lingered on her papers because she would not give Nicole the satisfaction of seeing how annoyed she was.

The two of them stayed like that for a few long moments. Both of them pretended not to care while they periodically glanced up from their papers to look at the other. A silence fell between them with the only noises being Wynonna’s heavy huffs and Nicole’s pleased little hums between breaths.

Finally, after a few minutes, Wynonna growled and threw her papers down. She shoved herself away from the table, rolling back in her chair a few feet, before getting up. She glared at Nicole before dropping to her hands and knees to search for the ring. “You’re such a fucking pain in my ass I don’t know why I’ve been friends with you for so long” She mumbled under her breath as her eyes scanned the ground.

Nicole, with amusement painted on her face, put her papers down and turned in her chair to look at Wynonna. With a perky tone she chirped out “Did you say something, dear?”

“Shut the fuck up and help me find your stupid ring” Wynonna grumbled.

Nicole’s amusement curled into a smirk. Her hands folded together and she gently sat them in her lap “What was that?”

Wynonna huffed and looked up at Nicole with a fierce annoyance in her eyes. Over the past year Nicole had worked with Wynonna on her communication. If she was feeling something or needed to talk about something she was supposed to be honest about it instead of making sarcastic remarks to cover up her true feelings. She knew that Nicole was looking for direct communication now. It annoyed her because Nicole was right to want that from Wynonna, especially in this moment. She gritted her teeth and let out a heavy sigh before finally speaking in a softer tone “Nicole, babe, I love you so much and I was a little bit of a jerk just now. Will you please help me find this ring that I so
lovingly got for you because you are the only person I want to annoy for the rest of my life.”

“Thank you” Nicole said sincerely before pushing her chair back and dropping on her hands and knees as well. She started to look around before she glanced at Wynonna “Was that so hard?”

“Yes” Wynonna said sharply. She then realized her tone and let out a deflated sounding sigh “I’m sorry. Sarcasm and whiskey are the only coping mechanisms I still have and right now there is no whiskey. You’re right, though, I was out of line.”

“I know you’re stressed” Nicole frowned and stopped looking for the ring. She rocked back to sit on her feet as her eyes focused on Wynonna. “I was out of line, too. We should probably both apologize to Waverly. She was so excited and we were dick bags.”

Wynonna huffed but gave a nod. Waverly was probably just as nervous about the sentencing hearing as Wynonna was and it had not been fair of them to pick on her. She rocked back on her own feet and looked up at Nicole with a frown “I feel bad. I mean, it was her idea the least I could have done was not been an idiot about it. She just wanted to witness the moment between the two people she loves most, you know? I did it for her. If it were up to me I would have just handed you a completed marriage application and told you to sign it.”

Nicole let out a huff of a laugh and nodded because she could very much see Wynonna doing it that way. “We will have to make it up to her. Let her plan our wedding or something. She can make it as cheesy and over the top as she wants.”

“Ew” Wynonna’s lip curled in disgust at the thought. But, that probably would make Waverly happy so she relented a nod at the idea.

“Oh!” Nicole excitedly scooted across the ground toward the leg of the table next to Wynonna. She reached under the tiny space between the leg and the ground and pinched the ring between her fingers. She pulled it out and presented it with a wide smile. She showed Wynonna then immediately moved to put it on her left hand. Once she did so she turned her hand toward Wynonna and wiggled her fingers in a motion of showing it off “How does it look?’

“Weird” Wynonna said honestly. She then laughed and added with a nod “But, in a good way.”

“Yeah, it’ll take a while to get used to I’m sure” Nicole pulled her hand back toward herself and inspected it. She gave a little nod and a genuine smile came to her lips. She looked up at Wynonna then leaned toward her, since she was so close, and touched a kiss to her lips. “It’s beautiful.”

“I know” Wynonna whispered with a smirk before leaning in for another kiss. She let this one linger, kissing her deeply but gently, as her hand moved into the still short strands at the back of Nicole’s head. Both of them seemed content to just enjoy this peaceful moment of alone time as realization set in. They were going to get married.

“Are you two really making out under the table?” Waverly had come back into the room to let them know the sentencing was about to start.

The sudden appearance of Waverly’s voice in the silent room scared both of them so bad they flinched upward and ended up hitting their heads against the underside of the table. Wynonna let out a groan as she grabbed her head and moved out from under the table “As always you have amazing timing, babygirl.”

“Serves you right for being a jerk” Waverly said with a satisfied smirk as her arms folded across her chest.
“We’re sorry for that” Nicole chimed in now, her hand rubbing the top of her head, as she gathered her papers from the top of the table now that she had moved to standing as well.

Waverly rolled her eyes and waved the notion off with a shrug “I don’t know why I expected anything else. It is the two of you, afterall.” She gave them both a soft smile then motioned behind herself to the door of the room. “They’re about to start so they want us to find our seats.”

“Be right there” Wynonna gave an acknowledging nod as she worked to stack her papers again. Waverly moved toward the door but paused. She looked back at her sister and Nicole and a smile came to her lips. There were no two people in the world more perfect for each other and she was thrilled that they were going to take that next step together.

“Here” Nicole offered to take Wynonna’s papers from her. When they were handed over, she offered Wynonna a little smile, before motioning to the small pocket on the left front side of the blazer she wore. “Reach in.”

Wynonna raised a curious eyebrow but did not hesitate. When she reached into the pocket she immediately smirked. Her eyes widened with surprise as she pulled the flask from Nicole’s pocket “You didn’t?”

Nicole let out a laugh as she tapped the stack of papers she held on the top of the table to ensure they were all straight before giving Wynonna a nod “I thought you might need to take the edge off just a tiny bit.”

Wynonna put a hand over her heart, looking completely touched, before she looked at the flask again. She twisted the top off, took a sniff, then tipped it to her mouth. She took a long pull then swallowed the mouthful that had poured in between her lips. Once her mouth was clear she licked her lips and let out a happy sigh “I love you so much.”

“Stop talking to the whiskey and let’s go” Nicole, who had already made her way over to Waverly waiting at the door, called over her shoulder to Wynonna without looking.

Wynonna let out a laugh, capped the flask, tucked it into the front pocket of the slacks she wore, then hurried over to the other two. She reached her hands out in anticipation and when they were taken by the other two she gave a firm nod. Her hands squeezed tightly and she looked straight ahead to the door that was being held open by one of the suited men “All for one?”

“And one for all!” Waverly and Nicole said at the same time. They all shared a quick smile before pulling their chins up, holding their heads high, and moving into the hallway of the courthouse. This was it. The last thing they needed to deal with before they could close this chapter on their old lives and finally look forward to a fresh start. Together.

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EPILOGUE

Doc, Champ, Champ’s father, one of Champ’s uncles, and the hitman the family had hired were all found guilty by a jury of their peers. They were all sentenced to serve seven consecutive life sentences without possibility of parole. Their charges of treason, regicide, conspiracy to commit regicide, and 4 counts of manslaughter all carried life sentences. During the trial details were revealed that all the guilty men were involved in planning the plane crash that killed King Ward as well.

Lady Hardy’s charges were reduced due to her full cooperation with the investigation. A lot of the information she provided helped the prosecution prove the guilt of the men involved. She took an
eventual plea bargain for 15 years in jail and 10 years probation after release.

No other members of the Hardy family were found to be involved. Upon further investigation, no one else involved in either inner circle was proven to have known about the attacks. It is the belief of The Ghost River Triangle’s National Investigation Service that all guilty parties have been sentenced.

The Earps are finally free to live their lives without fear.

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