Your Touch

by freehugs9

Summary

Both Baz and a gremlin are driving Simon crazy, but as usual, there's so much he doesn't know. His problems are about to get a whole lot bigger. Lots of Snow/Baz. :) Thanks, Idonothinkthatwordmeans for being my beta!
Late night Massage

SIMON

Penny would call it an obsession. (In fact, she has. A number of times.) But I can't expunge the image of Agatha and Baz from my mind. Holding hands like they were about to sing, or snog.

I don't blame Agatha for going through a rebellious stage. It's over now, and if I'm really being honest with myself, we were never that close.

It's Baz who worries me. I don't think he's made a move on Agatha - yet. But I don't know for sure. They keep giving each other these looks – and then looking away. I can't figure out if he's plotting something or if they really are secretly snogging each other behind closed doors.

The uncertainty is driving me crazy. I could barely concentrate on studying with Penny today, and now I keep tossing and turning in bed.

Sleep is an elusive beast that doesn't even have the decency to nip at my toes tonight. It's nowhere near.

I glare at Baz's still figure. The light of the full moon shining off his dark hair. His face in shadow beneath it, irritatingly elegant even in sleep.

This is all his fault. It always is. If he weren't constantly up to something, I'd have peace. But I can't ever seem to stop thinking about him and worrying about what trouble he's brewing.

"That's it," I growl, throwing off my covers and sitting up abruptly. A flash of anger surges through me and I only dimly register how cold the floor is on my bare feet. "Baz," I say sharply, "this has gone on long enough."

Baz's only reply is to groan and pull the covers over his head.

"Tell me. Now. What's going on with you and Agatha?"

"Fuck off, Snow." His muffled reply is groggy and when I glance at the clock, I belatedly realize how late it is. He must've been well and truly asleep.

I don't care. I won't be able to sleep until we've settled this. Better to confront him now and get it over with. "Are you using her?"

He throws the covers back a bit, pushing himself up on one elbow. "For what?" he demands.

"You tell me!" I toss back.

He groans and falls back onto his pillow. "Normally I'd refuse to answer on principle, but it's 1 a.m., for Crowley's sake. There's nothing going on between me and Agatha. Never was. Never will be. Now go to sleep, you fucking twat." He rolls over to face the wall. The wanker.

I take a deep breath, anger still coursing through my veins. "I see all the looks you keep giving each other."

He's still for a moment. Then he slowly rolls back over, the moon illuminating his glare. His gray eyes flash fire at me. "Snow. Allow me to work through your tortured logic for a moment. You want me to stop looking at Agatha?"
Without waiting for an answer he shakes his head incredulously, rolling his eyes and muttering, "Simon bloody Snow doesn't want anyone to so much as look at his precious ex-girlfriend - and he'll make damn well sure they don't sleep if they do."

"No!" I lean back a bit, my neck and shoulders throbbing from holding them so rigid while I fretted all day (and half the night) over this. "That's not it. You bloody well know what I'm saying."

He finally sits straight up and throws up his hands in exasperation. "Enlighten me."

Before I realize it, I'm shouting: "You're plotting something! You're always plotting something! And if you plan to use her-"

"I have no intention of using Agatha! I care nothing for her," he declares, shooting me a death glare. "The only reason -" he cuts himself off and I point at him.

"Aha! So there is a plot," I gloat at him. I knew it. And clearly bringing this up in the middle of the night was brilliant, because he's tired enough that he's making mistakes.

"I didn't say 'plot'," he bites out.

"So what is it then? Tell me!" I insist.

"Why the hell should I?" There's no doubt he's fully awake now. And furious. His forehead is wrinkling with an intensity that should scare me off, but he can't bloody well hurt me in our room.

"Because I won't let it drop until you do." I cross my arms over my chest defiantly. I can be right stubborn when necessary.

His expression turns to ice. He scratches the side of his forehead, deliberately, before running a hand through his tousled hair. He rests his forearms on his thighs and looks up at me through strands of dark hair. "If I swear to do you a small favor, will you drop this and let me sleep?"

"Why would you do that?" I ask, becoming even more suspicious. He must really not want me to figure out his plan.

He sighs. "I'm too tired to fight you tonight." The light catches his eyes again. I realize that he does look bloody miserable. Exhausted, and pale.

I'm so surprised that I whiplash quickly from rage to concern. Suddenly guilt is pulsing through me, unbidden, and I find myself making a noticeable effort not to feel bad about bothering him. "Fine," I murmur.

"Do I need to swear it, or-?" He holds up his wand halfheartedly, looking like he doesn't have the energy to cast the spell.

I sigh. He hasn't looked right since he's returned. More pale than usual, even for him, and with a noticeable limp. (Well. Noticeable to anyone who watches him as closely as I do.) Whatever he'd been up to had really taken a toll. I'd feel bad for him if I weren't sure he'd been up to no good.

Fine then. I jut my chin out stubbornly. "If you really want to do me a favor, massage my shoulders," I hear the words come out and realize again how bloody brilliant I am tonight. He'll never do it. And then he'll have to tell me.

His eyes widen and his lips part slightly. I'm opening my mouth to call him on his false offer when he stands.
My mouth is dry as I cross the room slowly.

Simon Snow just asked me to touch him. Fuck if I'm going to say no to that.

I nearly flinch each time my weight lands on my bad leg, but I force myself to cross the room without a limp or a grimace. I can't show him any weakness. (Not any more than I've already shown, anyway.)

Luckily, his bed is only a few steps away and I'm able to manage them without looking pathetic. I ignore his gaping mouth and gracefully settle next to him. Then I grab his shoulders and forcibly turn him away from me. I can't do this while looking him in the eye.

I squeeze his shoulders roughly, his muscles rigid beneath my hands. "Crowley, Snow," I murmur. He feels like he's wound up tight enough to snap. And apparently, he has if he's asking me to massage him in the middle of the night.

His head tips forward a bit as he groans.

I squeeze my eyes shut and bite my tongue. He has no idea what that sound does to me. It's a knife in my heart and excitement rushing through my veins. Out of habit I school my expression, and I force myself to keep on with a steady, even rhythm. As if this means nothing to me. When really I'm bleeding painful passion all over his bed – feelings that only intensify with each stroke of my fingers against his muscles.

Crowley. I'm struggling to breathe. But I'd take this any day over nothing. Every sensation is still magnified after being locked in that coffin for so long – and that goes doubly so for all things Snow. That faintly golden skin. The waves of heat rippling off his body. His smell, smoky green magic and antiseptic shampoo – a shockingly appealing combination of scents that makes my mouth water.

I don't know what I'd like more. To kiss him or to bite into that lovely neck.

As if to taunt me, the moonlight illuminates the curve of his skin beautifully, along with a few freckles and a solitary mole. My enhanced vision could see quite well without the help, without this silvery light shining on him like a beacon.

I shouldn't be doing this while I'm so weak. I shouldn't be doing this at all. If I had any sense I would stop now.

But as I run my thumbs down the length of his traps, he moans – and I don't stop. Instead, I tug him closer (but not close enough), rising up on a knee and slipping my thumbs under the neck of his t-shirt, repeating my slow, even movements against his hot, bare skin.

Fuck. This is killing me. I want to bury my face in his bronze curls. I want to consume his hair, his mouth, his blood. Every single bit of him. I don't think I could ever get enough.

"There - right there," he whispers and I keep my thumbs where they are, pressing down while he sucks in a breath. I allow my lips to skim the top of his curls.

It's a shame I'll have to kill him.

No. I'll never kill him. We'll have to fight to the death, that's a given. But he's more powerful than anyone I've ever met, than anyone in the world. One of these days he'll go off – and he'll kill me without even trying.
The sick part is that I won't even be the final boss he battles. I'm not the Humdrum. I'm nothing but a warm up. A fucking half-dead vampire, who loves him more than life itself. And yet when the time comes I'm sure he'll kill me without a second thought. I know he doesn't think anything of me. Only about how to stop me.

He doesn't know he could stop me with one look. With one touch. With one kiss. It wouldn't be hard at all.

I press my lips together as my chest constricts, binding a sob to my ribs. I don't want it to end like that, in a fiery explosion. I want him to fight me with his bare hands. I want him to press them against my cold skin, warming me one last time. I want to bite him just once, just a little, so I could die with his taste on my tongue.

No, that could Turn him. I couldn't risk that.

I suppose I'll have to break his nose. Leave a permanent mark on his face so he'll think of me whenever he looks in the mirror. Maybe I'll fuck him up even worse and whisper, 'I love you' while tracing the moles on his face and down his neck. When the blood runs into his mouth I'll lick it off his lips. And then he can do whatever the fuck he wants to me. I'll already have died and gone to heaven.

And that's the only heaven I'll ever taste.

Simon's right. I am plotting now. Visualizing our last battle. Orchestrating the best way to die. But I suppose if I have a right to anything, it's composing my own death.

SIMON

"Promise me you won't go off," Baz whispers.

It takes me a while to process his words. My mind is blissfully blank for the first time in ages. I don't want to think or worry about anything right now. His hands are so strong. I had no idea he'd be so good at this. Then again, he's so bloody good at everything, why wouldn't he be?

"When we do fight, don't go off."

I wrinkle my brow, glancing back over my shoulder. "What are you going on about?"

He stops massaging my shoulders, but his hands rest where they are. He looks concerned about something. Actually, he looks like he's in another place altogether. His gray eyes search mine before he speaks again. "It can't be like the Chimera. Promise me you won't kill me that quickly."

It's late, sure. But Baz has lost his fucking mind.

At the look on my face, Baz shoves my shoulders away roughly and stands. "Forget it," he mutters, limping back to his bed. He tries to hide it, but I know his leg is still bothering him.

"No, seriously. What are you talking about? I can't kill you. The anathema," I remind him.

He's sitting on the edge of his bed now and sneers my way. "Not here!" He kicks his legs up under his covers and angrily falls back against his pillow. "Crowley, Snow, I ask you for one fucking thing!"

I throw my hands out. "I don't even know what you're talking about! Why are we killing each other now? Are you saying I really do have to protect Agatha from you?"
"Why are you so bloody dense?" he demands. "The prophecy, Snow! We have to fight and you're obviously going to win. So as a favor, all I ask is that you try to kill me a little slower than the Chimera. Is that really too much to ask?"

"Where were you?" I practically scream. "What happened to you?" My head is swimming. A moment ago he's massaging my shoulders and now he's asking me to kill him? Slowly? Something is seriously fucked up here.

"Forget it!" he yells back. "Kill me however you want, just let me go to sleep."

I don't like thinking about the prophecy at the best of times. It makes my stomach turn. But after him being gone for so long, and then returning injured and drawn, it feels especially wrong. I have to admit I was concerned about him while he was away. Mostly I was suspicious. But I was concerned as well. And I've never been as worried about him as I am right now.

I stare over at his bed and try to regain equilibrium. I want him to threaten me and bite my head off and call me a wanker. I'm desperate to know what he was up to and I need it to have been something awful – truly appalling - so that everything can make sense again. So that the prophecy is justified. I can't imagine killing him without a really good reason. I can't imagine killing him at all, but I know my magic might if lives were at risk.

I sigh. "You know I didn't mean to kill the Chimera," I whisper. "I don't have any intention of killing you - or anyone - unless I have no choice."

When he doesn't reply I sigh again, involuntarily rolling my shoulders. I realize I feel so much better – loose. "You didn't have to give me a massage." I wait a minute. "But I- I do- I mean my shoulders do feel better, so, umm-"

"Go to sleep, already!" He yells in annoyance.

I fall back onto my pillow, cheeks heating with embarrassment. I never know how to talk to him. I should just tell him what he wants to hear.

"If I kill you, which I would never do unless I absolutely had to, I'll try to kill you slowly." I wince because that sounds like torture. "And painlessly."

He snorts.

"But I'd rather not kill you at all."

I try to get comfortable and find it's a lot easier now. Sleep is finally starting to nuzzle up against me when Baz whispers, "I'll never kill you."

I'm too tired and comfortable to puzzle through that. To figure out – or care – if all of this was just another one of his tricks. I fall fast asleep.
The Trouble with Gremlins

Simon

If I wasn't obsessed before, I am now. I study Baz carefully throughout the day. He won't look at me, but he doesn't look at Agatha either, so maybe that's an improvement.

I can't stop thinking about two things. The massage and the reason he asked me to kill him slowly.

Well, the second one is obvious. If I use magic, he'll be dead on the spot. If I'm trying to kill him slowly, he'll have a fighting chance. Odd of him to ask me outright, but understandable.

But surely, he didn't massage me just to shut me up.

Penny's no help at all. I asked her if there's anything evil someone could do while massaging you and she looked at me as if I was crazy. She wouldn't even supply me with a truth spell, other than Tell Me, Baby, which she told me not to use.

When I asked her why not, she simply replied, "Because he's likely to tell you his whole life story and his plans for the future. More hopes and dreams and less-"

"But that's perfect!" I insisted. "All of his plans? How could you keep this from me?"

"And," She raised her voice over mine. "It only works on lovers."

I sat back in my seat. "Oh, well, why did you bother telling me at all?"

She was only interested in studying and I didn't have the mind for that, so I wandered around the Wood for a while, hoping it would calm me.

Baz

I drain a raccoon on my way through the Wavering Wood. I sense Simon's presence a little while later and am intensely relieved that I've already fed. No need to give him anything else to hate me for.

I decide to stop. I ease down, resting my back against the hard bark of a tree. I wince at a sharp pain in my left leg and stretch it out a bit. Simon's not likely to spot me. He can't see worth shit in the dark and even in the afternoon the trees block out most of the sun here.

I take a deep breath, savoring his smokey scent on the light breeze. I feel my muscles relax, calmed by his presence. It's nice not to be alone even if we won't interact. I don't want to be alone again for a very long time if I can help it. I shiver.

I let my mind wander back to how alluring his muscles felt under my hands. He's thin, but his shoulders are still broader than mine. His chest would probably feel amazing. I wish I could call him over and trace his pecs with my hands, but I doubt he'd let me touch him now. I can't believe he'd asked me to last night.

I hear the leaves rustle to my left. My gaze pierces through the foliage to see a little creature with long pointy ears. It reminds me of the gargoyles on my bed and I'm fairly certain it's a Gremlin, even though I've rarely seen them. I've encountered a fair amount of their handiwork though. Had my keys nabbed a time or two. For a while, they amused themselves by stealing one of every pair of
socks I owned.

I pat my pockets out of habit, just to make sure it hasn't already pulled a prank on me. I gasp when I don't feel my wand. Of all the things it could have taken!

Actually, I didn't have much else on me. Only a peppermint and a few coins. Nothing I would have missed and somehow that little bugger knew it!

As tempting as it is to rush over there and nab it, I restrain myself. They are notoriously fast and if I scare it off, I'll probably never be able to spot it again.

I can't show my hand just yet. But I can't spell it still either, not without my wand.

I make a show of looking around the ground for it, trying to come up with a plan.

"Looking for something?" Snow asks, crossing his arms over his broad chest.

I hadn't been listening for him. That was obviously a mistake. I straighten and lean back against the tree. "Following me again, I see." I sneer up at him. I subtly glance to the right, to make sure the gremlin is still there. It appears to be laughing.

He glances around the wood. "Getting some air," He mutters, but I'm sure it's a lie. He's always stalking me, the wanker. I toy with the idea of asking Snow to cast the spell for me, but he doesn't have the best control of his spells. He'd muck it all up and I'd rather him not know I lost my wand if I can help it.

"There's lovely air by the pond." I've only taken my eyes off the gremlin for a moment, but when I glance back, I don't see it. "Shit." I mutter. I look back at Simon, just as the gremlin sticks a hand in his pocket. "Quick!" I yell, "Behind you."

Simon spins around and snatches at the thing. It barely evades his grasp, but undeterred, he yells, "Be Still!"

It works. I'm relieved. I don't know what I'd do without my wand. Probably get kidnapped again by fucking numpties. I would relax, but I find I can't move.

"This your wand?" Simon asks, plucking it out of the frozen gremlin's hand. He shutters at it. "Creepy little guy," He mutters as he turns towards me, holding out the wand. "Here, take it."

I'd reply with some snarky comment if I could. Obviously, that's not an option.

Simon comes closer. His knees crack as he crouches down. "Come on. Stop messing about." When I don't reply he reaches up and shoves my shoulder. I still don't move, but his touch burns through my sleeve. "Fuck." He mutters, sitting back on his heels. "Umm. Don't be still."

He's gorgeous blue eyes are fixed on mine. I take a moment to appreciate his proximity before the anxiety rushes in. He doesn't remember the counterspell, though he really ought to. We learned two our third year. I'd take either at the moment, though I'd prefer Move Along to Free At Last, because it's faster.

"Don't worry." He pats my arm a little gentler this time. "Penny will know what to do." He stands then hesitates. "Can't very well leave you in the woods like that." He bites his lip, then bends towards me. "Get up!" He shoves my shoulder. "Unfreeze." He shoves it again.

I try not to derive too much pleasure from his hand on my arm. After all, he's only touching me to
test the spells. He clearly has no idea what he's doing. "Be busy?" Even if that was a counterspell it
wouldn't have worked as a question. He's as hopeless as he is lovely.

He waves a hand in front of my face and murmurs, "Hope you can't hear me right now." He sighs
then slides one arm under my legs and the other around my back. When he lifts me I'm as stiff as a
board.

"Blimey, you're heavy." He groans, straightening. He takes a few steps, then has to turn to make it
between two trees, since my legs are sticking out. I enjoy the feel of his arms around me, the smell of
him so close. I'm still breathing, and that's something. I suppose I should be thankful the spell didn't
work on my lungs. Probably Simon's magic protecting me, wouldn't be the first time.

"I'll take you to Penny and you'll be good as new." He promises.

I wish he'd try the right spell now so I could wrap my arms around his neck and enjoy the ride a little
more. But he's too clueless to do that, so he carries me clear back to the school. Only dropping me
when I'm safely on school grounds. He makes sure I'm sitting straight up at least and not laying on
my side.

"Lucky we weren't out walking too late." He says, before taking off.

I guess I am glad the bridge was still over the moat but I can feel myself growing impatient. Now that
Simon's arms are gone, my discomfort is the only thing to focus on. Being rendered motionless feels
way too much like being in a coffin, all alone. Panic surges through me with nowhere to go. When I
get lightheaded, I realize I'm hyperventilating and focus on deep breathing.

Finally, he returns with Penny. She takes one look at me and says, "Move Along!" At least Simon
has one competent friend.

I revel in stretching out my limbs, which weren't in too great a shape to begin with, and let out an
embarrassing moan.

"Here." Simon thrusts the wand into my hand, his fingers stirring up a fresh round of tingles as they
brush against mine. I shouldn't derive so much pleasure from a simple touch. It's unforgivably foolish
of me. Anger surges through my blood at the hopelessness of my feelings for him and I have half a
mind to spell him back. But he did carry me all this way. He could have left me there. Especially
since I'm his enemy. Especially since he thinks I might kill him one day.

He offers me his hand. I glare at it and roll my eyes. I can stand under my own power. I stand,
looking down at him. "Honestly, Snow." I mutter, spinning around to march off. I don't want him to
see the blush rising to my cheeks at the thought of his arms around me, his muscles flexing against
my shoulder and side. I still can't believe he'd carried me all that way. It had to be at least half a mile.

"You're welcome!" He yells after me.

I squeeze my eyes shut tightly. I have half a mind to spin around and tell him it was his fault in the
first place. Or that he should bloody well know a counterspell if he's going to curse someone, but I
don't. I can't bring myself to say anything scathing. So I don't say anything at all.
My heart beats for you

Simon

I stayed out with Penny as long as I could, forcing myself to study after we freed the gremlin. (Baz probably would have been perfectly safe in the woods if that little bugger was.) But I can't put it off any longer. I have to climb back up to Mummer's house and get ready for bed. I steel myself for Baz's rage as I climb the steps.

Luckily, Baz is already in bed when I sneak in and grab my pj's. I quietly creep to the bathroom to change.

I flick the light switch off before easing back into the dark room. I blink a few times waiting for my eyes to adjust, then gaze over at Baz. Something about his posture makes me think he isn't sleeping. Probably can't while I'm still up making noise.

I feel a wave of guilt wash over me when I think about how long he'd been trapped by my spell. That couldn't have been comfortable, especially with his bad leg and all. I wish, for the millionth time, that I was able to use a wand normally. That my spells worked the way they should. What's the point of having all this magic when I'm always mucking things up? You'd think the chosen one would be competent at the very least. I hope, and not for the first time, that everyone's got it wrong and I'm not the chosen one at all. I'm just some bloke whose shit at spells.

Then I won't have to fight Baz, or the humdrum, or anyone else.

I don't know how to apologize. I guess the least I can do is return the favor and try to work some of the tension I caused out of his muscles. I creep over to his side of the room and decide to start on his shoulders. I lower the covers slightly, to massage them.

When I touch him, he turns over almost instantly. "What the fuck are you doing?"

Heat floods my body. I'm glad it's dark because my face is so hot, I know I'm blushing. "N, Nothing," I stammer, hurrying across the room to bed.

"Were you trying to choke me?" He demands.

"The anathema wouldn't allow that!" I insist, burying myself in covers. The truth is somehow worse.

"Then what?"

I let silence consume the room. Finally, I can't take it anymore. "Look, I feel bad about earlier. Your bad leg and all."

"My leg's fine." He growls.

"Yeah, of course. Why wouldn't it be?" I'm too embarrassed to say more. I can only hope he'll forget all about this in the morning.

Baz

I'm too alarmed for it to register at first, but I slowly work out that he had been trying to massage me. That if I hadn't spoken at all his hands would be all over me right now. And I feel like the biggest twat alive. What I wouldn't give to have him come back.
I take a deep breath. "You took me by surprise is all."

"Sorry." He mutters.

I clench my eyes shut. I'm fucking this all up. Just like always. "Go on then," I say, with more bite than I mean to.

He doesn't reply for a while and I think I've lost him, until he says softly, "You want me to?"

"It wouldn't hurt." I snap. I wince at my own tone. "The least you can do, really." Guilt never hurts when it comes to Snow.

I don't think he's going to come. He takes so fucking long. But I hear his breath nearing me a little later. "Which leg? The left?"

"Yeah," I say, throwing the blankets aside. I'm surprised he knows. I tried to hide it so well.

When he places his hands on my ankle I try to keep from making a sound, but it's hard. I press my lips together as he works his way up my leg. He doesn't use nearly enough pressure to work out the kinks, but Crowley it feels good. I think he could truly be choking me and I'd still enjoy the feel of those deliciously warm hands on my skin.

"More?" He asks. I nod to keep from speaking. He increases his pressure and a moan escapes from my lips. I can't bear to look at him now. It hurts so good. He caresses up my inner thigh and I'm a little disappointed when he makes his way back down. He thoroughly kneads my leg, then starts on the other.

I'm paralyzed again, but this time I can't breathe. I can't think. It's all so pleasant. I can't remember ever feeling this good before. And he volunteered! He fucking volunteered to massage me. Is it possible that he has feelings for me too?

After a few minutes, he pulls back. "Better?"

I nod. It's all I can manage. He starts to turn, but I grab his shirt. He turns so I can stare up into his beautiful blue eyes. "Thanks, Simon," I say softly.

He shrugs.

"You carried me all that way." I sound like a smitten idiot, but I can't stop myself.

He shrugs again. "Couldn't leave you there."

He could have, but I don't mention it. I let go of him quickly.

He reaches down and squeezes my shoulder, and my heart stops dead in my chest. "Sleep well."

I don't. How can I when I'd rather replay his words, his massage, the way he carried me, over and over in my head.

Simon

I think Baz might make a good friend. I'd never given it any consideration before. After all, one mustn't get too attached to someone who's been prophesized as the enemy but if we're not at each other's throats and we could do favors for one another instead, this arrangement might be somewhat tolerable.
I glance over at him to find him staring at me. He quickly closes his eyes, but he could be thinking something along the same lines. Might as well state it out loud. "We could help each other, you know? We don't have to be enemies."

"I think we do." He mumbles in reply.

His eyes are still closed, so I allow myself the luxury of staring at him. He looks like some beautiful, otherworldly creature in the moonlight. I suppose he is, but vampires aren't supposed to look that lovely. They're supposed to look dangerous and forbidding. Because they suck the life out of things.

Crowley, what am I thinking? I can't be friends with him or admire him. I've utterly lost my marbles.

Baz

I wish Simon wouldn't torture me like this. If he had a lick of sense he'd know we couldn't possibly be friends. But he obviously hasn't got any sense. Sneaking up on a vampire in the middle of the night. You'd think he had a death wish.

He's so brave.

I sneak a peek and see that he's rolled onto his back. I stare unabashedly at the side of his face. I memorized it long ago. I can see it when I close my eyes, but I much prefer the live version.

I can feel my heart fluttering in my chest and I suppose that's part of the appeal. It's times like this that make me feel more human. It reminds me that I still have a heart. I have to because it beats for him.
Sleeping with the enemy

Simon

Baz must have heard me growling in frustration, because when I emerge from the bathroom, he asks, "What's the matter with you?"

"It has to be that gremlin. That's the third toothbrush I've lost this week!" I point toward the bath, but Baz only shrugs.

"Of all the creatures you could have pissed off, a gremlin's probably the least trouble. A bother to be sure, but it won't be killing you any time soon. Here," He digs a box out from under his bed and pulls out a sealed toothbrush before holding it out towards me.

I hesitate before taking it. He's been a right prick to me all week after I'd suggested us being friends. I can't help but think this must be some sort of trick. "Haven't put a spell on it, have you?" I ask, hesitating with one hand outstretched.

He rolls his eyes. "I can smell your breath from here."

I snatch it out of his hand while glaring at him. I can feel my cheeks heating and that makes me angrier than the comment. Still, when I return to the bathroom I do an extra good job of brushing my teeth. Not to please him, of course. Just because I don't want to be a rotten smelling chap.

I emerge from the bathroom to scan his lounging figure. He's so prim and proper. He doesn't belong in a dorm room, classing up a lumpy mattress. He belongs in a mansion on a velvet chaise.

How he can possibly read when there is a beast on the loose wreaking havoc and class in a few minutes, I'll never know. "What can we do about it? You saw it before."

He reaches for his wand without looking up from his book and casts, "You're uninvited."

I hear the door open and close, but I don't catch sight of the thing. Baz must have only spotted it in the woods because he's a bloody vampire. "Show off," I mutter.

He levels me with a stare over the top of A Tree Grows in Brooklyn. "Would you like me to let it stay? It's messing about with your shit, not mine."

I glance around the room and quickly deduce that wasn't completely true. I walk over to the door and I nudge one of his sneakers with the toe of my shoe. "Oh yeah? Then why is one of your shoes missing its laces?"

He frowns at me before inserting a bookmark and setting his book down on the bed. He's by my side in an instant, crouching down beside me. "Crowley, Snow!" He groans, picking up his shoe.

I have an old pair in the closet, so I open the door and I nudge one of his sneakers with the toe of my shoe. "Oh yeah? Then why is one of your shoes missing its laces?"

He frowns at me before inserting a bookmark and setting his book down on the bed. He's by my side in an instant, crouching down beside me. "Crowley, Snow!" He groans, picking up his shoe.

I have an old pair in the closet, so I open the door and I start unlacing one. I throw the lace over to him. He stares at it for a moment, before raising an eyebrow at me. "It's red."

I raise an eyebrow in return. "So?"

"So, the other is white. I'll look like a naff plonker in that!"

Leave it to Baz, to be worried about something so insignificant. "You're right." I take it back and toss it and the shoe back into the closet. "Better that you go stumbling about without one. And what with
your bad leg, you'll probably fall down the stairs."

"That miscreant probably thought this was your shoe, and there's nothing wrong with my leg!" He yells back.

"No, certainly not! You limp for the fun of it!"

He stands angrily, "I don't limp." He growls, his gray eyes flashing.

I have half a mind to take a step forward and argue, but we both know he limps. Doesn't matter if he ever admits to it. Besides, I have class to get to.

I growl in exasperation and storm out the door. I jog down the steps, knowing I'll only get a brief reprieve from him. We have potions class together first thing and the bastard sits right behind me.

Baz

I stare at Simon's bronze curls, longingly. I want to wrap my pencil around them and pull him closer. I wanted to brush them with my lips again and breath in his scent. He's the sun radiating heat and light and I want to lean into him more than anything. It takes every ounce of control in my body, to keep from touching him. I don't have any attention to spare for class, but it hardly matters. I've already read and memorized the chapter. Class time is best spent admiring Snow.

I have had to be an exceptional tosser this past week, to keep him from finding me out. Everything he does lately seems seductive. Every time his eyes flash with anger I want to fan the flames. I keep hoping he'll come over and massage me again, but he hasn't. Probably won't. Even if he did, I know it doesn't mean anything to him. He still hates me. Not that I wouldn't love a hate massage. I wouldn't object to it by any means.

The lights flicker a few times during class. I spare a couple of glances up at the pair of golden chandeliers above our heads. I've heard of gremlins messing with electronics, but I've never seen it done before. Still, it's as good an excuse as any.

I lean forward, letting my lips lightly brush Simon's ear when I whisper. "You've created a formidable enemy, Snow. First the toothbrush, now a light show. Whatever will we do?"

He snaps his head away from me and glares back. I can feel myself grinning at the attention against my will. "I thought you spelled it away." He bites back.

Crowley, he's so easily provoked. I would say it's not even fun, but staring into those crystal blue eyes is always a treat. "I spelled it out of our room." I correct him. "I don't have the authority to spell it out of school."

His nostrils flare.

"You can ask the mage if you'd like. I know you two are like this." I entwine my first two fingers, then let one slip away so only the middle finger remains.

When he turns back in a huff, I have to bite my finger to keep from laughing out loud.

His head shoots back around and I quickly control my mirth. "Fantastic, now my pencil's gone. I hope you're happy!"

I'd heard it hit the floor a minute ago so I nod towards it. "That's just you being clumsy as always, Snow."
He glances down then leans over to pick it up with a grunt. Magic is rolling off of him in green smokey billowing clouds, so I'd better not rile him further. That boy has less control than a dropped bomb.

Simon

I wake up shivering under my blanket. I'm rarely cold and never when I'm sleeping. I get up and close the window, figuring that it must be cold outside, but the numbers on the alarm clock are dark and I realize we've lost power. No wonder it's so cold in here. It's partially my fault for always wanting the window open. If we'd left it shut, as Baz wanted, Mummer's house would have held the heat better.

I settle back into bed, but I can't get warm. There aren't enough blankets. I can hear Baz's teeth chattering across the room, which doesn't help matters any.

It suddenly occurs to me that this could be the work of that infernal gremlin. He wouldn't need to get into our room to wreck the electricity.

Either way, it's my fault. I'm starting to feel like everything is my fault and I don't know if I can fix it all.

Baz

I feel cold often enough that I've gotten used to it. I don't think my inner thermostat works right anymore, but tonight is the worst. My leg is throbbing and my teeth won't stop chattering. I don't remember it ever being this bad. I start to wonder if I'm finally turning all the way. If the evil inside of me will fully take over and my heart will shrivel and there won't be anything left of me at all.

But Simon closes the window and I realize it's simply the temperature. If Simon's cold enough to do that, it must be freezing outside.

"Baz?" His voice echoes across the room, but I don't answer. There's no point. I'm obviously here and he'll say whatever it is he has to say. Likely he'll accuse me of making it so cold.

"Baz, we've lost heat. I'm sorry." His voice is closer this time and I feel him throw another blanket over me. It has to be his, I already have the spares on my bed.

"Budge up." He says while pressing against my back. I move over, onto a chilled bit of sheet while he crawls under the covers next to me. My heart is going to beat its way out of my chest.

His fingers are suddenly warming my cheek and I force myself to stay perfectly still so as not to scare him away. "Crowley, you're cold." He mutters.

I close my eyes as he places his hand on my arm and briskly rubs it, burning into my skin with his warmth. I clench my jaw to keep from making a sound.

His body presses up against mine, searing me with warmth, and I squeeze my eyes shut as well. His hand massages down my leg and I lose control over a certain part of my body. Crowley, his hand is so fucking hot.

"Are you alright?" His warm breath caresses my neck.

I can't respond. Alright is not the word for it. I'm burning to death in a cauldron of bloody passion. I always assumed I'd die by fire, but not like this. I'd die a thousand deaths like this.
My chest constricts. I don't know why he cares. Probably feels responsible for the cold, like he feels responsible for everything else. I know he thinks that the world of magic rests on his shoulders. Crowley, I can't imagine being under that sort of pressure all the time. No wonder his shoulders were so tense.

"Baz?" His voice burns a permanent hole through my heart. The edges don't bleed they're cauterized immediately. His shape will forever be embedded inside of me.

I swallow loudly.

"I'm sorry, this is all my fault. It's either the window or that gremlin, and I am sorry."

It's hard to concentrate on anything he's saying when his hand is working it's way up and down my leg. I imagine turning over and pulling his lips to mine. I'd whisper, I love you, against them. Once, twice, a hundred times, because those words won't stop looping in my mind and if I ever let them go, they'll likely be stuck on repeat.

I'd tell him that it's not his fault. Not the gremlin, who he stopped from stealing my wand. Not the way the world is, not the way his magic is. He can't help any of it.

His hand comes to a rest against my thigh. "Thank you. I can't believe you haven't killed me already."

I honestly don't know what he's thanking me for. I haven't said or done anything.

I can't stop myself from rolling over then. I can't keep from tracing his warm face with my hand. His freckles are a temptation on their own, but his gorgeous blue eyes are my undoing. "I told you, I'll never kill you. Never, Snow. I'd sooner die."

I'm staring into his eyes now, but his hand has fallen away. "Why?" He whispers searching my eyes.

I quickly remove my hand. I've afforded myself enough luxury. I'm not delusional enough to convince myself I'm helping him in return. I can't warm him. I'm always colder.

I clench my jaw. So many words are fighting to make their way out of me and that I can't respond at all. I can't tell him that I'm already half dead, or that he's better than me in every way. I certainly can't tell him that I'd never want to live without him.

He grips my upper arm and I envy the way he can abandon all sense of propriety to touch me. I couldn't have crawled into his bed, not without dying of embarrassment. "I couldn't kill you either. Even if I should. I know you too well." He lets me go, then turns onto his back to stare at the ceiling.

"I'd think that would make it easier," I whisper. "You know I deserve it." As much as I've tried to hide it, I'm pretty sure Simon knows what I am.

He turns his head to frown over at me. "You don't deserve death!" He exclaims.

I admire that way his curls fan out on the pillow for a moment. "Thank you." I finally whisper, closing my eyes. A lot of people would say any vampire deserves death. Not Snow. Maybe the daft wanker still doesn't know.

His warm hand cups my cheek and I take a shaky breath. He takes it away to pull the covers half over our heads. I don't feel cold anymore though. I've stopped shivering.

"I was worried about you, you know?" He whispers. "Please don't leave like that again. If you were
plotting-" He lets his voice trail off.

Part of me wants to tell him the truth, but I can't take the humiliation. He wouldn't need a wand to defeat a few fucking numpties. He'd go off. No one could kidnap him.

I'm weak and pathetic and while I'd be ashamed to tell anyone, I'd be absolutely mortified to tell him. "I wasn't plotting against you." I finally manage. "It's not all about you, you conceited git." I roll away from him.

He was worried about me? That bit didn't register at first. I know he'd wanted to keep tabs on me, but him being worried about my safety and well being doesn't seem likely. Then again, he did just cover me with his blanket and rub feeling back into my leg. No, it's all guilt. That's all it is and I'll put an end to that.

"None of this is your fault, Snow. Not the gremlin, not how your magic works, and not the cold. You don't have to come over here and make things better. You're not responsible for me." I bite out the last bit. I don't need his pity or protection.

I hear him turn his back to me, but he doesn't leave. A moment later he's sound asleep. His breathing is even more appealing when he's right beside me. I close my eyes, then scoot back until our backs are touching. I enjoy the feel of his warmth for a good hour before I fall asleep.

In the morning, when he's gone, I find myself wishing I hadn't fallen asleep at all. That I had enjoyed his breathing and warmth and closeness all night instead.
Your taste

Simon

I open my eyes to a flashing alarm clock, so I know the powers back on. I open the drawer and dig out Baz’s watch to reset it for him so he won’t be late for breakfast. Then I get ready and leave as quickly as possible.

Baz was too cold to kill me for sleeping in his bed last night, but there’s nothing to hinder him from offing me this morning. He would probably rather have frostbite than have me warm him, the stubborn wanker.

I take my seat at the table and start downing scones like they’re going out of style, my leg bouncing up and down with nerves.

“What’s the matter with you?” Penny asks, making me jump as she falls into the chair beside me. Her plate only contains one scone. I don’t know how anyone could bear to eat only one.

“Nothing.” I quickly rinse the lie down with some coffee.

She rolls her eyes at me then pulls out a textbook. The table shakes as she drops it above her plate and flips it open. "I don't have time for your drama, so I'm glad you won't tell me." She mutters.

Neither of those things is true, but I'm too relieved to call her on it. I don't know how I'd ever explain sleeping with the enemy.

My heart stops when Baz strolls into the room, looking dapper as ever in his uniform. The lights from the chandeliers flash off of his slicked back, black hair. He flashes me a quick glance that sends my heart into overdrive, before gathering a small plate of food.

"Did he look angry?” I ask myself. It's hard to tell. Baz has bloody well perfected emotionless looks.

"Who?” Penny asks, reminding me that I have an audience.

"Baz,” I reply.

She watches him slide elegantly into his chair and smile at his best mates before she turns back to me.

"No, why should he?"

I fill my mouth with scone to buy myself a second to come up with a plausible reason. "That gremlin knocked out our electricity last night. I've really pissed it off."

"Surely, he doesn't blame you and don't let it bother you if he does. Why, my family has had our share of run-ins with gremlins and not one of them was provoked. They stole two of my best necklaces and my mother wouldn't believe it was gremlins until her jewelry started going missing as well. We found them months later next to our gazing ball with half a dozen keys and more coins and trinkets than I could count. Seems they were starting a collection."

"How did you get rid of them?” I ask, raising an eyebrow.

"They got bored and moved on. Other than the necklaces, we'd assumed we lost everything else and I think they were wanting a better reaction."

"But they couldn't even see my reaction!” I insist. "Baz spelled them out of our room."
She just shrugs, getting sucked back to her book almost immediately.

Surely, there is something more that can be done about them. I'll have to ask the librarian later if there are any books on it.

Baz

Dev is running his mouth when it suddenly occurs to me that our alarm went off this morning, which means Simon set it for me once we regained power. He'd thought to do that before leaving for breakfast.

Warmth rushes through my veins. I find my eyes glued to Snow, wondering why he would bother. Why he's suddenly taking so much interest in me.

Then I'm utterly drenched in guilt because I don't deserve his kindness. I've been a complete tosser for years, especially to him. I've done nothing to deserve the favor and I can't remember anyone ever paying me that kind of consideration. It's overwhelmingly misplaced.

My heart soars for a moment, as I allow myself to bask in his thoughtfulness. Then tears prick at my eyes a moment later, because I am a horrible vampire who wouldn't deserve Simon if I was the last person on earth. He'd be better off with anyone else than me. I fantasize about licking blood off of his face. I drain animals to keep breathing. I am a wretched, unlovable monster.

His kindness really doesn't add up at all. Maybe he knows I have feelings for him and he's leading me on so he can mock me later. The massages, the cuddles, he's setting me up! Exploiting my biggest weakness.

I glare over at him as a wave of anger surges through me. This is a new kind of low.

"Baz, Baz!" Dev calls my name, so I turn my glare on him. "I asked if you wanted to come over to our dorm tonight. We're going to watch a movie on the ceiling, there's this new-"

I can't think straight at the moment so I stand, whisking up my plate. "No," I grumble while marching away.

If Simon thinks he can set me up, he has another thing coming.

Simon

The books that I find after school claim that the best thing to do about gremlins is ignore them. That seems pitifully insufficient.

I march into the room. Baz's focus immediately lurches to me. "Well, we're not going to ignore it, I can tell you that much!" I declare, removing my jacket and throwing it onto my bed.

Baz's eyes widen, his lips parting. His arm drops, his book settling against his leg. I'm surprised he's giving me his whole attention. I don't want to let it go to waste.

I walk over to him, pointing in his face. "Don't you tell me to ignore it. Not you too. You've seen what it's done."

A look of confusion twists his perfect features for a moment. "Wait, what are you talking about?"

I throw my hands out dramatically, "The gremlin!" I exclaim. What else could I possibly be talking about? "It's stolen my things, your wand, tried to freeze us to death. We can't simply ignore it and
wait for it to come up with some other way to kill us, can we?"

I know I'm being a bit melodramatic, but I have thought of little else today. "It's become my greatest enemy, Baz.-" I realize how ridiculous that sounds as soon as it's out of my mouth. The humdrum is creating dead spots and I'm claiming a pest is worse?

I take a few steps back and sink down onto my bed. "It's driving me crazy." I mutter into my hands. I take a deep breath. It smells nice in here. Baz must be wearing some sort of cologne. He rarely wears any, too hard to hunt with a powerful scent.

I glance up. He's staring at me like I've lost my mind. "Great, we're in the middle of a crisis here and you have plans." I gesture over at him.

His forehead wrinkles, as he turns to place his feet on the floor. "I don't have plans." He assures me. I sigh. He's a pathological liar. I don't have a limp. I don't have plans even though I'm clearly wearing cologne for someone. What a load of shit. "Fine, then you won't mind helping me hunt that miserable gargoyle."

He shakes his head and stands, motioning towards the door. "After you."

He's being entirely too agreeable about this, but I'll worry about that later. Right now, I have a menace to catch.

Baz

We're deep in the forest and I have no idea how Simon plans on catching something too fast for him to see, but I don't worry about that. I'm trying to work out my own plan. I have to be extremely cautious or I'll ruin everything.

The first step is obvious. Kill him with kindness, that's what he'd done to me. But I'm not just going to cozy up to him a bit. No fucking way. I plan to take this a whole lot further. He's going to pay and I am really going to enjoy it.

I tap my wand against my leg absentmindedly. I'm not letting it out of my hand this time around. "Let's sit," I suggest.

Simon glances over a challenge in his eyes. "Tired already?" He teases.

I sneer back. "No, you gormless git, I was sitting the first time I spotted it." So much for killing him with kindness. I'll probably have to skip the first step.

He sits and leans back against a tree. I take shallow breaths of his scent my heart pounding in my ears. I draw up my legs, resting my wand against them. I can't concentrate on anything but his proximity.

He fidgets and his arm sends a shiver of tingles through mine with a single involuntary brush.

This is a stupid plan. It's bound to backfire.

"Well, what do we do now?" He asks after only a minute.

I can think of several things that would pass the time nicely. I glare over at him. "We wait."

"Well, that's-" He shakes his head, picking up a fallen leaf and twirling it by the stem.
"Haven't you ever hunted before?" I demand.

He shakes his head. "There must be some spell that would speed this all up."

I guess it wouldn't hurt to try. I raise my wand. "Lost and found." A dozen things appear before me. Several toothbrushes, my shoelace, coins...

My eyes fall on a pin that was once my mother's. I rarely looked at it, but I kept it in a drawer because I didn't like being without something that once belonged to her. I snatch it up quickly, as Simon does the same for some other object I don't see. We both keep our mouths shut about it. I take my shoelace and sweep the rest of the items over to Snow with my shoe.

He frowns at the toothbrushes. "Can't very well use them now."

I pick up a fuse. "I know how it shut down the power."

"That wasn't very helpful," he murmurs back. "Don't you know some other spell."

My nostrils flare. He has no patience whatsoever. "Sure, I know a perfectly good gremlin spell that I'm not using," I say between clenched teeth.

He huffs and looks away.

I should do it now. Right now. He'd never expect it.

I hear something to my left and freeze, my eyes seeking it out. The gremlin is watching us from the bushes and he's not laughing anymore. He looks angry.

I reach out and touch Simon's arm lightly with the back of my hand. "Don't look," I whisper. "But it's just there in the bush."

He places his hand on my shoulder and I feel a connection to him. I'm filled with magic. No, it's more like I'm tapping into a very deep stream of magic, an unlimited supply. I raise my wand, "Gilded cage!"

A golden cage forms around the gremlin. Which isn't unusual, that's what's suppose to happen, but this cage is more beautiful than anything I've ever seen in my life. It's covered with gemstones in various shapes. There are gremlin faces and fairies and flowers. It sparkles in the sun like a priceless work of art.

I take a deep breath, closing my eyes, because Simon's touch, his hand on my shoulder, and his magic are all so unbelievable. I feel light headed, light-hearted, and I want to bask in that flow a little longer.

"Now what?" He whispers. His breath on my ear causes me to take a deep trembling breath. Crowley, he's sitting close.

"I can send it halfway across the world." My voice is breathless, so I swallow again, concentrating on Simon's flow of magic and the next spell. "From whence you came," I order. It vanishes. Gremlins were originally from Fiji, so it shouldn't be returning any time soon.

"Will it be trapped in that cage forever?" Simon sounds concerned about it now that it's out of his hair.

"No. That's the brilliance of it. The gilded cage has no bottom, it simply hypnotizes it's captive with
its beauty. As soon as the gremlin tries to get out, it'll find the cage easy to overturn. Though, I've never seen one so lovely. It might take a while to decide it wants to leave."

Snow removes his hand and takes all his magic with it. "Good."

I immediately miss his touch. I turn, raising an eyebrow at him. "Now you're concerned for it?"

He shrugs. "I don't want it to die!"

I stand, dusting off the seat of my pants and Simon follows suit. It really is now or never.

He's looking at the ground, which makes it a good deal easier to work up the nerve. I grab his strong shoulders and rotate so his back is to the tree. I push him forcefully into it and he looks up with wide blue eyes. He's such a bloody fool. He'd be dead by now if I'd wanted to kill him.

I take his face in my hands and mash my lips against his. I pull on his bottom lip with mine fully expecting to be pushed away so I can shout my scathing accusation.

But he doesn't push me away.

Crowley, lips are sensitive. My nerves are all on edge, tingling with pleasure. It's almost too much to bear. His face is smooth against my hands as if he's just shaved and he still smells like smokey magic. I could consume that smell.

I switch to his top lip, savoring it, tasting him. A little bit of mint, but mostly smoke and mirrors and magic.

I've never kissed anyone before and I have no idea what I'm doing, but my mind shuts down so I can't worry too much about technique. His hand is suddenly in my hair, pulling gently. It feels divine.

My hands trace down his neck, as he pulls me tighter against him and thrusts his tongue into my mouth, causing my hands to grip the back of his neck.

Pleasure explodes through me. His tongue is playing with mine and I try to emulate what he's doing, but to be honest it's all instinct at this point because my mind is completely blank. I can't think, I just feel every part of his body pressing up against mine. His hand in my hair, his soft skin, and Crowley, those lips.

He grabs my hips forcefully and I moan, "Simon," into his mouth. It takes everything in me not to pull back and tell him I love him. But I can't and even if I could I wouldn't want to stop kissing him long enough to say it.

Simon

I've never cared about my name before. When I was a kid I didn't like it because people would tease me about the game Simon Says, but I haven't cared either way for a really long time.

But when Baz moans my name it makes me weak. It's as if he's picked it up out of the dirt, polished it off and handed it back, sparkling, shiny and brand new. Crowley, I love my name when he says it.

I've never been kissed like this before. I never cared too much for Agatha's kisses, but this is completely different. I feel like I've come alive for the first time in ages. I'm positively burning with passion. My mind is gone, burnt up in a cloud of smoke and I don't miss it at all.
Baz smells absolutely delicious and his hair feels so much softer than I thought it would. And his lips are so refreshingly cool that I feel I could drink from them forever.

I don't know how long it takes for me to realize that I'm kissing a boy and my enemy at that. Even then I push him back reluctantly a hand to his strong chest that I wouldn't mind trailing my fingers down if I'm being completely honest.

We're both breathing hard as I stare into those expressive gray eyes. Storm cloud and electric lighting, flashing up my insides with fire.

I swallow, "Baz."

His laughs softly, shaking his head. He licks his bottom lip then bites it. "I know what you're doing."

I frown up at him because his eyes are full of accusation. "Kissing you?" I ask doubtfully.

He leans closer. "The alarm clock, the massage, the snuggling for warmth."

My mind is still shot so I only manage to murmur, "What?"

He raises his eyebrows, his eyes widening. "But I got you first." He shoves a finger into my chest. "You wanted me, Simon. I felt you harden against me. You wanted me. Don't forget that." He turns away and marches off, and I'm left completely puzzled as to what just happened.
You wreck every part of me

Baz

I stroll out of the woods, wondering how I'll ever face Snow in our room, but I get to put that off for a while because the bridge is up. I hadn't even noticed the sun setting. Stupid night vision.

"Shit," I mutter. I know of a few places I could go, but I can't bring myself to leave. Protectiveness smothers my need for privacy and all but kills it. I'm not going to leave Simon alone no matter how awkward it's going to be between us. I sit and wait.

Several minutes later he emerges from the woods, staring at the moat.

"Your gremlin held us up a bit," I complain as I stand. His bronze curls are a mess, probably from my hands, and his eyes are not amused.

"You're the one who was snogging me for a good ten minutes!" He exclaims.

It couldn't have been ten minutes. Actually, I suppose it could have been. I have no idea how long we were kissing. The fact he can spout a number suggests he wasn't nearly as consumed by it as I was. "Follow me." I sneer at him, before making for the underground bunker.

I only know of the place because of a tome in my parent's library, and I only discovered it after many years of seeking. But it's as good a shelter as any out here.

I march over the hills next to the school, acting like I know exactly where I'm headed. In all honesty, it takes me about 15 minutes and I'm relieved when I finally stumble across the small rose quartz stone. I raise my wand and declare, "Open Sesame," over it. A circle of sod moves aside with a quiet rumble.

I trudge down the stone stairs, magical lamps lighting my way as Simon calls after me, "What is this place?"

"A secret, so don't go blabbing about it." I toss back in return.

The stone hallway illuminates our way with harsh white light. Overhead fixtures flicker on one at a time as I stroll forward giving me the illusion that they're obeying my every whim, when in fact they have motion sensors to conserve electricity.

I've only been down here once a few years ago. After determining there were no rats or other creatures I could suck the life out of, I haven't been back.

I do remember where the pantry is so I head that way and point to the nonperishable boxes and cans. "I know you're hungry. You're always hungry." I say it in a derogatory way that kills a small chunk of me. I'm regretting that kiss now because I'm going to have to be so cruel to him. How many other pieces of myself am I going to lose? And all to save face. Maybe I should lose my face instead and keep my heart.

He flashes me a scathing look before his gaze flies to something on the shelf. "Wizard Crunch!" He exclaims. "I saw the commercials, but we never had this in the shelters!"

My heart compresses with the statement. He was nearly starved in the shelters and it's hard for me to imagine anyone treating him that way. I want to go back in time, sneak out to wherever he was and
smuggle food into him. I feel guilty for not being there for him when he needed someone most.

But I can't turn back time. I can't fix all the errors I've made. All I can do is secretly enjoy his excitement now.

Simon

I wish I'd known about this place when I was trapped outside a few years ago. It's an absolute luxury. I spot several things on the shelf that I can't live without and clutch them against my chest like a starving man.

I know Baz is judging me for my gluttony, but I don't care about that. "What else is down here?"

"Beds, better than our dorm ones. Bathrooms, libraries, a music room, an underground garden..." His voice trails off, as I stare at him in wonder.

"Seriously?" I gasp. I can't believe all of this was right under our feet all along. "What is it, a bomb shelter?"

He shrugs. "According to what I've read, it would stand up to bombs, but it's more for hiding in case of emergency. I think bombs were the least of their worries."

I should probably wonder what they were really concerned about, but all I can think about is the fact that Baz snogged me in the woods. Why would he kiss me, and why would he show this secret bunker to his enemy? None of it makes any sense.

I shouldn't have enjoyed it in any way, but Baz is an amazing kisser and he'd smelled so good. He still smells good.

I find myself admiring his posh looks in a whole new way. My mouth waters with hunger for him. He's more appealing than anything else down here and the desire -the need- to taste him again is overwhelming.

He's sucked me in for some nefarious purpose and I've fallen for it so easily. I should be ashamed of myself. I feel like even more of a moron than I usually do and his hasty explanation did nothing to satisfy my curiosity.

I didn't know vampires could seduce just anyone like that. No wonder so many people ended up dead. He was so much more dangerous than I ever imagined.

And now we're not in our room and there is no anathema, and I'd like nothing more than to be pinned against the wall, completely at his mercy. If I don't get a grip, I'm going to end up dead, or he will if my magic decides to protect me. I don't want tonight to be the night it all ends. I don't want that night to ever come, but tonight is much too soon.

But he could have attacked me in the woods if he'd wanted to. So he's toying with me, but why? All I know is that he'd been every bit as turned on as I was.

I study him carefully, wishing I could read his mind. If I don't get to the bottom of this, it is going to eat me alive.

Baz

"Let's pick out our rooms shall we?" I lead him down the hall and gesture to the small rooms with comfy beds that light up as we pass them.
I spot one with an enormous bed and immediately choose it for myself. The walls are concrete with a layer of magic over the top that makes it look as if we're in the middle of a jungle. "This one will do nicely for me. See you in the morning, Snow."

"Wait." He grabs my arm, filling it with a pleasant heat. My heart flutters in my chest. I turn to look at him. "If it was all a trick, why did you wait for me, Baz? You could have come here on your own."

I suppose I could have, in theory. I wouldn't have abandoned him, but he needn't know that. "I didn't want you to die." I bite out.

He shakes his head while digging out a handful of Wizard Crunch cereal. "You know I wouldn't have died." He insists, before cramming it into his mouth and chewing loudly. I don't find it a turn off in the least. I wouldn't mind eating it out of his mouth.

"You give yourself too much credit," I say, backing into the room. "Find your own bed and goodnight." I start to shut the door, but he sticks his foot in the way.

"So we're not going to talk about it?" He raises his eyebrows at me.

I pretend ignorance. "About what, Snow?"

"You called me Simon while you were snogging me." He growls sexily.

I squeeze my eyes shut. I can't talk about this right now, or ever. I put up a thousand shields against him. Because he doesn't like me and he never will. "Slip of the tongue."

"Not the only slip of the tongue." He mutters. Pretty sure I wouldn't have heard that if I wasn't a vampire.

I place my hand against the door. "What do you want, Snow." I apply pressure, but the door doesn't budge.

"Why did you kiss me?" He asks bluntly.

I don't know why I didn't anticipate this inescapable conversation. He was bound to talk to me about it, and I have no lecture prepared.

I study his blue eyes, my gaze flicking rebelliously to those tempting moles. There are a dozen things I want to say, but I force them all down.

He swallows and presses a finger against my chest. "You wanted me." He accuses.

My nostrils flare. "I wanted to get back at you, sure." I wanted his lips, his mouth, his body, his soul. I've wanted all of him for a very long time. I look away so he won't see the desire burning behind my eyes.

He frowns. "For what?"

I'd already listed everything back in the forest. "I said goodnight," I growl.

He grabs the back of my head and nudges the door open enough to pull my lips to his. The boxes he was holding fall to the floor with various thuds. I'd like to think he'd rather snog me than eat, so I imagine that for a few moments.

He tastes sweet like Wizard Crunch and my hands violently grab his face. I trace the soft skin of his
cheeks while my lips eagerly explore his again.

The door gets out of our way, the cereal crunches under his shoe and suddenly his body is against mine, his hands wandering my hair. His tongue playing in my mouth. I don't think I could ever get enough of this. I pull him back towards the bed, my mouth tangled in his.

I only have one plan now and it involves straddling him in bed. When I pull him back another step, my calves bang into the footboard. I'll work my way around it.

His hand traces down my chest, over my stomach, below the belt and I moan shamelessly into his mouth. Crowley, it's everything I've ever hoped and dreamed. I can't get enough of him. And I don't know how I'll make it anywhere away from here. I can't move, can't speak, can't breathe.

He squeezes me gently and I pulse against him, "Mmm." I purr, racing my hands down his chest. If my excitement was visible it'd blind us both. If it was audible, it'd blow our eardrums. I've wanted this for so long, but I never imagined it would actually happen.

His hand is only over my trousers for a second before he pushes me away. His blue eyes are hot, blazing fire. "You wanted me," He insists, poking a harsh finger into my chest. I can't take any steps back but I fold a little over of the footboard. "Remember that." He growls out.

I can't let him leave. I can't let this end. I grab him before he can two steps away and fall back onto the bed with him. I roll over on top of him, slip my hands under his armpits and slide him up to the top of the bed like he weighs nothing. I grab his wrists and pin one between the pillows, and the other on top of a pillow. I kiss the moles on his cheek, that have been tempting me for years. I suck at his jaw.

I can hear the blood rushing through his veins. I don't know if he's frozen in anticipation or fear, but he doesn't fight me. There would be no point really, I'm so much stronger than him. He'd need to go off to stop me.

I stare at his neck for a moment, but I don't kiss it for fear of further freaking him out. Instead, I loosen my grip, lightly brushing his wrists with my thumbs. He feels so amazing underneath me, but I can't force him to stay. It wouldn't be right. It wouldn't even be satisfying. Not if he wants to leave.

"You're not going to be happy until you wreck every part of me." He whispers brokenly, his eyes shining with tears.

I squeeze my eyes shut, pressing my face into his shoulder, bleeding internally. I don't want to wreck any part of him. It's the last thing I want, but I can't seem to stop.

He pushes me harshly then, and I willing roll out of his way, letting him scramble to his feet and stare down at me with haunted eyes. "I don't know what you're up to this time, but you've taken it entirely too far."

I shake my head. "No." I swallow, grasping at any reason to give him that won't leave me vulnerable. If he knows my heart and he doesn't reciprocate my feelings, it will break me. I won't be able to live with him or myself or anyone.

He turns on his heel and strolls towards the door, taking my heart and soul with him. He crunches past the cereal, leaving all of the boxes on the floor. Leaving everything in shambles, a sordid mess.

I crumple against the bed, an empty man.
Chapter 7

Baz

I'm not cruel to Simon. I'm not anything to him. It's been at least a week since we kissed and I've stayed out of the room and out of his way as much as possible. I think that's what he wants.

I sneak into our room after he's gone to bed and he leaves before I wake. We didn't discuss it, we've just adjusted.

It's fucking ripping me apart.

I miss teasing him. I miss seeing anger flare behind his eyes. I miss his cutting words. But I get more than I deserve. I get to watch him sleep and hear him breathe. I'll take it. I'll always take that over nothing.

But I simply can not cause him any more pain.

Simon

Baz won't talk to me. I still have no idea what he wanted from me, but I'm sure I've screwed up his vile plans somehow. Not that it makes it any easier to endure his absence.

I either want to eat way too much or nothing at all. Nothing healthy anyway, if I skip meals I fill up on junk. It doesn't help. Nothing helps.

I'm shamelessly replaying our kisses in my mind and trying to consume every single cherry scone in the dining hall when a girl walks up to me. Even the flaky layers of scone are nothing compared to Baz's lips. Nothing will ever compare to them. I'm probably doomed to a lifetime of disappointment from here on out.

My mouth is full when the girl sits takes a seat across the table and leans towards me. Her long blonde hair brushes the table as her blue eyes smile into mine. "Hi, Simon."

A sharp pain reverberates through my chest when I hear my name. It will never sound as sweet as it did from Baz's mouth. He's ruined kissing, and hunting, and magic, and now my bloody name.

I swallow, "Hi." I don't recall her name at all. I certainly won't ruin it.

"Gina," She offers.

I nod.

"We have history class together." She reminds me.

I shrug noncommittally. She doesn't look familiar.

Her eyebrows narrow for half a second before she shrugs it off, "Anyway, I was wondering if you'd like to take me to the football game this Saturday?"

Baz plays football, and I can't bear the thought of seeing him there, even if he is sitting the bench. I'd sooner run needles through my skin. "No, thanks. I don't care for it." I mutter. He's ruined football too.
"Oh well." She shrugs and tilts her head in a saucy way, her blue eyes sparkling. "In that case, you should come to my room. Everyone else will be at the game."

For some reason, my eyes snag on Baz's table. His gray eyes are already trained on me, radiating anger. I can't figure out why he's angry. Maybe he thinks Gina will make me happy and he can't stand the thought.

I can feel my eyes narrow in his direction, my chest filling with rebellion, "Alright, that sounds lovely." I reply towards Baz.

His frown deepens for a split second before he glances away.

"Fantastic." I jump when she touches my arm and my attention reverts to her. "See you then."

Baz

I pick up my tray, ignoring whatever Dev is saying. I march over to the trash and angrily dump my scraps. I shouldn't have heard everything they said. Normal people aren't tortured by this much knowledge.

If she kisses those lips. No, if she touches that hair. No, if she so much as admires those moles. No, if she even basks in the glow of those blue eyes, I will hunt her down.

I bend my tray a little unconsciously, before placing it with the others. It doesn't sit right, so I quickly leave the scene of the crime.

He was with Agatha before. He clearly fancies blonde girls. I'm about as far from a blonde girl as a person can be. I'm the opposite of everything he likes, everything he wants. Why did I ever think I could turn it all around on him? What was I hoping for? That he would say, "These past few days, the massages, the snuggling, I've been trying to seduce you." And then I could say, "No need, I've wanted you for years." Crowley, I'm a total plonker.

Even if he had come up to me and blatantly said, "I fancy you and I'd like to kiss your face off," I wouldn't have believed it. I would have pushed him away. He couldn't convince me it was true. Not with a thousand words.

I'm not in the same league as Snow. I'm not worthy of his admiration. I could never earn his love. It was always a fool's quest, his heart.

But if I'm not good enough for him, there's no way in hell she is. It's time I find out more about Gina Hepburn.

Simon

Penny gets me into the girl dorms, where I'm not allowed to be, and I wander aimlessly around for a bit. Probably would have helped if Gina had told me which room she was in. I'd be terrible company anyway, I should go hang out with Penny instead, but I don't have the energy to pretend I'm okay.

I sink to the ground in the hall, my head falling into my hands. A couple of girls pass by and I hear them whispering to each other, but I don't care what they think. I should definitely leave, but the thought of going back to Mummer's alone is like a punch to the gut.

"Simon." I look up, spotting Gina standing in a doorway, across the hall. "Are you going to come in, or what?"
It takes a monumental effort to push myself to my feet. I stroll into a room so pink it almost hurts my eyes. I want to leave immediately.

She trails fingers down my arm, smelling like fresh roses. Probably the closest scent she could find to pink. "I'm glad you came."

That's funny, considering how much I'm regretting it.

"Here, have a seat." She pushes me back a few steps until I'm sitting on her bed. "You can take your coat off."

I don't. I'm trying to figure out if I even like girls. I'm not really attracted to them, but I'm not attracted to boys either. Maybe I only fancy vampires. Crowley, that would be a disaster. Trying to snog every vampire I see until one of us inevitably dies.

She waves a wand over a teapot. She purrs, "Some like it hot," in such a suggestive voice that I'm surprised the teapot responds. It doesn't seem to mind, because a few minutes later she's pouring us both steaming cups of tea and forcing a heart covered mug into my hands.

I don't want the tea. It smells like odd herbs and nearly burns my hands. I lean over to set it on the floor, making a mental note not to kick it over later.

She frowns down at it, giving me the impression that she finds my behavior repulsive. "Perhaps you would like some biscuits instead." She offers me the plate, but if I take one if will only prolong this visit. I shake my head.

She throws out her hands, causing one of the biscuits to fall to the floor. "What? You don't trust me?" She erupts in a shrill, high voice.

The last thing I need is more drama. I stand abruptly, accidentally upsetting the teacup. I hesitate as the brown liquid spreads across the carpet, more steam pouring off of it than seems possible. I'd spell it away, but I'm sure that would backfire. Better let her deal with it. "I have to go."

"You just got here!" She declares, blocking the door.

I take a deep impatient breath. "I have homework." It's not a lie. There are quite a few things I've been putting off doing. It's hard to concentrate when I'm being eaten alive by regret.

She glances around the room quickly. "Then we'll do it together." She focuses on her backpack. As soon as she moves towards it, I open the door and escape. I step gratefully into the cooler hallway. I didn't want to be in that room a moment more.

It's not her, honestly. I just want to be alone. My head is too full of taunting memories and unanswerable questions to function properly. My heart is too twisted with pain. I'd be piss poor company around anyone.

Baz

The Hepburn's are an old magic family. It's not hard to find history on them, but the more I read, the more concerned I grow.

Over a dozen years ago, they were in a coven with my family and 10 others. They had clandestine meetings to discuss what could be done about the destruction of the old ways. The group supposedly disbanded years ago, but it wasn't hard to read between the lines. They disliked the mage and would do whatever it took to stop him. I wouldn't be at all surprised if that also meant stopping Simon. I had
to warn him.

I hurry back to Mummer's house, hoping I'm not too late. I burst into the door with such force that Simon's eyes go wide with surprise. I'm insanely relieved that he's still here. "You can't see Gina tonight," I exclaim dramatically.

He frowns slightly, standing from his bed, "Why is that, Baz?"

He adds enough disdain to his voice to turn my name into a weapon. I walk over, grabbing his shoulders, "I think she might be trying to kill you."

Hebreathes a derisive laugh, as he knocks my arms away. "Wouldn't that just save you the trouble?"

"No." I straighten, "You're not listening, her family is in a group that's against the mage."

"As is yours." He points out.

I nod, "Well, yes. But-

"Stop." He holds up his hands. "Whatever you're doing, just stop. I can't take any more." His eyes narrow. "That's your goal, isn't it? Can't kill me so you drive me to suicide? Is that it?" His voice raises with the accusation.

"What? No! I'm trying to warn you, you git! Please, for once in your life listen to me!" I plead desperately.

"Can't imagine why you'd want to keep us apart. Does she know something about you, Baz?" He circles me, staring at my face with a calculating gaze.

I take an exasperated breath as his eyes fly to the clock.

"Must be something pretty condemning if your willing to miss a football game for it."

I lean around him to see it's after seven. The game started over an hour ago. "Fuck!" The coach will be furious, I'm already on thin ice after getting back 8 weeks late.

I start to the closet for my uniform but stop myself. It's too late now. I slam the closet door shut.

"Shit!"

My heart is pounding. I might get kicked from the team. I haven't missed a game since I've been back. Then again, one less person sitting the bench isn't going to kill them.

I hear Simon fall back onto his bed with a sigh. "I've already been and she didn't try to kill me once."

I glance back in confusion, "You've already been?" But I'd been certain she was plotting something. I sit on the edge of my bed, staring at the door. I'd missed the game for nothing. I'd humiliated myself in front of Simon for nothing.

"Look." He says softly. "I don't plan on talking to her again. Your secret, or whatever," He waves his hand through the air, "Is safe. I don't care what you're plotting, Baz. I don't have the energy to care anymore."

He sits up and glares at me for a second, before pushing off the bed and strolling to the bathroom. I
stand, but he closes and locks the door before I take a step.

I march over to it. "What do you mean, Simon?"

He flings the door open and takes a step forward so that he's glaring directly into my eyes. "Don't call me that." He growls through clenched teeth.

He's radiating anger and green smokey magic, probably seconds from going off, but it's so much better than the depression. I'd rather he take it out on me than do something stupid. I don't know what he's angry about, though. "Your name?"

"You ruined it." He claims, poking me in the chest. Crowley, I missed those flashing blue eyes. His bronze hair is backlit by the light in the bathroom and he is absolutely striking.

But I'm more confused than ever. I think he's gone mad. "How? Pretty sure there's only one way to pronounce Simon."

"You ruined everything!" He accuses hotly.

That doesn't seem possible. I throw out my hands. "You already went out with her! How am I ruining it? Seems like you did a pretty good job of that on your own." I wince. That was exactly the kind of accusation I was trying to keep from spouting. I should be at the football game right now. I should still be ignoring him, not making things worse.

He shakes his head. "You're a tosser."

"I know!" I yell back. "Excuse me for spending my afternoon in the library, completely missing the game, trying to keep someone from killing you. Excuse me!"

Simon pushes me then and I stumble back in shock. "The anathema!" I yell, hoping a little shove won't set it off. It doesn't seem to.

His blue eyes are pure fire. "Tell me the truth!"

"About what?" I demand.

He steps closer, inches away. "You're a vampire and you can make people feel things that no one else can."

I freeze. I was pretty sure he knew I was a vampire, but I didn't think he was going to throw it out there in the open and I don't know what powers he thinks I have. "What things, Snow?"

"That's how they get their victims, isn't it? But it doesn't matter for them, because then they're dead and they don't have to live with everything being ruined forever!" He points to his chest. "But I do. You knew that, didn't you? And you did it anyway. Scones don't even taste that good anymore, Baz. Scones!"

"I don't have any powers like that, Simon! I can see in the dark. I have an increased sense of smell and hearing, but I can't make you hate scones!" Only after I say it do I realize that I basically admitted that I am a vampire and if he told the wrong people I could be expelled or even killed for it.

But I find I'm not terribly concerned about either of those things because he has feelings for me. He has to. Very strong feelings apparently.

He's standing so close, I can feel the heat radiating off of his body. I can feel the angry breathes he's
taking. He starts to reply, but I don't hear the words. All I can hear is my heart pounding. I'm lost in those blue eyes and I can't keep my hands off of him for a moment more.

I lean forward, grab his face and press my lips to his.

He pushes me back a step and wipes his mouth off with the back of his forearm. It's devastating. It's exactly the reaction I expected of him the first time around but I was prepared for it then. It kills me now. "I'm not falling for that--"

I take a step closer, "I'm not-"

He shoves me away harder, leaving one hand burning against my chest. "No."

My heart is breaking and I don't know what to do about it. I don't know how to fix this. I press my lips together, leaning into his hand. "Simon."

"No." He shakes his head and takes a few steps back, leaving his hand outstretched to keep me away. Like I'm some sort of monster.

I am some sort of monster.

Simon

All I've wanted for days was for him to kiss me, to talk to me. But as I stare into his devastated gray eyes, I know I can't allow it. If I keep kissing him, I'll keep getting sucked back into whatever this addiction is. If I keep him at arm's length, there's a possibility it'll wear off. That I can go back to not needing him. Not craving him. But I have to be strong now.

"No." My arm is trembling. This is by far the hardest thing he's put me through.

Finally, he nods focusing on the floor. "Okay." He says softly.

His tone makes this even harder. It's much easier to fight off an attack. It's hard to fight the urge to comfort him. (Or simply give in and snog the living daylights out of him). He looks so sad like he's lost his only friend.

But I'm not his only friend. I'm not his friend at all. I'm just his victim, his mark. It's all an act and I refuse to fall for it. "Don't ever kiss me again." I don't know how I get the words out. They skewer me, like swords to the chest. But if his stupid vampire kisses can drive a person mad with lust, I have no choice.

He closes his eyes tightly, his face a mask of pain. He heads to the door, throws it open and flees.

Momentary doubt washes over me. What if I have it all wrong? What if he really does have feelings for me? What if everything I feel for him is real?

I spend the night replaying all of our memories in my head, but his actions are too inconsistent for me to draw any conclusions. I don't love Baz, that's ridiculous. I can't really love him and he certainly doesn't give a damn about me.

But why would he miss his game to warn me about Gina? The only answer that makes any sense is that she must know secrets about him that he doesn't want her to share. They must be pretty dark secrets.

I'll have to get them out of her.
I'll Keep You Safe

Chapter Summary

The spell in this one is based on the song, "I'll Keep You Safe" by Sleeping at Last. You can read it without hearing the song, but it'll be better if you give it a listen. All credit for the lyrics in the spell and the title go to Sleeping at Last.

Baz

For years, the prophecy seemed impossible. I could never picture Simon killing me, until now. I may have inadvertently pushed him past his limit, reeling the prophecy in like a shark on the line, it's sharp teeth eager to consume me. Hate and love are similar emotions and now he hates me for sure.

His accusations were insane to me at first, but the more I think about it, the more unsure I grow. I know fuck-all about vampires. What if we really can seduce our victims? What if I can? What if I did and now Simon only has these feelings for me because of my twisted saliva? It makes more sense than him actually liking me for me.

Crowley, that's fucked up.

I don't even know if he has legitimate feelings for me, but I do know Snow. There are certain things he can't resist.

Simon

Baz didn't sleep in our room last night. I hardly slept, but at least I was there. Who knows where he was.

I feel him enter the classroom and plop into the seat behind me so I spin around, glaring into his stormy gray eyes. His hair is slicked back and he looks impeccable as always. He must have been in our room to change during breakfast. "Where have you been?"

His jaw flinches, but he doesn't answer.

"You should have come home."

He stares at the floor, refusing to look at me. I realize I sound like a mother and only just stop myself from saying I was worried sick. I shouldn't worry about him at all. I turn back around facing the front, but I can feel him behind me. I'm hyper-aware of every sound he makes. Every breath he takes.

He isn't at lunch at all. I feel a mix of anger and worry about it, fretting myself into such a state that I can't take more than a bite of my sandwich. At least Penny is in the library so she can't see how fucked up I am right now.

Gina decides to disgrace me with her presence a few minutes before the bell rings. "I'll forgive you for last night, but you're really going to have to make it up to me." She says.

"What do you know about Baz?" I don't mean to start the conversation that way, but I can't help
myself. It's the only thing I want to hear from her. It's the only thing I want to hear, period. I don't think I'll be able to concentrate on anything else until I get to the bottom of this.

She tilts her head flashing me a smile. "What will you do for the information?" She asks in a sexy voice.

I'm not her teapot and I don't warm to her tone in the least. "Please, it's important."

She rests her chin on her fist and tilts her head. "So important that you'll meet me on the ramparts tonight?" She pouts.

I flare my nostrils. "Fine. What part?" The ramparts run the circumference of the school.

"Right above the bridge. Ten o'clock." It'll be up by then.

"Fine," I mutter in return.

She smiles back at me. "It's a date." She rises gracefully to her feet and struts away. I roll my eyes.

Baz

I don't want Simon to have to look at me, so I don't sit at my table at lunch. I'm a ghost, a phantom, invisibly watching over him.

He doesn't eat, so I ask the cook to send a sandwich and a couple of scones to our room. He'll appreciate it later even if he never says so.

Then I try to decide which side of the moat I want to be on for the meeting. No way am I going to let him go alone. I still don't trust Gina. She either wants to seduce him or kill him and both are almost equally as disturbing.

I finally decide to be on the far side of the moat. I don't want to have to sleep in our room if he does snog her and I don't want to kill them for making out. But if she is trying to kill him, I'll still be able to help. I just needed to scout out a place that I can see them from.

Simon

It's after ten when I finish climbing the stairs to the ramparts. I only know because I stole Baz's watch. Not because I needed it, but because having something of his comforts me and I decided to indulge myself a little. It's easier than going cold turkey and a watch seems safe.

I know the food was from him. I devoured it before I thought too much about it because I was starving. But it bothers me now, that once again I can't figure out his motives. Maybe he's trying to drive me insane. Pretty sure it's working.

I spot Gina from the stairs and stroll towards her. The wind is whipping her blonde hair into her face, so she grabs hold of it and twists it around her hand.

"You came."

I'm only five minutes late so I don't know why she sounds so surprised. "Yes, so tell me what you know about Baz."

She smiles and tilts her head to the stone wall, "Come, sit."

I stride over and rest my bottom against the low wall. "Go on."
"His parents and mine are in the same group." She begins.

I nod. He told me that much. "Go on."

"He wants you dead."

For some reason I can't fathom, I can feel protectiveness rising up inside of me. "He's had plenty of opportunities to kill me."

She snorts. "But he can't really. You'd find a way to survive."

"Maybe."

She pierces me with intense blue eyes as she runs her fingers down my chest. I'm so stunned that I jerk back a little and flick her hand away. I realize a second too late that it was an odd thing to do, but so is touching a stranger's chest.

She frowns over at me. "You and Agatha aren't together anymore."

My forehead furrows. "What's your point?" And how does she even know that when I've never noticed her before.

She starts to reach out again but I raise my eyebrows at her hand and she pulls it back. "You and I could have a lot of fun together."

I've never had a girl come onto me this way before, and while I'll admit it's a little flattering, I mostly feel confused. "You don't even know me."

She shrugs, "We could easily change that."

I'm not interested in changing that. "If you can't tell me anything more about Baz-"

"Oh, I can tell you more." She says as the wind whips her hair back from her face. "He has a powerful amulet that he smuggled into school. In the wrong hands, it can cause irreparable damage, and his are definitely the wrong hands."

I could picture his hands when she said it, and they didn't look wrong to me. Hadn't felt wrong either. Then again he was probably still my enemy. My judgment was clearly clouded. I couldn't trust Baz, but I couldn't trust her either. "What does it look like?"

"It's a small pin, gold on the outside, red in the center."

I shrug, "If I see it, I'll turn it into the mage."

I start to stand, but she leaps up and pins me down by my shoulders. "You can't turn it into the mage!" She insists, her eyes wild with outrage.

I frown up at her, "Then what am I to do with it?"

"You give it to me!" She insists. "I can turn it into the proper authorities."

I scoff. "I don't know you and I'm certainly not going to steal something for you. Now if you'll excuse me..." I go to stand, but she kicks me in the chest and I go flying back.

I feel myself falling towards the moat. The weightlessness is disconcerting. My stomach drops and I'm abso-bloody-lutely sure I'm going to die.
I windmill my arms frantically. My fingers crash against the stone, but it's more painful than helpful. If there's anything to grab onto I don't feel or see it.

"Float like a butterfly!" The words surround me, driven by the wind and suddenly, I'm floating. I take a second to catch my breath.

I'd recognize that voice anywhere, but I still don't believe it's him until I turn and take in his dashing features. I'm ashamed to say that a wave of pleasure washes over me along with the relief. He's just so bloody fit.

I kick my legs in the air and make for the edge of the moat where Baz catches my hand and pulls me onto the grass. His cold hand in mine makes my heart slow to a more normal pace. I'm so relieved to see him that I can't stop staring at the side of his pale face. He's absolutely breathtaking with the wind whipping his long dark hair about. His gorgeous gray eyes are protective as he glares back up at Gina.

Oddly, I feel safe with him next to me. I feel like we could bloody well take on the world together, him and me.

He looks very debonair with his wand in his hand, his uniform clinging to his body in a most appealing way. I still don't want to be attracted to him, but he looks amazing. And he did just save me.

I've barely stepped ashore when Gina's angry voice roars. "If you're not my ally, then you're my enemy" She starts muttering something neither of us can hear, raising her wand. The wind blows her hair around her, making her look every inch a witch. And not the good kind, either.

"Oh, fucking hell." Baz murmurs, grasping my hand tighter and dragging me back. I glance down and see something gray and slimy plop onto the shore. I stumble back as Baz pulls me along. The hideous heads emerge and I realize that the merwolves are climbing out of the moat and flopping towards us. Their bodies are grotesque and unnatural. They smell swampy, nauseating.

"They can't do that!" I yell. It has to be magic.

"They are." Baz raises his wand at them, "Stay back!"

They hesitate, then keep coming, their reek creeping up on us. It's not going to work.

The sky darkens above us and I look up to see a thousand bats, birds and other creatures I don't recognize. Anything possessing wings it would seem is after us. Seems like overkill to me, but I suppose they'll get a feast after the merwolves finish us off.

Or not. My magic is beginning to overwhelm me. I'll probably kill them all at once, even if I don't want to. Maybe even Gina.

The thought of killing a human being nauseates me and I try to figure out a way to clamp down on my power.

Baz's hand squeezes mine. My eyes meet his and I push my magic towards him as I did in the woods. He turns and clamps his free hand over my eyes. The sudden darkness briefly increases my terror. I don't know what he'll do with my magic. I just know it will be more controlled than anything I could accomplish.

His breath is soft on my ear as he passionately whispers with magic, "I'll keep you safe."
I drop Simon's hand and hug him to me with my free arm, as blinding white light stuns the creatures around us. I can feel his magic filling me.

When I'm sure he won't be blinded, I let my hand fall from his face. I clutch both of his hands in mine, my wand between my right hand and his left.

Wind is whipping around us now. I can smell the merwolves, the birds and bats and Simon's magic, but I concentrate on his blue eyes. On the spell, "Hold out your hands, can you feel the weight of it, the whole world at your fingertips." I extend our arms to our sides. He threads his fingers through mine. It's hard to concentrate on anything but his touch. But I know I need to.

"Don't be afraid." I felt protectiveness take over my body. I'd never let anything hurt him. "Our mistakes, they were bound to be made, but I promise you I'll keep you safe."

He takes a step closer and our chests touch. I drop my forehead against his. The spell is designed to let me create anything around us to protect him, but I'm not creating alone. Simon's magic is rippling through me, protecting me right back. Our minds seem to bind together and we're constructing a quartz barrier around us. My eyes are squeezed shut, but somehow I can see what we're creating in my mind's eye. We're surrounded by love and light. Nothing can touch us.

I find I don't even need to speak the words of the spell anymore. I just think them and pearls rise from the moat, attracting the merwolves with their glamour. They plunge back into the water as the pearls sink to the bottom, drawing them down with brilliance.

I clutch Simon's hands tighter as trees rise up out of the ground, shielding us further. Insects burst from the ground blocking the bat's sonar. All the flying beasts feast on the newly raised crop as I wrap my arms around Simon clutching the back of his head. Fanning my fingers through his blonde curls.

I breathe the last part of the spell against Simon's ear, "You are an artist and your heart is your masterpiece, and I'll keep it safe." I feel like he can see everything inside of me, my love, my desires, everything. But I leave myself exposed to him. It hardly matters now. I'd do anything to protect him. Even this. Even making myself completely vulnerable to him. Even if he doesn't love me back. Even if he never does.

I can feel his appreciation and relief. But he still doesn't completely trust me. I can feel his fear and doubt. I can practically taste them. They're like poison to my soul, but I'm willing to spend a lifetime proving my love if that's what it takes.

Time seems to stop around us. He hugs me tightly to him and I hug him back with everything in me.

Finally, he pulls back and glances at the quartz that completely surrounds us. It throws a rainbow over his features. I didn't know he could look any more beautiful to me, but bathed in rainbow light, my heart bursting with love for him, he's never looked more handsome.

Simon takes another step back so that our arms fall to our sides. He throws me a playful grimace widening his eyes, "Do we want to see what we've done to the world?"

I would be perfectly happy staying here and staring at him forever, but it would be awfully hard not to kiss him and he'd specifically told me never to do that again.

My heart sinks, bringing me back down to reality. No matter how much I love Simon, he doesn't want to be with me. I know that. I felt that and I can't blame him. Who would want to be with a
vampire?

The weight of my unrequited love threatens to deflate my lungs, but I manage a small nod and say with magic, "As you were," to the quartz around us.

Simon

The quartz shrinks into the ground revealing a brand new forest of ancient trees, kinds I've never seen before, higher than the ramparts. Higher than the school. If it wasn't for the lights from the wall shining through them, I'd think we'd been transported to a different world. It's wild and beautiful.

I follow Baz cautiously to the moat, where the merwolves are excitedly swimming around humongous pearls.

I glance over at him, but his eyes are on the ramparts. "Where did she go?"

I shake my head. "I don't know, but it doesn't matter. She lives here. We'll tell the mage and he'll put an end to it. She can't go around trying to kill people."

He glances over at me and worries his lip with his teeth. Crowley, I missed him.

I glance up at the sky. I can only see a bit of light through the leaves, so I don't know where all the bats are, but they're not attacking so I don't complain.

I take a deep breath. "Think we can still find the bunker?"

He hasn't taken his eyes off of me. They're smoldering with passion and desire. I feel like they're going to boil me alive.

Before they turn my insides to complete mush, he glances out through the trees. "Yes, this way."
I want you completely

Simon

Baz leads me directly to the pantry. When he turns to face me I raise my eyebrows at him. "I'm not always hungry," I complain.

He smirks then pulls out a box of Wizard Crunch and tosses it to me. I catch it and wrinkle my nose at him. "The commercial makes it look better than it actually is." I walk over and slide it back in. "Besides, someone sent a feast up to our room."

He smiles and I find myself admiring his bright white teeth. He really does have a gorgeous smile. "I have no idea who would have done such a thing."

I breathe a laugh. "Right." His intense stare is warming my entire chest. I don't know why I'm so attracted to him. Yes, I do. He's bloody gorgeous, every inch of him, and he exudes sexuality.

He swallows and turns to leave, but my hand shoots out and latches onto his arm. When his eyes meet mine again, I feel my face flush. "Thank you."

He presses his lips together, searching my eyes.

"For saving my life." I let my hand fall away.

He nods, taking a step back and tucking his hands into his pockets. "Anytime." He doesn't speak the word casually. He says it as if he means it with all of his heart.

Baz

Simon has no bloody idea how much restraint it takes not to attack him right now. Not to pin him against the wall, rip open his shirt, and run my hands down his chest while my tongue explores his mouth.

I want him more than blood. I want him more than anything. I think he's thanking me for not killing everything, but it's hard to concentrate on his words when I'm so enthralled with the way his mouth moves.

"Baz."

My attention shoots back up to his gorgeous eyes. I'm happy swimming around in them for a while, so blue, so warm, so kind. Crowley, he has the best eyes. "Yeah," I answer softly.

I keep my hands firmly in my pockets. I bite my bottom lip for good measure. So far my hands and lips have been surprisingly well behaved and it's taking everything in me to keep it that way.

He takes a step closer. "Are you listening to anything I'm saying?" His lips tip up in amusement and my gaze slides back to them.

"Not really." It comes out soft, drenched in desire. I couldn't work up a decent sneer if my life depended on it. I don't bother trying.

He slowly reaches up and brushes back a strand of my hair with his fingertip. I close my eyes, enjoying the small touch more than seems possible.
"I love your hair like this."

I don't know what my hair looks like, but I'm tempted to find a mirror. I'll do it this way every day if there's a chance he'll touch me again.

He traces a finger down my cheek and I whimper. I'm immediately ashamed and hoping he didn't hear the slight noise.

"Look at me." He says softly.

I open my eyes. He's standing even closer than he was before. He's inches away. "Crowley, Snow. Are you trying to make it impossible?" I complain, taking a step back. A shelf halts my retreat.

"You do feel this, don't you? I didn't think- but," He swallows.

I frown at him slightly, "What are you trying to say?" My heart is carving a hole in my chest trying to get to him. I'm incapacitated by fear, because he holds my very essence in his hands, in his words, in his mouth. He could crush me so easily. One bite and I'd be destroyed. No one should hold this much power, but it only makes sense that he does. He possesses all the power in the world, why shouldn't he possess all the power over me.

His hand cups my cheek. I lose every other sense. Every bit of me is intensely focused on the feel of his hand on my cheek. His thumb stirs up a wake of tingles as he caresses my skin. I take a shaky breath.

He takes a step closer. I have nowhere to go. He knows that. "I was wrong, wasn't I? It was never a trick."

I stop breathing altogether.

"It's not a vampire power. This is real."

I lick my lips and his eyes fall there.

"Yes?" He guesses. When I don't reply he whispers my name, caressing that one syllable with his mouth in a way that makes me come undone.

"What if I said-" Simon cuts his words off and closes his eyes when my right hand escapes it's pocket and tangles itself in his curls.

I freeze, terrified he's not going to finish his sentence. That he's going to back away from me. But he quickly recovers, his eyes opening to drown me. "You can kiss me whenever you like?" His voice is shockingly vulnerable.

"But you don't trust me," I whisper softly. I'll give him a way out. But only one. And he better not take it.

"Not completely."

My chest explodes with crushing pain.

"But I want you." His lips brush over my cheek. "Completely." He whispers against my lips.

My other hand is against his cheek now and I'm pulling him closer, my lips digging into his with all the desire I've clamped down for years. I spin him around, shoving him into the shelf so hard several cans fall off.
I'm worried I've crushed him. "You okay?"

He answers by plunging his tongue into my mouth, by grabbing my arse and pulling me closer. He's never touched my butt before, and I find myself overwhelmed with joy at the sensation.

I sneak my hands between us, find the gaps between his buttons and rip his shirt open. My hands are massaging his chest, which is radiating heat like a furnace. "Crowley, you're hot," I whisper against his lips.

"I'm going to warm every inch of you." He growls back. I couldn't be any harder at this point. I've never heard a more appealing sentence in my life.

He rips open my shirt, taking the extra effort to pull it down my arms. I have to move them aside so he can get it off, but our bare skin touching is worth it. As soon as it falls to the floor, we race to touch every inch of newly exposed skin.

He explores my chest and then in unison, we massage each other's backs pulling each other closer. My hand hits one of the shelves reminding me that he's probably in an uncomfortable position.

I take a step back, pulling him with me and open my eyes just enough to lead him into the hall. I shouldn't have taken him into the pantry. I should have led him straight into a bedroom. Now we're stumbling along, trying to kiss and walk at the same time like drunk sailors.

I'm headed down the hall, when he pins me against the wall and shrugs his shirt off the rest of the way, his mouth still kissing mine.

He presses against me and I moan, "Simon" into his mouth. His increases his pressure and rhythm in response. Oh my god, the sensation is amazing. But it would be better without all the metal in the way.

My hands trace the top of his pants until I find his belt. I quickly pull the end free and slide the pin out. I pull it apart. My fingers fall to his button, but he pulls back, breathing deeply.

His hand is pinning my shoulder to the wall. "Baz, wait."

Fuck, the belt was too much. I stop what I'm doing and rest my hands on his hips.

His blue eyes soften. He leans forward and kisses my jaw softly. He teases it with his teeth and I groan as his body settles back against mine. "We probably shouldn't." He whispers against my skin.

"Whatever you want," I whisper, massaging up his back. I'm completely fine with exploring his back and chest all night. It's so much more than I'd hoped for as it is.

"Oh, I want," He pulls back, his blue eyes sparkling mischievously, "An awful lot of things."

I can't help but smile back. "You can have them all," I promise emphatically, laughing, happiness bubbling up inside of me. I feel intoxicated by his words. They've turned me into a love-struck fool.

"You sure?" He whispers, leaning forward to lick my earlobe. He rests his forehead against the wall, his body still pressed against mine, his lips against my bare shoulder. "Tell me where you were."

I freeze, my body tensing against the wall.

He leans back, searching first one eye, then the other. "I want in." His hand cups my cheek, "I want you to let me in."
He was already inside every part of me. Why did I have to tell him my most embarrassing moment too?

I shake my head, "It's not what you think."

"Okay." He says softly, not letting up on his stare.

I push away from him, taking a few steps back. "It's embarrassing."

His forehead wrinkles slightly. "How?" He asks in confusion.

I bite my lip and look away. I can't tell him. I simply can't. I don't know what he likes about me, maybe my strength. Maybe my abilities, I don't know. But I do know that this makes me look like a pitiful loser and even if he's glad I told him, he'll never look at me the same. I can't bear it. "You're right." I swallow, "We shouldn't do this." I quickly turn and stride down the hall.

"Baz!" He calls after me.

Shit! I can hear his footsteps echoing down the hall, coming after me. I quicken my pace.

"What did you think?" He shoots past and spins to face me. I almost run into him. "That I wouldn't mind you keeping secrets from me as long as you stuck your tongue down my throat?"

"Fuck, Simon." I glare back. "You're the one who kissed me!"

His eyes widen, "You saved my life. You acted like you really cared about me." He yells, placing a hand against his glorious chest.

"I do!" I proclaim loudly. It echoes off the walls. Normally, I'd be horrified I just admitted that, but right now it's the least of my concerns.

"Prove it." He growls.

I shake my head. Out of everything in the world, why did he have to be hung up about that? "Ask me anything else."

"Does your family expect you to kill me?"

"I don't." I hesitate, wanting to answer honestly. They never specifically told me they wanted me to kill Snow, I assumed that myself. "I don't know."

His nostrils flare. "Do you have a pin that's gold and red?"

I frown slightly. How does he know about my mother's pin? "I don't see what that has to do with anything."

He studies my eyes a moment more before leaning against the wall and folding his arms over his chest. I couldn't help but admire his biceps. Crowley, he was gorgeous. "I think that's what Gina's after."

"That doesn't make any sense." I shake my head. "She was after you!"

"No. She wanted me to steal it from you. I told her no."

I focus on the wall, my mind spinning. How did she know about the pin and why would she want it? "It was my mother's. I like to keep something of her's with me." I admit softly.
"Do you know what it does?"

I glance back at him, trying not to let his chest distract me. "It doesn't do anything. It's ornamental."

He studies me a moment more. "She seems to think it's powerful, dangerous."

"But-" I shake my head. "I-" I try to think back to when I first brought it to school. My dad had acted like he didn't want me to take it with me, but he finally relented. Could it hold some sort of power?

I'm tired of standing so I stroll into the closest room and sit on the bed, resting my chin on my hand. Simon moves down the wall, but keeps against it, staring at me through the open doorway. "I thought it was simply a pin, but it could be more. I can ask my father when I see him this weekend."

Simon nods, before pushing off the wall. He's almost out of sight when I call after him. "You could come with me."

He hesitates, then nods before walking away.

I sigh and run a hand through my hair. I freeze halfway through and carefully pull it out, before running for the nearest bathroom. I gaze into the mirror. Fuck, my hair is a mess now. I'll never know how Simon likes it.
Simon

I don't know why I expect Baz to pause at his front door. He doesn't, he turns the knob and strides inside without hesitation. I don't feel prepared or authorized to enter.

I ignore the warm light inside and glance up at the imposing house. The stone buttresses and towers make it look like a fortress. This place probably has dozens of secret passageways. A troupe of maids and butlers. It's probably haunted.

"Simon," Baz calls gently.

I close my eyes, enjoying my name for a moment. It's been several days since he kissed me in the bunker. His shields, which were momentarily lowered to save my life, flashed right back up when I asked him a personal question. I don't know if they'll ever come back down.

Not the sort of person you want to have an intimate relationship with, I remind myself. It's a lie, but it makes me feel a little better about him closing me off.

I force myself to step into the house of my enemies, who likely want me dead. Especially, when they find out that Gina somehow broke into our room and stole the pin while I was making out with Baz underground.

"Hey," Baz's eyes are soft and he's staring at me in such a way that makes the opulent foyer fade behind him. He takes a step towards me as I close the door.

He raises his eyebrows, "It's going to be okay." He squeezes my upper arm gently and I relish the rare contact. He's been kind to me the last few days, but distant. Certainly not as demonstrative as I'd like. He was probably just caught up in the moment before. I shouldn't expect any more kissing. He's clearly locked me out with an iron key.

"Baz, good of you to visit!" I jump at his father's booming voice. I should have noticed his approach, but my attention had been consumed by gorgeous gray eyes.

Baz drops his hand quickly and spins around, offering it to his father, who would probably kill me, given the opportunity. "Good to see you, Father," Baz replies, shaking his hand formally. It seems like an odd exchange, but I'm far from an expert on families.

His father's shrewd eyes dissect me next. "Mr. Snow." He pauses before offering his hand. He does light damage with the weapon, but none of the bones in my hand fracture. Suppose that's something to be grateful for.

"Mr. Grimm." I return warily. Coming here was a bad idea. I'm very tempted to wish them both well and leave while the door's a step behind me.

"You have something to ask me?" His eyes only rob me of breath a moment more, before he turns to his son who's far more likely to form a coherent reply.

"Yes, may we speak in your study?"
"Certainly," he turns slightly to call to a maid I hadn't noticed hovering at the edge of the room, "Please bring us some coffee and sandwiches."

She nods and hurries off while we follow Mr. Grimm down several hallways. I feel bad for setting foot on the ornamental rugs covering gorgeous wooden floors, and I steer clear of the priceless works of art on the walls and pedestals.

Finally, we make it to the office and I fall into the lush, black leather seat his father gestures towards. It's more comfortable than seems possible and I wonder if it's spelled that way.

Baz takes the seat beside me as his father settles behind an enormous ebony desk. Everything in this room is either red or gold or black. It screams power. It's terrifying, quite frankly.

Baz launches into the story about Gina, leaving out all the good bits and ends with what we'd discovered from the Mage. "She was homeschooled up until a few days ago when she transferred there for more 'social interaction'. Her father withdrew her from school before she could be expelled. She attended for less than two weeks."

His father leans back, folding his hands over his stomach. "It's a personal matter then, between families. Mr. Snow was the primary target, so the Mage is well within his rights to retaliate or demand retribution, though it won't be in his best interests. The Hepburn family is formidable."

"Gina wasn't after Snow," Baz replies, leaning forward in his chair. "She was after my mother's pin and she got it. So tell me, father, what does it do?"

"What do you mean she got it?" His father demands angrily, leaning his powerful forearms onto his desk.

"We were on the other side of the moat. We had to wait until morning to return to our room, and by the time we did, it was gone."

His father's nostrils flare, his dark eyes flash angrily. He studies me for a moment, before his gaze sweeps back to his sons, softening a bit, "I think this is something I best tell you in confidence, Basil."

Baz glances over at me and I eagerly immerse myself in kinder eyes. "Si-Snow, would you give us a few minutes, please."

I stand quickly, "Sure."

Baz

I have to wait a minute for Bridget to arrange our coffee and sandwiches and escort Simon to the parlor before my father gives me his full attention. "How much does that boy know?" He demands.

"Nothing more than we've already told you. It's a lie, but I'm not about to admit that I told him our family and the Hepburns were in a secret group that might want him dead. I'm assuming that they stole the artifact to use it against the Mage?"

My father eases back in his seat and picks up his cup of coffee. "It doesn't work that way. What Gina stole was a protection amulet. Specifically, a Pitch protection amulet. You need Pitch blood to use it."

"Mother always wore the pin. Why didn't she use it when the vampires attacked?"
"Because she was a selfless woman." My dad sighs and rubs an eyebrow. He takes a deep breath before continuing, "Do you remember about the Magickal War of 1855?"

"Yes."

"Your ancestor Richard Pitch died before he could go to war, leaving behind a wife and 4 children, whom he loved dearly. He deeply regretted not being able to fight for their safety and he was frustrated he could no longer protect them.

"His wife possessed a gold and ruby brooch that she wore frequently. When the veil was thin, he came through and promised to protect her and the children from harm. They performed a ritual that tied his spirit to the amulet so that if she was ever in trouble she could speak the spell, place a drop of Pitch blood on the ruby and he would be able to cross the veil at any time to protect her or any Pitch descendant."

He pauses to take another sip. "Everyone in the Pitch family who went to war for years after performed the same ritual over the amulet. Uncles, cousins, sons, many of whom died in the war. No one person owned it at that point, it was kept safe by various members of the family."

"Has anyone ever used it?" I ask, leaning in.

"Only once. In 1905, Richard's granddaughter, Mary Pitch was attacked by a man in an alleyway. She called for help, but no one answered. She was bleeding, some fell on the brooch. As soon as she noticed, she quoted the spell she'd known since she was a girl. Dozens of ghosts solidified in front of her, they tore the man to shreds, but they didn't stop there. They were men of war and saw only enemies, they destroyed everyone on the street and houses nearby that day except her and her sister who was in a room above the restaurant across the street. Everyone within 2 square blocks was killed. No one but Pitches survived."

"What happened to the ghosts?" I ask.

"They grew weaker and weaker. The next couple blocks reported poltergeists and visions, but nothing more. A few were said to have returned to their homes, lurking there and disturbing the owners in mostly harmless ways. I think a few still haunt their old homes, still wanting to protect them."

"So there aren't any more in the amulet then." I surmise.

"On the contrary, it worked. Hundreds of people have pledged their afterlives since then. If it was set off now there would be over a hundred years worth of vengeful ghosts released. It would be a disaster of epic proportions."

"But why would they take it? Only a Pitch descendant could use it, right?"

My father hesitates. "It's possible they've found a relative who's willing to cooperate. But it's also possible..." He leans forward, focusing solely on me, "Do you know what the Hepburns specialize in?"

I shake my head.

"They're creature mages. They train magickal creatures to do their bidding for them. Maybe with a drop of Pitch blood, they thought they could train the ghosts. It's a long shot." He leans back, sucking in his cheek and looking thoughtful. "They would have to be extremely desperate to use it. Anyone would."
"And they might not be able to." I put in hopefully.

"Even if they got Pitch blood, which wouldn't be hard to obtain, I doubt they would know the spell. It was never written and only passed down to family members."

I nod, breathing a sigh of relief. "So it is entirely possible that they stole it to prevent us from using it."

My father nods, before freezing. He studies my eyes intensely, before picking up the phone. "Hello, Jeffery. Put us on high alert."

I frown over at my father as he hangs up the phone.

"It's just the sort of thing someone would do if they were planning an attack."

I shake my head. "But we're allies. They wouldn't attack us."

His face takes on the likeness of hardened steel as he replies, "You can never be too careful."

Simon

I've eaten most of the sandwiches the maid provided by the time Baz returns. He doesn't say a word just tilts his head towards the door. I follow him outside, immensely relieved that we're leaving before I'm murdered.

"I don't think your dad likes me," I whisper after he closes the door behind us.

He's silent as he leads me to the car. He places a hand on the back of my seat as he backs up and turns the car around. He proceeds down one of the longest driveways I've ever encountered in silence.

"Baz," I prompt, staring at his profile.

He takes a deep breath and tells me exactly what the amulet does. "They're either planning to train the ghosts, or planning an attack and keeping us from using it." He finishes while turning the car towards the school. "Or something we haven't even thought of yet."

"So they were behind the gremlin," I mutter.

His gray eyes flash to mine. "I didn't think of that."

I nod. "They were hoping it would steal the pin."

He pulls over quickly, pulling his wand out of his vest quickly to cast, "Lost and found." Nothing happens. "Shit."

"It's not lost, it's stolen."

"But the gremlin stole it before." He insists frantically.

"And gremlins are the creatures of the lost." I remind him. "We can't get it back that way."

"So what then?" He demands. I feel bad for him. It's more than a weapon to him. It's a link to his mother. It's personal.

I press my lips together, focusing on the window, "I don't know. We'll think of something."
"Think fast." He advises. "We might not have long."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for everyone who has read this far! What is your favorite line or part so far?
The plan

BAZ

"I still think the direct approach is best," Simon insists for the third time around a mouthful of Aero bar.

I stop pacing long enough to pierce him with a scathing look. He stares up at me from the edge of his perpetually rumpled bed. His blue eyes widen at me with innocent earnestness, while he chews his chocolate. Crowley, he's adorable. Far too adorable to berate. It's been days since I've been able to work up a satisfyingly snarky rejoinder to one of his many idiotic comments. Every time I look at him I'm transported back to the bunker, Simon half naked and beautiful, his eyes blazing with need, his hands heating every inch of my back. My insults are instantly incinerated in a blaze of wildfire.

I patiently remind myself that every time I've flown too close to my own personal sun, I've crashed and burned. It's best for both of us if I remain polite and distant.

I take a deep breath, inhaling his scent. Fuck. I had deliberately taken time to feed before this conversation and it's done nothing whatsoever to diminish my crippling need for Snow. It's only gifted me with the embarrassing ability to blush.

I look away and pace faster, hoping he won't notice. "My father is hardly going to march up to the Hepburn manor and demand that they give back the amulet. He'd never even make it past the front gates. You know how many spells are guarding that place?"

Simon throws his hands up, "No Baz, I don't! How could I possibly know that?"

I pause. He's so oblivious to the way these things work. It should be infuriating, but for some bizarre reason, it only compounds his appeal. How can I possibly love the fact that he's completely clueless? I must be even further gone than I thought.

I force myself to turn and head back towards the door. "Think about it for a moment, Snow. You know how tightly the Mage has locked down Watford." I swivel and stroll back towards the window. "Old families like the Hepburns? They've had decades – centuries – to spell their homes secure." I shake my head firmly. "No. The direct approach is a non-starter." I throw him a look over my shoulder on the way back towards the door. "And before you say anything, sneaking in is definitely not an option. Surest way to get us both killed."

"This is ridiculous!" He complains. "They stole your mother's heirloom! Why wouldn't your father ring them up and demand that they give your property back?" Simon bounces to his feet, catching my arm as I stride by, and turning me towards him. "And for Crowley's sake, Baz – stop pacing!"

He clutches my other arm, pulling me to a halt. He's standing so close I could easily step forward and kiss him. Fuck. How am I supposed to concentrate on anything when he's touching me? I can barely remember to keep breathing – attempting to plan the moves and counter-moves of this deadly chess-match is hopeless.

I have to extricate myself. "Snow, you can't just –" but I abruptly decide mid-sentence that it's a very bad idea to tell Simon to stop touching me. I can feel each of his fingers, distinctly, burning into my arms. I'm staring deeply into his blue eyes, falling into them, slowly.

A faint voice in the back of my head reminds me to remain polite and distant. No need to plummet to my own demise, again and again. A glutton for pain and rejection.
But Simon's lips are an absolute work of art, they really are, and that voice can sod the fuck off.

Fortunately, Snow pulls away before I do anything regrettable. "What, you can't even call them? I suppose their phone is spelled too!" He says sarcastically. He takes a step back, crossing his arms over his chest with a huff.

I take a deep breath. Steady. "There's a hierarchy, and the Hepburns are at the very top. You don't call them, they call you."

"Well, that's ridiculous. You're saying they can get away with stealing anything they want? Can they get away with murder too?" He's glaring at me now and it's completely unsettling. Crowley – he's beautiful when he glares.

He steps forward into a sunbeam that lights up his blonde hair like the crown on an avenging angel, who still believes there's some measure of justice in this world. I see his fingers instinctively twitch for something. Not his wand, that's for sure. He's reaching for his sword, that would really complete the picture. Haloed Simon raising his sword for justice.

I hate to burst his bubble – but, "They have gotten away with murder."

"Bloody hell," he murmurs, deflated, twisting his fingers carelessly through his hair. My eyes rake over those curls.

"They were let off this latest time when they insisted they couldn't be faulted for their creatures' actions. 'Dangerous beasts, hard to control,'" I quote, thinking back to the reports from that bloody episode a few years ago.

When his frustrated blue eyes lock onto mine, I'm dragged back to the present, abruptly flooded with desire. My voice is breathless as I conclude in a murmur, "and so on and so forth."

It's suddenly extremely hard to remember why I'm not snogging Snow. Because those lips are so inviting and I'm 90% sure he'd kiss me back, at least for a little while.

I worry my bottom lip and Simon's eyes fall there. When his eyes slowly meet mine again, the estimate jumps to 99%.

But it's not the odds that have deterred me these last few days. It's the fact that he wants me to confess my incompetence. I'd be irretrievably lessened in his eyes – no longer a powerful, capable equal. He'd see me for the pathetic loser I am, and I just couldn't bear it.

I take a few steps back until my legs hit my bed. I force myself to sit. Fuck this pride. I wish I could throw it aside, but it feels like the only strength I have left.

I stare up at him for a moment before it suddenly hits me. It's not my pride at all. It's infinitely worse. It's naked, paralyzing fear of rejection. I can't open up to Snow, because he'd never love all the filth inside of me. How could he? I'm a cesspool of ugliness underneath a very thin layer of appeal. I'd rather him love whatever small precarious thing he sees in me than hate me to my core.

Fuck, that's debilitating. I glance at the window, desperately trying to keep myself from sinking into utter despair, but the bright sunlight that crowns him like a hero, is same sunlight that stings me to look at, that claws my icy skin with its golden beams. It offers no respite.

The bed dips beside me. The fucking idiot is sitting on my bed. Innocent, beautiful, inches away from a monster. I wince when his hand touches my shoulder.
"Baz," he whispers softly. "Fuck, Baz, you're shaking."

**SIMON**

Suddenly Baz looks dreadful and I feel like a bloody wanker for speaking at all. I'm only derailing his train of thought. At an utter loss, I impulsively wrap my arms around him. He tenses beneath me. I feel so wretchedly inadequate. I have no idea what this hierarchy is or how it works. I'm woefully out of my depth when it comes to magical families, creatures, and centuries-old defense spells. I don't even know how to form the beginnings of a plan. My best idea all day was, 'Have your daddy go get it.' I sound like a fucking toddler.

Poor Baz must feel completely alone. I can't help him at all, and Gina never would have been able to steal it in the first place if it weren't for my idiocy.

I stroke his hair very lightly and pull his head closer to my shoulder. I take some small comfort that he hasn't pushed me away, even though he's not hugging me back. "I'm so sorry," I whisper into his hair. "I never should have met up with Gina. If you hadn't been there saving my life..." I press my lips together and continue to berate myself silently.

"What?" Baz demands, pushing me back a bit to flash me a proper glare. He leaves his hand on my shoulder, squeezing it tightly. "Don't you dare blame yourself," he bites out fiercely. He shoves my shoulder a bit as he lets go.

"But this whole mess is my fault!" I insist.

Baz gestures vehemently towards the door, his face suddenly dark with fury. He's stopped shaking but I notice his fist is clenched, his knuckles white. "Snow," he bites out, "that's completely ridiculous. It's Gina's fault! She's the one who fucking did it, you wanker."

I stare at him in confusion, struggling to keep up. Why is he so worked up about this? It's so obviously my fault. Isn't it? Isn't everything?

"It's not your responsibility to make sure nothing bad ever happens. To save everyone, every time." He shakes his head in frustration, then exhales sharply, visibly attempting to still his expression. "Just-" he takes a deep breath, pushing me, "get off my bed."

I breathe a laugh, tensing against the pressure. I'm still not entirely sure what's going through his head, but I know he's going to have to push a lot harder than that to move me.

He doesn't. He relents while glaring at me, "What is so fucking funny, Snow?"

We lock eyes again and it's hard to describe how beautiful he is to me in this moment. The flush of his skin. His black hair uncharacteristically wild, brushing his eyebrows because he's run his hand through it too many times. The passion flaring in his eyes.

But what's most beautiful is how vehemently he's defending me. From myself. The moment he started admonishing me for blaming myself, I instantly felt this weight fall off of my shoulders. He makes me feel lighter. Almost – blameless. Almost – perfect.

My fingers are tracing that bit of hair framing his forehead. I don't know when I started doing that. I had no intention of it. "You have no idea how good you make me feel," I whisper softly.

Baz shakes his head in confusion. "You're mental."
I blush, yanking my hand away from his skin, focusing my attention on the relative safety of the floor. "It's just – I – I think you're the only one who doesn't expect me to fix everything."

He shrugs his shoulders. "You know I've always thought this Chosen One thing is bullshit. You're one person. They can fix their own shit. The only person you should be worrying about is you."

I snort and shoot him a look. "You hardly take your own advice, lifesaver."

He raises an eyebrow. "I do take my own advice, Snow. You have no idea. That night – I was taking care of myself! I'm much too selfish to lose..." His eyes soften as he leans back a bit, "You," he finishes quietly.

He looks down at the floor, nudging my heel with the side of his foot. "Seriously though, get the fuck off my bed, Snow." His voice is gentle.

"Why does it sound like you're still protecting me?"

"Because I am. You need to get away from me."

"What happens if I don't?" I ask softly. I'm pretty sure whatever will happen if I stay right here is far more appealing than anything that could occur on the opposite side of the room.

He searches my eyes for a moment before tracing my cheek with his fingertips, gently resting his palm against my skin. That simple touch is spellbinding, hypnotizing. I let him pull me closer, his cool cheek brushing mine. His breath caresses my ear as he whispers, "I eat you alive."

I stay perfectly still, my heart pounding in my chest. The past few days have been miserable. He's been polite but impenetrable, keeping me at arms' length no matter what idiotic comments I made, trying without success to get a response from him. Anything. I'm starving for his attention, any of it, all of it. And now – he wants me? I still can't imagine why. He's so posh and sophisticated, everything I'm not.

"Simon," his smooth voice makes me shiver in anticipation.

BAZ

I know what I should say. I know several things that would drive him away. But I hesitate. At this point, I'd rather walk directly into an open flame than make him leave.

He's sitting so still – unexpectedly patient for Snow – and I find it so bloody difficult to say what needs to be said. Something in me rebels and I brush his cheek with my lips. Shifting closer, I nibble my way up his ear. The small sound he produces brings a smile to my lips.

I clutch the back of his head and kiss the base of his jaw. I work my way lower, kissing along his neck. He tips his head back in response.

I still don't know if he trusts me. Why he tolerates my teeth this close to his skin. I'm keeping my fangs in. I'm being so careful not to scrape his skin in the slightest. But he has to sense the insatiable, desperate monster lurking just below the surface.

Not that it's a monster he should fear. I'd protect him with my life.

Fuck, I'm supposed to be protecting him now, by staying away from him. Or protecting him from seeing the real me. Or.. who am I fooling? I'm taking my own advice. I'm protecting myself. I can't lose him. I won't.
I ease back, taking a deep breath, readying myself to speak these terrible, necessary words. But the instant my lips part to tell him that I will never let him in, he takes possession of my mouth.

I sink into another world. A beautiful world that smells like smoke and tastes like chocolate and feels like heaven.

His velvet tongue licks up mine, while his hands send pleasure down my neck, down my chest. He pushes me, gently, and I let myself fall back onto the mattress. I play with his hair, keeping his lips locked to mine. Letting him slowly unbutton my shirt. I make quicker work of his. Eager to feel his delicious heat against my palms again.

What was I thinking? The only plan I need is to stay here with Simon, letting him kiss me into oblivion until they come to attack us. His hands finally finish with the buttons, and now he's tracing my chest, kissing my lips.

Yes, I'm perfectly fine waiting here. Let them come to us. I'm lost in him and I don't ever want to be found.

Suddenly, I push Simon's shoulders away from me, breaking the kiss. "That's it!" I burst out, sitting up and taking Snow along with me.

Simon tilts his head at me, breathing raggedly.

"We set a trap! We let them find us!" I lean forward and kiss his lips excitedly.

He pulls back. "How can we set a trap? We don't know their plan."

I smile, kissing along his cheek until I get close enough to his ear to whisper, "No, but we know what they need." I lean back, catching his frown. I take a quick moment to kiss it off his face. Before painfully shoving off the bed. It might be annoying, but the pacing helps me think and the kissing doesn't.

"Remember they need three things," I count them off on my fingers. "The amulet, Pitch blood, and the spell. They only have one. They know I have the blood, and they likely think I have the spell."

"Wait, that's your genius plan? To be the bait?" He demands incredulously. "I don't like it, Baz. Besides, you don't know the spell."

I grin at him. "Exactly. They have no idea that I can't give it to them."

"But what if this all goes wrong? What if they capture you and torture you for it?"

I'm tempted to let my fangs pop, but I restrain myself. Instead, I start a fire in my hand and stare at the flames. "I'd like to see them fucking try."

"I'm coming."

I glance down at him. His fierce expression on my behalf makes my heart freeze over. That stubborn wanker is never going to let me go alone. Which is stupid, because if I'm wrong, if they already have the spell somehow. If they're only missing one thing – Pitch blood which they can get by cutting any part of me. If they unleash the ghosts, there will be nothing I can do to protect him. "Fuck no. It is out of the question."

He stands, leveling me with his obstinate stare. "Baz, I'm coming."
I know that look. I know there's nothing I can say to change his mind, but that doesn't stop me from trying. Dammit, he's buttoning up his shirt. "Snow, stop." I mean that in a couple of different ways. If I've got to waste my time arguing with him he ought to at least have the decency to let me look at his beautiful chest while I'm at it. "I can't be certain they don't have the spell. We can't take a chance that the ghosts won't be in play."

He goes right on buttoning up his shirt and ignoring common sense. "Baz, It's not a debate."

I try to think of any place we can lure them where he would be safe, maybe the bunker. No, they're ghosts. They can likely pass through walls and dirt. "I don't have to tell you what I'm planning or where I'm going!" I insist. Like hell, he's coming.

He pauses on the second-to-last button to give me his full attention. His lips curve down and I see the pain in his eyes. "No, you never have."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?" I demand in a low voice.

"It means – just try to lose me, you fucking tosser." He takes a step closer as if to intimidate me.

I wince. This feels like a terrible idea. If he's off the playing field, I know he'll be safe. But if I push him away and the prat follows me in any way – Aleister fucking Crowley. I can't protect him if I don't know where he is. If he's coming anyway, I have no choice but to keep him close.

"Snow. I don't like this. If they do manage to invoke the spell, I'll have no choice but to cut myself and cover you in Pitch blood and I don't even know if that will work."

His eyes widen for a moment and I see his hand involuntarily twitch for his invisible sword. "We'll get the amulet before it comes to that."

 Fucking confident avenging angel. He better be right.
I know Baz thought my plans were rubbish, but his is far worse. We're walking out to the middle of a field, in the middle of nowhere. "You should have at least sent them a note. They're never going to find us." I insist.

The sun is setting. It's low in the brilliantly painted sky, it's rays barely scratching the surface of the earth. Baz is strolling along in a posh suit like we're going to a bloody ball. He digs his cell phone out of his jacket pocket, which he activated as soon as we were off school grounds. "GPS. They'll find us."

"They don't know you have your cell phone on right now or that we've left school." I point out.

"They have people who track that sort of thing. They have an almost infinite amount of resources at their disposal. They'll find us and when they do, I prefer to be as far away from other people as possible." He turns to me, his gray eyes hooded with concern. "You should turn back now."

He'd already tried to convince me to wait at school a half dozen times. He knows I'm not going to leave now. I don't bother arguing with him again.

He tucks his phone back into his pocket, pulling to a stop in the middle of the harvested field. We can see for miles around us, other than a small copse of trees that's about 40 feet ahead there's nothing but sky and fields.

Baz removes a knife from his pocket, flips it open and brings it towards his index finger. "Unbutton your shirt."

I catch his wrist just below the knife handle before he can cut himself. "What are you doing, Baz? We shouldn't have any of your blood out in the open."

He snorts a laugh. "Then you shouldn't have come." He says, bringing his finger up to the knife to prick it.

I glare at him and release his wrist since the tosser went and cut himself anyway. He grabs the bottom of my shirt and pulls it up to my chin. His cold finger meets my chest and I freeze at his touch. Having someone write on me with blood ought to be disgusting. I ought to be repulsed by it, but my cheeks are heating, and if anything I'm aroused. It feels so intimate. Plus, he's protecting me... again.

I study his gorgeous, pale face for a moment before glancing down to see he's writing the word Pitch with his blood. I allow myself a half smile at the word. "If the ghosts don't sense the blood, we better hope they can read." I tease him.

He leans forward and gently blows on my skin. I close my eyes in utter rapture. His chilly breath makes me shiver in delight. I enjoy it for a moment before I realize he's written his name on me. Almost labeled me with his blood. As if I'm his.

If only that were true.

But he can kiss me as many times as he wants. He can save my life over and over. He can label me with his blood, but as long as he's keeping secrets from me, I'll never really be his. Or maybe I will
be in a way. Something he wants to keep safe and snog. Property, but that's all. I'm not his partner. I'm not his boyfriend and he doesn't trust me. He doesn't even want me here.

I take a step back and he lets the shirt drop back down, covering the word. He touches his finger to his tongue, licking it before tucking it back in his pocket. He drops to the ground, the sun at his back and gazes off into the distance. I'm assuming he's looking in the direction of the Hepburn mansion, but I don't know off hand.

I plop down beside him then rotate so that my back's resting against his. I shift a few times before the oat stubble beneath me become more tolerable. I have a feeling this is going to take a while. Actually, I have the distinct feeling they're never going to show. "A riddle maybe."

I can feel him turn his head. His hair brushes my ear. "A riddle?"

At least, I have a good view of the sun setting. He can only see the plain, open sky while we wait. (Probably doesn't want the sun on his skin.)"Well, we couldn't give them an address, but we could have mailed them a riddle. Maybe sped things up a bit."

He shakes his head. "I've turned on my GPS, and I'm waiting in a field for you. Come fall into my trap, you bloody idiots." He mutters.

It sounds stupid when he says it like that. "That's not a riddle and it doesn't rhyme," I insist.

"Right, what was I thinking." He replies sarcastically. "Rhyming riddles are much more subtle."

"Waiting in the middle of a field is subtle?" I demand. "What business could we possibly have here? Checking soil samples?"

"Snow," He turns slightly, his shoulder resting against mine. I glance over my shoulder at him. His face is so close I can see the pores in his skin. "You're right." He says softly. "We should walk back. Snog a bit in the car. Make it look like we drove out here for some privacy."

His whispered words warm me from my ear to my toes, which curl in anticipation. "That-

The back of his cool finger lightly brushes my cheek, drawing my attention to the fact I'm blushing. I push his hand away and stand. "That would be much more plausible than sitting in a field." And much more appealing.

"Wait," He catches my shirt with his hand and points into the distance. Something's approaching from the east but it's hard to tell what it is. He pulls himself to his feet beside me, before letting go of my shirt.

I glance down, quickly tucking it back in, as if preparing for a formal meeting. "What is it?"

He shakes his head, then after a moment he replies, "I think it's a unicorn."

I can just make out the white horse-like figure with wings now. It's a majestic creature, and it's alone, riderless. I still tense, expecting it to attack. "You think it'll gouge us with its horn?" I ask.

He flashes me a look of disbelief, "No, I don't think it'll gouge us with its horn!"

"What if it's an attack unicorn?" I insist, throwing out my hands.

A laugh bursts from him. "An attack unicorn? They don't attack people." But he pulls out his wand just the same. He's not as sure as he sounds.
I whisper the incantation for the Sword of Mages, and it appears in my hand.

The unicorn lands about twenty feet in front of us and walks casually over. As it draws near, its head turns to the side and it glances at us with an intelligent eye. It takes me a moment to realize why the eye looks so strange to me. Its pupil is vertical, surrounded by amber. It blinks, but I know I've seen an eye like that before. It hits me a moment later, I've only seen eyes like that in a dragon.

Baz raises his wand, just as I turn towards him. "Get down!" I throw myself into Baz and knock him to the ground, just as a plume of flame erupts from the unicorn’s mouth. I can feel the heat searing into my back. There is smoke all around us, curling off of me. I'm drenched in pain and power and smoke. Then everything goes black.

Baz

One moment I'm trying to get my wand arm free so I can cast a spell and protect the wanker who tackled me, the next I'm sinking into plush, rich dirt. An unfamiliar earthy scent seeps up from the ground. Aftershocks of Simon's power wash over me in waves. He must have gone off and teleported us to the ends of the earth.

I glance up and spot a thick-leaved bush a meter away. No unicorns, so that's a good sign, but there must be a hundred birds around us. They're infuriatingly loud.

I tilt my head back tracing my eyes up the trunk of an extraordinarily thick, moss covered tree. The air is so saturated with water that fog hovers around us, masking most of the branches.

I manage to turn enough to press against Simon's shoulder. I gently push him, and he budges a few inches to the side. He's dead weight, so going off must have knocked him unconscious again. He really should have let me cast my spell. He has no finesse whatsoever.

The smell of Simon's smoke is saturating the air, but it smells strange too and it takes me a moment to realize why. It smells putrid, like burning flesh.

Panic shoots through me, and I extricate myself more quickly so I can stare down at him.

His back is a fucking mess. Most of his shirt is simply gone, the rest is singed and smoking. I place a hand over my mouth as a gasp escapes unbidden. "Shit!" I mutter. I can't look away from what must be a second or third-degree burn. The skin is raw red with bits of black. Blisters are already starting to form.

I glance around for my wand, only to realize I'm still holding it. My heart is trying to beat my ribs to bits and my hand is trembling when I cast the first healing spell that comes to mind, "Early to bed, early to rise!" It doesn't seem to do anything. (Not that Simon could sleep this burn off at the best of times.) I cast a few more, but nothing changes.

I glance around as if someone will be standing nearby to offer me help. There is no help. If anything's out here it probably has more predatory intentions.

I kneel down beside Simon, my hand hovering over him, before coming to a rest on his golden brown curls that seem untouched. "Simon!" I brush his hair back. "Simon, open your eyes. Say something!"

I take a shaky breath, glancing around again, this time for panthers or snakes. Crowley, I have to get him out of here. I hold onto him and cast, "There's no place like home." But we don't move. I never have been able to pull off that level of spell. Few people can successfully teleport.
Simon groans and I sit back on my heels, staring at him while he stirs.

Simon

It hurts to move. It hurts to breathe all of this smoke. I haven't felt this spent since the Chimera. I must have blasted that unicorn-dragon to kingdom come. I would worry about Baz, except that I hear him calling my name. I feel his hand in my hair.

I try to sit up, but the movement causes crippling pain to shoot through my back. It feels like I'm being roasted alive. I didn't kill it quickly enough.

I try to glance over my shoulder, but I can't get a good look at my back. I'm not even sure I want to see the damage. Then I notice our surroundings. We're far from the field. "A jungle?" I guess, observing the trees around us.

Baz releases a shaky breath, looking relieved. "I don't know. You went off and brought us here."

I let my head rest against the ground. At least we got out. At least it was me that got burnt and not Baz. (I hear vampires are extremely flammable, and I'm mostly positive he's a vampire. It would certainly be easier to protect him if he'd just fucking tell me already. I'm so tired of all the secrecy.)

"Does my back look as bad as it feels?" I venture to ask.

"It's not too bad." He doesn't meet my eyes when he says it, "But it's not responding to any healing spells."

"I can't fucking move, Baz. I know it's bad, you tosser." I mutter. (It feels like I'm bloody dying.)

"This isn't an ordinary burn. Probably feels worse than it is." He glances around us in a paranoid fashion. (It's making me paranoid.)

I don't know if he's telling the truth or not now. I decide to close my eyes and pretend that he is.

"Cold as ice." When he says that I feel like I'm being chilled to the bone. I can still feel the heat searing me, but the cold is nipping my back as well. I think that might be a little better. It gives me something to focus on other than the burn, anyway. A cold frost-bit sort of pain.

"Do you know any teleportation spells?" I ask him. I'm reluctant to try again, but I'm 100% sure we're not walking out of here. We must be extremely far from the school. There are no jungles near Watford.

"Already tried." He returns.

"Here." I reach for his hand, groaning with pain. He takes my hand and I push power into him. I know intellectually that I shouldn't have any left at this point, but power has always seemed like a bottomless pit to me. I tap into the endless supply and send it to Baz.

"There's no place like home."

Baz

I'm half afraid we'll wind up in Hampshire and my dad will be towering over us demanding to know how we got into this mess.

I'm so fucking relieved when we appear in our room at Watford, that I want to cry.
Of course, the spell would take us here. This is home to me, home to Snow. This place feels more like home to us than anywhere else on Earth.

I glance down at Snow, who's sprawled out on the floor, exactly like he'd been in the woods. My strong, invincible, Simon. Crowley, I need to fix this. There's only one place that's going to have the information I need and that's the infirmary, which is on the other side of the school. It would take me forever to carry Snow there even if he wasn't in so much pain.

I squeeze his hand. "I have to go to the infirmary. I'll be right back. Do you want me to move you to the bed?"

"Merlin, no." He mutters against the floor.

"Alright." I lean down and kiss the top of his head. "I'll be right back," I say again. Before shooting to my feet and flying out of the room.

I rush across campus in a blind panic. I don't like leaving him for even a moment, but I have no idea how to cure this sort of burn. I have to leave. So I tear across the ground like a track star.

I rush into the infirmary and grab a Medical spell book off the shelf. I start flipping through it while walking towards the door. I have to assume there's some sort of magic over the burn preventing it from healing.

Magickal Burns, I find in the index. I quickly flip to the page and read the passage labeled, The truth will set you free. I run into the door frame, so I take a second to look up and point myself down the hall before reading the text while walking.

In order to heal a magickal burn, you must first break through the layer of magic that prevents it from healing. First, speak, "The truth will set you free", followed by a deep secret truth that is personally binding you. In order for the spell to work it's very important for the truth you pick to be something deeply personal. Simply stating a fact will be ineffective.

The blood freezes in my veins as I rest my finger against the last word. I have to tell Simon a deeply personal truth in order to heal him.

My hand slides into my pocket, stroking the face of my phone. I'm tempted to call a nurse. If I head back into the infirmary, I'm sure I can find someone's number. I could let a professional handle this.

What then, a nurse tells him a deep secret and they share a bond, and she (or worse, he, or is it worse? I'm still not sure that Simon's gay) shares a bond with him?

But the alternative is ripping my chest open and flooding him with a wave of my depravity. Surely, that's worse.

I glance back down the hall in the direction of Mummer's house. Simon's in pain and I promised him I'd be right back.

I will be.

I run all the way back and burst into our room. He hasn't moved an inch since I left.

I take a deep breath, lift my wand and stroll purposefully over to Snow. "The truth will set you free."

"Simon, I was late returning to school, because I was kidnapped by numpties."
"You were kidnapped by numpties?" Simon demands from where he lies on the floor. I was hoping the pain would distract him from my confession. But of course, the wanker has to zero in on my humiliation.

"Yes," I admit. "I was – trapped. They kept me in a coffin for 6 weeks." A wave of darkness presses in on me, choking me. I swallow it back. I'm not done; I have to say enough to make the spell work. It has to be deeply personal. "Nothing else could have kept me away from Watford." Nothing else could have kept me away from you.

Fuck. I can't say that last bit. What I said had better be enough.

I shoot a torrent of Get Well Soons and every other healing spell I've ever heard at him, and thank Chomsky they seem to be working. By the time I burn through all the ones I have memorized, his back stops looking like raw, blistered meat and the panic in my chest eases a bit. But his back still looks painfully red. I flip through the book for more spells.

"Baz. Why wouldn't you have told me that?" He sits up and turns, frowning at me.

I glare back at him. "That I was nabbed by fucking numpties like some powerless child? Gee, I wonder," I spit out. But the fact that he can apparently sit up without too much pain is a huge relief.

I flip back to the index and trace my finger down the page, stopping on burns. I concentrate on what I'm doing because if I allow myself to think of all the destruction my confession could cause, I'm not going to be able to function. "Try moving to your bed now, I'm nearly finished."

He stands cautiously and takes a few steps before dropping face-first into bed, his back exposed to me. "It feels a lot better."

I know it must, but I'm still glad to hear it.

"Baz." He raises up on his arm a little. "Thank you. For saving me."

His blue eyes widen with sincerity and it's almost like he's speaking with magic. With enough power to drive his words into the darkest parts of me – and light a spark. I feel dizzy; I can't possibly deserve the level of thanks his tone implies. He's thanking me with everything in him when I'm just trying to clean up my own mess. Aleister fucking Crowley - it's my fault he was burned in the first place. He should have never been there.

I step up and throw another barrage of spells his way.

"I thought you were plotting against me," he says softly.

"Of course not," I mutter between spells. "Don't be ridiculous."

"It's not ridiculous!" he sputters. "The old families hate the Mage and I wouldn't be surprised if they were plotting against him. And against me."

"We're not, and you're not the same as the Mage, Simon," I insist. I don't know when I stopped thinking of Simon as the Mage's tool, but I don't now. He's just – Simon. Only Simon. (My Simon.)
He sighs and sinks back into the mattress. "Fuck, Baz. Numpties after you. Goblins after me. Unicorn-dragons after us both. When does it all end?"

My chest squeezes at his tone. He sounds absolutely drained. I'd like to wrap him up in my arms and hide him away where no one will ever find us. A place where he can rest. And we can be at peace.

Instead, I cast spells until I'm out; completely drained. That last one was probably unnecessary. His skin had already returned to its perfect golden hue. I admire a mole along his spine and a few freckles by his shoulder blade I've never had the opportunity to see before, then throw the book onto the dresser.

I lean over and gently trace a few moles with a feather-light touch. "How does that feel?"

"Freezing."

I breathe a laugh.

"Seriously Baz, now all I can feel is that cold as ice spell."

Shit. I summon my last drop of strength and cast You're getting warmer – relieved when he relaxes, his head drooping forward.

I'm so tired that I can't resist dropping next to him on the bed. And while I'm there – I can't resist brushing my lips over that new mole near his neck. There are a few lower down, but they'd normally be harder to reach, so I already know this is going to be my favorite one on his back. I love the soft bump against my lips. "Better?"

"Mmm," he moans.

"Thank you for saving my life," I whisper against his warm skin. My thank you somehow seems weak compared to his, even though I thoroughly mean it. Even though it really should be more sincere since he was only hurt because of me.

"I owed you," he replies, his voice light, teasing. "I'm just glad I ignored you and tagged along."

I flinch back like I've been kicked in the chest. First, I told him I couldn't handle a few numpties and now I've proven I can't handle setting a trap and getting my mother's pin back. I'd be dead twice over if it weren't for him and Fiona. I've never felt so inadequate.

It's not only that I was absolutely worthless in the fight, but it's also the fact I set us up, to begin with. It was a horrible plan, waiting in a field for them to attack us. I don't know what I was thinking. That we were invincible? That we could simply snatch the amulet away and run?

No, that wasn't it. The fact of the matter was, I failed to plan for every contingency. I never expected them to try to kill us without a word.

I stand, feeling smaller than before. "Are you certain it's completely better?" I ask, nudging his singed sleeve with the backs of my fingers. The whole back of his shirt is burnt through. We'd ripped apart a couple of other shirts in the bunker. If we aren't careful he's going to need a whole new wardrobe soon.

He takes a deep breath and shoves himself into a sitting position. "Yeah."

I nod and start to turn, but his words stop me. "Baz. They don't need you."
I turn back to search his eyes for a moment. I'd been too busy trying to heal him to think about what the attack meant – but he's right. The Hepburns had sent those beasts to kill. Which meant they didn't need me for anything. Not for the blood. Not for the spell. "They have another Pitch," I whisper, dread creeping into my voice.

"They must," he agrees, leaning his forearms against his thighs.

"Fuck." I needed to talk to my dad, but I'd left the car on the side of the road. Anyway, it's late and I'm completely spent. It'll have to wait until morning.

Simon

I can't believe all the pain is gone. That he fixed me completely. That doesn't seem possible.

I watch Baz as he pulls his pyjamas from the drawer silently. I know he's thinking, probably plotting his next move, but he doesn't say anything to me. He simply heads to the bathroom to change.

I let my head fall into my hands. I don't want to think about the Hepburns or the Pitches or the amulet. I can only focus on the fact that I was wrong about Baz. He wasn't late because he and the other magickal families were plotting an attack. He'd been kidnapped. Held against his will. Trapped in a bloody coffin for six weeks?

And I didn't find him.

I'd searched every night, but like a total moron, I only searched the school. Obviously, he wasn't here. Obviously, he'd never come back. Now that I thought about it, it made no sense that he'd be at the school. I should have looked elsewhere. I should have found him.

I pinch the bridge of my nose, overcome with guilt and regret. Baz rarely needs anything and he never asks for help. And the one time he desperately needs a hero I'm wandering the empty catacombs and grounds like a gormless git.

I don't know what to say when he emerges from the bathroom, so I silently take my turn, trying to line up a coherent row of words in my mind while washing my face and brushing my teeth. I realize belatedly that I didn't bring any pyjamas in, but I'm more worried about what I'll say then changing.

When I emerge a few minutes later, I still don't have anything better than, "I didn't know how to find you, Baz. I'm sorry, I didn't know- I-" I glance at the window as if the moon will hand me the right words through the pane.

"I never asked you to find me," he growls back. "Fuck, Simon, I didn't want you to find me. Please –" he shakes his head, lying down in his bed, "just shut up and go to sleep."

"But I was wrong about you!" I insist.

"Not all wrong," he mutters, before beating his pillow into submission and throwing his head against it.

I decide not to touch that comment tonight. Not to ask for clarification. I don't know why, but this admission clearly cost him. It should have brought a wall down, but now it feels like there's something else between us. There's always something.

I want to go back to the field when he wrote his name on my chest and know what I know now. I want to feel like I am well and truly his. But maybe I never will be.
No, fuck that. I don't have the right words, I never do, but maybe I don't need words. Or – maybe I only need one.

Baz

I hear Simon open a drawer. I don't have to try to listen for him. He's always hovering on the edge of my senses, even when he's not the focus.

I'd recognize his footsteps anywhere. I register them coming closer. I can only hope that he's pulled out some pyjamas and that he's not doing something crazy. But I know with absolute certainty that he's not planning to change right in front of my bed.

My eyes flutter open as he grabs the bottom of my silk shirt and jerks it up towards my chin. I raise up to my elbows as his hot index finger meets my chest. He traces an 'S.'

My heart stops dead in my chest. I smell the blood now. I'm not sure how I missed it before, even with the smell of smoke still tingeing the air. I should have known at once that he pricked his finger.

I raise my eyes to his face, which is focused with fierce determination as he writes an 'N.' My eyes trace over the three moles on his right cheek, the one above his left eyebrow, then I get lost in his hair.

Pain stabs at my nose and behind my eyes. I swallow desperately, trying not to tear up, as he circles his finger in the shape of an 'O.'

I don't know what he's doing. (I know exactly what he's doing.) I don't know why he's claiming me. I don't dare hope that he could possibly want me. Not all of me. Not the deficient parts. Not my failings.

He finishes with the 'W' and then places his finger against my lips. His beautiful blue eyes meet mine, his eyebrows raised with a single question. I don't know what it is exactly, but I know for damn sure the answer is yes.

My lips part without conscious thought and I lick the blood from the tip of his finger, then pull it into my mouth, sucking it. His blood is better than I ever dreamed it would be. Simon tastes a bit like he smells, smokey and clean. There's a hint of something sweet. It's altogether good. No one evil could ever taste this pure. It's instantly, easily, my favorite taste in the world.

My fangs pop out, shaking me to my senses. I release his finger and retract them quickly. I don't know if he noticed them or not. (I hope not.)

He's such a bloody fool to put me in this position, and for some reason that makes me love him even more. My heart is nearly exploding with love for his idiot. I'm worried I'll go too far or do something stupid, or be unable to control myself.

But he doesn't seem concerned at all. I relax in the comfort of his lovely face, his hopeful smile. He bends down and blows on the letters, drying them on my chest.

I love the sensation of his hot breath on my skin, but I can't wait a moment more. I pull his face to mine and fall back against my pillow. Kissing his lips with all of the passion that's coursing through my veins. He lets his body fall against mine, then almost immediately pulls back. I'm only disappointed for a second before he shrugs off his ruined shirt and throws it onto the floor.

His chest meets mine again. My name against his. My blood against his. My lips against his. He shifts so that our bodies line up perfectly, and I don't know how anything could feel any better or any
more complete. His tongue enters my mouth, proving me wrong. This is the best I could ever feel.

One of his hands traces my jaw making it tingle. I absorb his warmth, his acceptance, his longing. And just like his blood, it's almost too good and too beautiful to be real. (It's certainly too good for me.) (But I want it more than anything.)

He forcefully rocks against me, pushes against me, like he can't get enough. He grips my hips, drawing me closer.

I was wrong again, it keeps getting better because every action he takes drives home the fact that he still wants me. After everything I've said and done, Simon Snow still wants me.

I let go of his face and trail my hands up his perfect back, happy beyond reason that I healed him. That I healed him with my words.

And he healed me with his blood.

I don't know how long we snog on my bed, but it feels too soon when he pulls away, breathless and sticky. His sweat is ruining our signatures and I couldn't care less. He can sweat on me all he wants.

He props himself on his forearms, staring down into my eyes. Looking absurdly powerful. He's always powerful, arguably the most powerful person in the world, but he doesn't often look it.

He holds all of me in those eyes.

"In case that wasn't clear," he says softly, tracing my temple with his thumb. "You're mine."

I can't help it. I grin. And then I pull his face back to mine because fuck if that wasn't the most beautiful thing I've ever heard him say.
Trouble in Paradise

SIMON

Waking up in Baz's arms is exquisite. Anyone else would be too hot to sleep with, all tangled up like this, but Baz's skin is refreshingly cool. We're perfect together.

I never felt this way about Agatha. We did the things couples did just to do them. And she was beautiful, sure – but as I stare at Baz's face, I realize he's more than beautiful. He's precious to me in a way nothing else is. I love every dark hair in his eyebrows. I love every line in his lips. I love every pore in his perfect face.

His nostrils flare slightly as he takes a slow, deep breath, his chest expanding to lift my arm a bit.

Baz isn't fragile in any way, but he seems that way to me right now. Maybe it's because he's sleeping. Maybe it's because we were just attacked and I can't stop thinking about what would have happened if Baz had been blasted with fire instead of me.

I don't know how I could carry on without him. (I don't think I could.) But I also don't know exactly how to keep him safe in this world. (Then again, I never know how to keep anyone safe. My magic usually takes care of it for me.)

My stomach is already growling at the prospect of scones, but I don't want to leave this room – I don't even want to leave this bed – without him. I pull him closer and press a gentle kiss to his cheek.

He stirs, blinking up at me, his forehead wrinkling slightly. He makes that face he always makes when it's too bright, or too early. It makes me smile.

He still has about 20 minutes until his alarm goes off, so I whisper, "It's alright. Go back to sleep." I decide to get up and get dressed, but I have to climb over him to get out of bed and when I do he wraps his arms and legs around me, locking me to his chest.

I close my eyes, still amazed that he wants me here. Part of me still expects him to push me onto the floor at any moment.

I tense for a moment, then relax against him. I take advantage of the situation by kissing his jaw and then his neck. We were too exhausted last night to kiss as much as I would have liked. (Forever. Give or take.) My hand is exploring his soft hair and I kiss along his jaw until I get to his lips.

He turns his head away. "Simon," he mutters. "Let me wash up first."

He's such a posh tosser. There's really no point in getting up to get ready for the day and then climbing back into bed to snog. If he thinks I care about his morning breath, he's wrong. "I'd rather you not." I kiss his chin instead, lightly biting it.

BAZ

I slowly awaken, desperate to keep Simon with me. Not just now, in this bed. (Although apparently my limbs had already decided to cling to him without any conscious input from me.) No – I want him for much longer.

My brain doesn't function well in the morning, and it's hard to plan out a way to accomplish that. Especially since I haven't figured out what bits of me he likes, and why on earth he likes them. I
certainly don't want to do anything to repulse him. (Although I'd have thought everything I've done thus far would have pushed him away, so what do I know?)

I know I love his lips and teeth on my skin. His heat seeping into my body, making me feel alive. Maybe if I don't move he'll keep covering me in kisses and I won't have to do anything at all.

Crowley, Snow's stomach is making a ruckus. I can feel it rumble against mine. You would think he hadn't eaten in days. And he'll need breakfast before class. If only the weekend was longer and we could lay in bed all day. (Not that we would.)

I let Simon go as memories of last night assault me. (The bad ones, not the good ones. I'll save those for later.) I wish I could have forgotten about them for a bit longer because now I'm trying to work out how I'm going to go to all of my classes and still have time to get the car back and visit my father.

"Baz, whatever you're thinking, just – stop," Simon says softly.

I gently push him away, and he willingly slides the rest of the way out of bed. His feet settling on the floor.

"I can't. One of us has to plan things." It comes out harsher than I'd like and I internally wince. I don't know how to balance everything right now. Simon, school, this infernal pin. The weight of it all suddenly feels crushing. Not to mention I need to feed and I won't have time for hours yet.

I squint in the blazing sunlight and frown up at him. His blue eyes are wounded. It's as though I've kicked a puppy. I soften my tone, "Snow, come on. You'll want to get down to breakfast before class."

His forehead wrinkles a bit, his eyes flashing. "I don't always need to eat!" he insists, as if it was an insult. I look away, hurt. (I was trying to be considerate.)

"Your stomach begs to differ!" I bite back. I don't mean to throw in a sneer, but old habits die hard and I'm far from congenial in the morning. He glares at me for a moment, then turns, stomping to his wardrobe and angrily yanking out a fresh uniform.

I wince, visibly this time – because his back's to me. I want to say something to soften things back up between us, but it's probably better if I keep him at arm's length for now. I've got to go to class. Taxi to the car. Drive to Hampshire, check in with my father. Somewhere in there I'll have to find time to feed. It'll take ages and I know I'll get back late.

Part of me warms at the thought of Simon's eyes blazing up at me, insisting on accompanying me. A larger part of me simply feels irritated that he'd fight to come along for no good reason.

So. It's decided. There really is no point to him tagging along. No point in us both being up late. Hopefully, he'll still be willing to talk to me when I get back.

SIMON

I pace our room for an hour after class. I assumed Baz and I would meet back here to plan our next move, but he hasn't returned. My stomach has tied itself up in knots and my brain is painting the vilest pictures it can of where Baz is and what's happening to him. I wander the school grounds, ask Niall if he's seen Baz. Of course, he knows nothing. Then, in desperation, I explore the catacombs. It's like the beginning of term all over again.
It was never like this with Agatha. I never worried about where she was or what she was doing. Never once did I think she might be dead somewhere when I didn't see her.

But it's always been like this with Baz. (I wonder if it always will be?)

I return to Mummer's every hour. When I open the door this time it's after midnight. I throw myself onto my bed. Then angrily get up and sit on Baz's bed instead just to spite him. I briefly entertain the idea of stealing one of the Mage's birds to send him a message, but I don't have the finesse for that sort of magic. I can't use my magic on people or animals. It always goes wrong.

I know fuck-all about vampires. I know Baz wants to snog me, but that doesn't mean he has these same feelings for me. Maybe vampires want to snog everyone and have feelings for no one. (He can't possibly have the same feelings I do, because I would never do this to him.)

I would have kissed him in the morning. I would have rushed back here to talk to him after school. (In fact, I did.)

I don't think it's all a trick. I think he does enjoy kissing me. But that doesn't mean he wants to be together. He never said I was his. I told him what I wanted, last night – but I never asked what he wanted. I'm such a bloody fool when it comes to these things.

It's after one when I finally work out that he only told me about the numpties because he had to. Because of that spell. He hasn't let me in, not really. I don't think he wants to let me in.

I'm exhausted, so I slump back on his bed and wait for him, fighting to stay awake. I don't know what else to do.

BAZ

It's nearly two in the morning when I get back. My father gave me a lead as soon as I handed him the car keys.

"Basil," he'd said. "I thought of something after you boys left the other day. There was a member of the family who came round asking about the amulet after Natasha passed. Gabriel Pitch. I gave him a call and he said he'd be happy to talk to you about it. I figure it can't hurt to have another member of the family read in. I doubt he'll want to stand up to the Hepburns, but it never hurts to make the connection. He said he can meet you on Wednesday at 5 o'clock. I'd go with you, but I have a previous engagement and he made it sound like that's the only time he has available. I've got his number and address in my office."

I was relieved that he offered up a lead without me having to ask. There's no way he would've casually shared this information if he knew what happened – that we were attacked by a mutant beast. Or if I spelled out the implications of this attack – that the Hepburns must already have a Pitch. (Who may or may not be a willing participant.) He doesn't know how dangerous following this lead is going to be, but I do.

Which is why I'm not going to tell Simon about this. Gabriel agreed to meet with me, but I doubt he'd tell me anything with Simon tagging along. This is a family matter. (And I'm not putting him in danger again. I can still smell his burning flesh.)

I slip into the room as quietly as I can. I'm tired beyond all reason, but the blood sloshing around in my stomach has soothed my nerves, at least.

I immediately spot Simon sleeping in my bed; he's propped up against the headboard, like he was waiting for me. Crowley, he's beautiful. Perfect. His golden skin once again beautiful and whole. My
I'm riddled with guilt as I change. I can't stop thinking about our disastrous encounter with the dragon, about the acrid smell of Simon's burned flesh. I knew it was only a remote possibility, but I should've had a contingency plan if the Hepburns already had the blood and the spell. I might as well have served both of us up on a silver platter. That was incredibly arrogant and idiotic of me – and it almost killed Simon. My mind is swirling. I can't stop berating myself. All my plans to draw them out, to negotiate with the Hepburns and buy us time, were for nothing. I should have given more thought to this. I ignored a knight on the chess board, a near-fatal mistake. One I can't afford to make again.

When I return from the bathroom, I consider slipping into bed alongside Simon. Wrapping my arms around him. Absorbing his heat. If I wake him, he'll probably be angry with me. (Which is as much a reason to do it as not. Any interaction with Snow holds appeal.)

But I don't deserve to sleep by Simon, or feel warm and alive tonight. And anyway, I still can't afford to get too close to him. (Not yet.) I need to visit Gabriel on my own, so I can't tell Simon anything about it. Simon's not my pawn. He's my king. He's my everything. If I lose him, it's game over, I won't want to go on. I'll fortify him behind as many pieces as I can, no matter how angry that makes him.

So I lay down in Simon's bed and inhale the scent of smoke and shampoo deeply. For once, I immediately drift to sleep.

SIMON

When the sun's rays wake me from slumber, I glance hastily around. Baz is in my bed, the tosser. I'm so angry with him I could break the Anathema. (Although mostly I'm relieved.)

I get dressed, but I don't go down to breakfast. I walk over to my bed and crossly notice how beautiful his dark hair looks, tumbling into his eyes.

I shove his shoulder. "Where the hell were you?" I demand. I'm starting to smoke, so I take a few deep breaths to calm myself.

He groans. He doesn't even bother to look at me.

"Where were you?" I demand again, kneeling down to glare at him.

He rolls away from me and I want to throttle him.

"It's fucking over, Baz." That's a lie. "I can't do this." Another lie. "Do you even want to be with me?" Pathetic. (I should really think about what I'm going to say before I speak.)

"Please." (Now it sounds like I'm begging him to be with me.) (I might be begging, I am on my knees.)

He turns back to glare at me. "Of course I want to be with you, you git. Stop blustering, it's too early."

"Then tell me where you were! Do you have any idea how worried I was?" I point at him. "And don't you dare say you were kidnapped again."

He raises up on his forearms. "I was taking the car back to my dad's. Where the hell do you think I was?" He sneers at me a bit. "I'm not going to tell you everything I'm doing and everywhere I'm
going just because we're snogging now. So stay the fuck out of my business."

I'm so angry, I'm afraid I'll go off. There's no reason he couldn't have told me he was taking the car back. No reason to hide that. So either he's lying, or he's extremely inconsiderate. Either way, I need to get out of here before I bring down all of Mummer's house. I shove him one last time, then turn to leave.

His harsh voice follows me. "And I don't want your help with the amulet, Simon. This is a family matter and it's too dangerous. Give me some space, or it really is over."

"It is over!" I yell back. I storm out of our room, slamming the door behind me. Doesn't he understand that if he doesn't let me in, we don't have anything? I don't want to snog him while he's here and then have him run off to who knows where to do who knows what without me. I leap down the stairs, two – then three – at a time. I'm a bloody fool because nothing has changed. He's still as distant as ever. He doesn't want the kind of intimacy that I do. He probably never will, and kissing is not enough for me. He'll drive me fucking crazy with his secrecy. How can I be with someone who doesn't want me to know who they really are? (I can't.)

Penny notices my mood (or maybe the smoke tips her off) when I flop down next to her with a heaping pile of scones and even more butter. (I'm tempted to eat it with a spoon like I did first year.)

"Well good morning to you too. Were you attacked on the way to breakfast?" She rolls her eyes a bit. She'd be more worried if she really thought I had been.

I shake my head. "Something like that." I should tell her about Baz and the amulet and everything. I really should. She is my only true friend. The only one I can really count on. (I don't know what to say.)

"Honestly, Simon, if it's that gremlin again..." Her voice trails off.

I nod. "Yeah, it's the gremlin," I lie. (I never lie to Penny. Something is seriously wrong with me.)

"I thought Baz spelled it from your room?"

"Fine! It's Baz!" I admit.

"Not this again." She rolls her eyes and takes a bite out of her toast.

"You complain about Trixie enough," I mutter, but for once I'm relieved she doesn't want to hear the details.

"10% of conversations, Simon," she reminds me. "That's all the Baz talk I can take."

I watch him stroll in, acting like he bloody owns the place. I'm glaring at him when his eyes make contact with mine. He doesn't glare back. He simply looks away, emotionless, then gathers a little food and sits with his mates.

For all appearances, he doesn't even care we've broken up. (Were we ever together?) (I don't think he ever really cared about me.)

I huff a breath of air. "Fucking tosser."

BAZ

I can't help but watch Simon for most of breakfast. He's so hot when he's angry. He's smoldering this
morning, passion billowing off of him. I can smell his green smoke from here.

He was worried about me. It still comes as a surprise. He knows I'm not plotting now, and he still wants to know where I am. Not that I can tell him without placing him in danger, which I'll never do again. What I did was unforgivably stupid. I won't rule out my own incompetence this time. I might make a mistake like that again, and if I do, he can't be anywhere near.

My vision blurs a bit as I focus on his bronze curls. He can't have meant it when he said that it was over. (He might as well have stabbed me in the chest, but apparently the Anathema didn't see it that way.) His words play again, filling me full of holes.

Because I was wrong before. I wouldn't die happy with Simon's blood on my tongue. As wonderful as it is, I'll always want more. I want to feel his magic thrum through me, again. I want to fight off monsters with him by my side, again. I want to watch movies with him and cuddle with him and have a future with him. I desperately want every experience with him, all of him. A lifetime of Snow.

But it's better if he keeps his distance for now. Hopefully, he's angry enough to give me some space. Enough space that I can follow this lead and ultimately end this threat. I desperately hope that when it's all over he's willing to take me back. But I refuse to put him in any more danger to make my wishes come true. After all, I can't have him forever if he's dead. No one can.

I take a slow sip of coffee, picturing him in my bed last night. I should have slipped in beside him while I had the chance.
Trapped

Baz

I'm feigning a casual stroll up the long cobblestone walk to Gabriel's mansion when the disorientation hits. I'm suddenly – shockingly – empty, hollowed out as if I've lost part of myself. I come to an abrupt halt and it takes me a moment to work out that I'm in a dead spot. I shudder.

I can't imagine my home being on a dead spot. The magic that would cost a family is tragic. I feel pity for Gabriel as I walk on, gazing up at his enormous castle. This place must be centuries old. I spot a few gargoyles on the parapets, leering down over the imposingly large front doors.

When I was young, my father told me that gargoyles keep evil spirits away and the ones on my bed would protect me. At first, I thought that was why the wraiths never bothered me in my room. Later I decided it probably had more to do with the fact that I was a vampire. I suppose I must have been right. These gargoyles hadn't protected my relative from the Humdrum.

I'm about to ring the bell when a noise at the edge of my senses draws my eyes to the walk. Simon. He's headed straight towards me with a scowl on his face. "You said you were going to the Wavering Wood," he growls.

I hurry to meet him before he can get too close to the door. "How did you follow me?" I growled back in a low voice. I should have noticed him before. He can't be here.

"Never mind that, just tell me what you're up to." His golden curls are being tousled by the harsh wind. The wanker didn't even bother with a coat even though it's quite nippy out today.

"Visiting a relative, and you need to leave at once." I pull up short of him by a couple of feet.

He takes a step forward, closing the gap. "No. You need to stop lying to me."

"Gentleman!" A booming voice causes us both to turn towards the entrance. "Come inside. You'll catch a cold in this wind."

I scowl at Simon, but he just shoulders past me to the door.

Fuck! I rub my temple, as I follow on his heels. There has to be something I can do to protect him, but we're in a dead spot. No spells are going to work here. Which means the amulet won't work either. I suppose that's something. I won't have to figure out a way to covertly cover Simon in my blood. Still glad I have my knife on me, though. You can't be too careful.

Gabriel's posh suit is pulled taut across his lean frame, as he holds the door open. He looks a little too happy to see Simon for my liking. His dark brown eyes are sparkling as he waves us both inside.

I notice Gabriel hide a slight shiver as he shuts out the cold. His dark black hair is combed back like mine was before the wind got ahold of it. That and the widow's peak makes him look almost as much like a vampire as I do, albeit a middle-aged one. His skin's a little tanner, though.

He stretches out his hand to Simon first. "Gabriel Pitch, glad you came!"

Simon looks a bit taken aback but shakes his hand just the same. "Simon Snow - pleased to meet you."
He turns to me, as if I'm an afterthought. "Basil, your father told me to be expecting you." He shakes my hand then gestures to a row of hooks along the far wall. "You can hang your coats over there, and take your shoes off if you don't mind. Over there on that carpet."

The carpet's a few feet away from the wall and looks a little out of place in the castle. It's black, thin and worn. You would think he'd have gotten something a bit newer to go with the décor.

We make our way over. I start to shrug off my coat, then suddenly, there's no ground beneath me. As I'm falling, I try to reach out to grab the straight edge of the floor when it passes my line of sight, but my arms are tangled in my coat sleeves.

I watch as Simon grabs the edge of the floor with one hand. He reaches back and snags the lapel of my coat with the other. I'm pulled to a halt, spinning halfway around. I hear a ripping sound as my left arm tears against the sleeve it's half out of.

We've mostly fallen through to the next floor. The dirty ground is only a few feet beneath me. Grime and mold assault my nostrils when I take my next breath.

I glance up at the sound of struggle and get dust in my eye just before I fall the rest of the way to the ground. I try to soften Simon's fall a bit, wrapping my arms around him and making sure his head doesn't hit the ground. The weight of him crushes me into the dirt.

I rub at my right eye before I glance up at the hole in the floor. It's bigger than I'd thought it was: about 10 feet square, and I don't see any floor hanging down. It must have retracted rather than fallen open. I'm not even sure how Simon managed to catch the side of it.

"The Mage's heir! This is too good," Gabriel laughs gleefully, smirking down at us. "Take them both out at once. I'll be a hero for certain!" He waves a finger down in our direction. "I had hoped you'd bring him to me, Basil, but I wasn't counting on it." He shakes his head. "Bloody brilliant."

Simon stumbles up and away from me, muttering an incantation, fingers twitching at his hip, but of course the Sword of Mages doesn't appear. Not in a dead spot. It's all up to me now.

I stand, brushing my suit off. "You're working with the Hepburns?" I call up at him, still blinking my right eye to work the damn dirt out of it. I walk over to the bars and locate the hinges of the door. It's padlocked.

My mind spins rapidly, calculating. I harden my face into my habitual unruffled arrogance. Even if we pick the lock, there are chains woven through the bars and the door. I follow the links up to several rows before I spot the padlock joining the ends together. It's about ten feet up and facing outward. I'd be able to reach it standing on Simon's shoulders, but even if I could manage to turn it around and pick it with my knife, it'd take some time to unthread the chain. And then, of course, we'd have to make our way out of the house, through Merlin-knows what other booby traps.

"With the Hepburns? Hardly. I hired them! Do you even know how much extra money you boys have cost me? It was supposed to be a simple operation. One gremlin and you wouldn't have even noticed it was missing. But you had to be difficult. Now, they want to charge me for a number of ridiculous things. You should have seen the bill!" He steps back out of sight. Then whispers excitedly. "Not that it matters, not that it matters. Everything's coming together. I'll end this single-handedly." He steps back into view, a dark silhouette, and points down at me. "And then you'll see. You'll all see!"

I rub my eye again and finally clear it. "See what?" I had to keep him talking. We were family,
maybe I could get through to him.

"The Old Families will be in charge again. No more taxes. No more raids. We'll keep the traditions alive!" He strolls back into our line of sight, gesturing down. "As we always should have. One man! One man thinks he can destroy what it's taken decades – no, centuries! – to build. Not anymore." He shakes his head before pacing out of the frame. "But one man will restore it all. I'll be famous." His voice grows quieter, more urgent, "Not that it matters. Not that it matters! What matters is restoring all of magic."

"What of the Humdrum!" I call up. "We still-

"The Humdrum -" he bursts out, contemptuously, striding back into sight. "Is probably the doing of that corrupt nincompoop! With the Mage out of the way, I anticipate that whole situation will simply resolve itself. And if not, we'll deal with it much more competently than he has, I can tell you that much!" he bellows. "It's getting worse, not better!" Then quieter, he adds, "Ending the Mage is ending the Humdrum, if you ask me."

"What does that have to do with Snow and me?" I call back up.

He throws out his hands. "You're in the right place at the right time! They'll be here any minute. I'd back away from the hole if I were you, Basil. Won't matter if Snow has a few broken bones when he dies, but there's no sense in you getting hurt if we can avoid it." He points back down. "And you'll thank me later. You all will!"

So he was planning to use the amulet? On the mage and his men and Simon? Would it even work in a dead spot? "The amulet is magic, Gabriel. It won't work here."

"Ah!" He says, crouching down and holding up a finger. "But that's the brilliance of it all. My manor is only partially on a dead spot. The Mage won't be able to magic his way out of this one, none of you will! But I can unleash vengeance a few rooms away and it will be inescapable! The protectors can travel a few city blocks according to legend, thirty-three feet shouldn't be an issue." He starts muttering to himself again. "They're late. They're late, but they'll be here! They'll be here."

I take a deep breath, my eyes cutting to Simon, he stares back with wide blue eyes. I don't think I've ever seen him look so afraid and helpless. He doesn't have his magic here. He can't go off and save the day. It's all up to me.

I focus on Gabriel with renewed determination. I draw on all my reserves of power and entitlement to sneer up at him – as equals – as if we were standing level and jointly considering a vexing problem. "Fascinating plan, Gabriel. Worthy of a Pitch. But you've failed to consider that we need Snow alive as a contingency. We can use him if necessary against the Humdrum. If you're wrong and ending the Mage doesn't resolve that situation, and we've just ended Snow as well, it could be a lot more bother than it needs to be."

Gabriel throws out his hands again. "Baz! Use your head, boy. He's the Mage's Heir. If the Mage dies, he could be put in charge! That boy could still carry out his evil plans! No, we can't have the Mage or his Heir alive."

"I wouldn't!" Simon calls up, urgently. "I don't want to be in charge!"

Gabriel points at him angrily, "I know what you can do, boy, and it's not natural! You're every bit as evil as that man is, maybe worse! Oh!" His footsteps hammer against the floor and I close my eyes against the new dust and dirt he turned loose on us. "They're here! How many did you bring this time, you arse? Three, four? No matter."
"At least, let me out of here! My father will-
"
He bursts back into view. "Your father will thank me! They all will. If you want to help, you'll get
that brat out of sight and keep him quiet. That's your role in this." The floor slides shut, blocking him
from view.

I take a few steps back, pulling Simon with me. My fingers brush over the knife in my pocket. I draw
it out and flip it open. My hand is shaking, so instead of nicking my finger, I cut a jagged line. It
bleeds immediately and I wince when I make a stroke across Simon's forehead. I feel like the walls
are closing in on me. I glance at the stone sides to make sure the room isn't shrinking. It's not.

I close my eyes, feeling the coffin around me all over again. Panic pounds my chest, forcing the
breath from my lungs in heavy rasps.

Simon grabs my arm, grounding me. I'm not alone this time. But in some ways that makes it worse.
I'm not going to die here, but Simon might if I can't save him. And part of me will die with him.
Probably the rest of me.

Simon pulls me forward. His breath warms my ear as he whispers, "As soon as they enter, we yell,
warn them." I take a deep breath, enjoying the warmth radiating off of him for a moment. Clamping
down on the panic enough to think.

We could try to yell, but calling anything out will likely draw them closer, right into the trap. And at
this point, Gabriel's likely to kill Simon either way. After all, the Mage won't be as powerful without
his "Chosen One" weapon.

"That's not going to do any good." I drag him over to the bars. "I'll climb on your shoulders and pick
that top lock."

Simon

I don't even see a top lock just rusty metal chains that extend too far.

I can feel Baz's blood dripping down my forehead, towards my eyebrow. My hand involuntarily
comes up. I stop myself from wiping it away at the last moment and push a few strands of hair back
instead. "What do you mean it's not going to do any good?"

"If anything it'll attract their attention and draw them into the trap." He waves me over, "Come on! If
we can unlock these bars by the time the others fall in, maybe we can all stop him together."

I sigh and head over lacing my hands together. He turns me so my back is to the bars, then steps into
my hands with one foot, while grabbing onto the bars behind me with his hands. He hauls himself
up, stepping onto my shoulders like I'm part of a ladder. The chain is pressing uncomfortably into my
back, but I'm not in any danger of tipping over at least.

"Fuck, I can't get to it." His shoe is shifting on my shoulder, so I grab his ankle with one hand.

I could die down here. I can't go off, I can't do anything. If the blood doesn't work, I'm dead.

The drop hits my eyebrow and the fingers of my free hand reach up to brush the blood along my
temple. I glance down at my stained fingers and rub the blood with my thumb until it balls up. I wipe
it off on my pants.

Everything about this is dirty. It smells like the catacombs down here, but earthier. I should have
never followed Baz. Not into the catacombs, not to this house. Why can't I ever mind my own
business? "I should have listened to you," I tell him gently.

"Shut up, Snow." His weight shifts again. He's jerking around up there now, pulling at the chains. He told me not to come because he was trying to protect me... again. And what do I do? Break up with him.

I hear footsteps above me and although some muffled speech comes through the floor, I can't make out any words. Baz is probably right. Even if I call up, they won't be able to tell what I'm saying.

I shift my back a bit so the chains are cutting into a different part. "Baz, if I don't make it - "

"I said, shut up! You're making it." He responds through gritted teeth.

I rub his soft pant leg. His trousers are far too nice to be wearing in a dungeon. I can't believe this might be the last time I touch his posh clothes or talk to him. "I- I didn't mean it- when I said it was over."

"The only thing I care about right now is keeping you alive. So unless you have some brilliant idea, shut the fuck up."

The floor opens up and several people fall in. The Mage stands out with his green hood and boots. He rolls into the fall then leaps up, drawing his wand like a sword. He points it upward, then hesitates. His arm drops back to his side. "You'll be sorry!" He shouts up. He looks like a powerless man in a costume. I never thought I'd see him like this.

The sight would probably please Gabriel if he was paying attention, but one of the men caught onto the side and he has a white cloth pressed to his mouth. It takes a few moments, but the man drops in a moment later. I feel my legs tense, wanting to run over to catch him, but a few of the other men rush in to soften his fall. The lower him to the ground, unconscious.

I glance up at Baz, who has turned the lock around and is busy messing with it. The floor above us slides shut.

"Simon!"

My eyes jerk to the Mage. He's breathing hard, his eyes racing frantically.

He rushes to me, his gaze snagging for a moment on my forehead before shooting up to Baz. "What are you doing here?" he shouts in disbelief.

Something falls to the ground beside me and I look down, spotting the padlock. "You did it!"

It feels like Baz almost falls, so I shift under his weight. He's jerking at the chains again, loosening them. "A little help here!" Baz demands.

The Mage's men rush over to help with the chains, and I recognize Premal. Penny's brother. She would die if anything happened to him. Even if he can be a tosser sometimes. "Baz, I don't know if we have enough time. You should cover everyone in blood first."

"Simon, you can't be here! What were you thinking?" The Mage steps closer, all of his attention on me. "This is a dead spot. You're vulnerable here and we can't afford to lose you. I won't lose you! After all I've done!"

He didn't even know half the danger we were in. I thread my hands back together. "Baz!"
He makes an aggravated sound, but climbs down me, sparing a moment to search my eyes. His eyes are very dark gray in the dim light, but they're soft when he reaches up to touch my cheek, lovingly. "Fine," He whispers, before glancing down at his finger. He reaches into his pocket for the knife again and cuts the next one.

He reaches out and hastily marks the three men near us on various parts of their faces, whatever he can reach.

"Hey!" Premal protests. "What are you doing?" He reaches up and wipes it off with the back of his sleeve.

"Let him," I say. "We don't have time to explain, but Baz's blood might be the only thing that can protect us now."

"Over my dead body!" Premal snaps.

Baz shrugs indifferently. "Your call."

I shove Baz. "No! Especially him!"

He flares his nostrils at me, but reaches out and manages to swipe at Premal a few more times through his flailing hands.

"Keep working those chains loose!" Baz commands them. Premal glares at him, but they all obey. It's hard not to listen to Baz when he's speaking with that kind of authority. When he steps away, I nod towards the Mage.

Baz hesitates, but instead of walking over to the Mage, he strides over to the man who's passed out on the ground and carefully traces his brow.

When he returns I raise my brows towards the Mage. If he doesn't mark the Mage, I'll wipe some of the blood off my forehead and do it myself.

"Simon. What is the meaning of this!" He demands, throwing back his green hood.

I don't bother explaining. I doubt it's going to take Gabriel long to speak the incantation. Everyone needs to be covered before then. "Baz!" I widen my eyes at him. His jaw is set and I'm afraid he's not going to listen. I know he doesn't like the Mage, doesn't agree with him, but he can't really want him to be torn assunder by ghosts. "Please."

He takes a deep breath, searching my eyes for a moment before stepping over and swiping his finger down the Mage's left cheek. There's not a lot of blood in the stripe, but hopefully, it'll do.

A moment later a piercing cry reaches our ears.

"Behind me!" Baz shouts while glancing at me. He takes a step back, wraps an arm around me and presses me into his back. My chin is crushed into his shoulder and one of my eyes is in his hair when I see them materialize out of the wall before us.

I can feel the men rush behind us, one trips over his own feet as he goes. There are a few gasps and one cries out in fear, but I can't spare any of them a glance. My attention is focused on the snarling men of war that pour into the room. They don't flicker in and out like the ghosts during a visiting. They look nearly solid. Most of them are dressed in uniforms from various wars, some worn, some covered in dirt, but every color is vivid, real. I spot a bayonet and then a pistol. One whips out a sword at the sight of us.
They keep coming, emerging on top of each other and blending together. It's impossible to say how many there are. Too many.

The temperature drops as they come. I cower behind Baz and his arm tightens around me as he raises his other hand. "Halt, men! I am Tyrannus Basilton Grimm-Pitch and I command you to stop, these men are with me. Under my protection. They are not a threat!" He barks out in a resonant voice.

A few of the ghosts zoom over our heads, their bodies lengthening to unreal proportions. Everyone ducks down except Baz. I'm trembling against him and the men are crying out in terror and diving to the floor for their lives, but if anything Baz stands up straighter. He becomes more commanding, the general of this whole fucking army, who they had better obey. He's fucking fearless, powerful. There's no one else in the whole world I'd rather be standing behind.

"There is no war." He enunciates every word with power as if each one is magic. "There is no enemy here. No one to protect. You are free to rest in peace!"

A few of them open their mouths and there's a piercing sound like a ringing in the ears, but no words. They fly around the room in agitation, swooping closer to the men. The ghosts seem to be in a state of confusion. I don't know if it's the blood on everyone or Baz's words but they lose their ranks and drift aimlessly apart.

A freezing cold breeze hits me as one shoots behind me. I clutch Baz harder, squeezing my eyes shut as a sense of dread washes over me. Death is at hand, I can feel it. A man screams behind me and I can only hope it's in fear rather than pain but I can't make myself turn to look. I'm frozen in terror.

"Go, rest in peace!" Baz commands them again, gesturing violently towards the wall.

The cold and terror ease up enough for me to open my eyes and see them zooming away in different directions, disappearing through the walls.

I take a deep shaky breath, still trembling violently. I keep glancing at every wall for several moments before I'm well and truly convinced that they're gone.

I focus on taking another breath. Baz's arm is strong and sure against my back, while I'm squeezing the life out of him. I relax my hold, but I can't stop shaking.

I glance behind me at the other men. They're all accounted for, and the only blood I see is Baz's. I've never been so relieved in my life. I was afraid at least one of them would be bleeding to death on the floor.

Baz spins around, wrapping his arms around me, clutching the back of my head and holding it to his shoulder, like he'll never let me go. I close my eyes feeling safe in his arms. Finally allowing my muscles to slowly relax.

Baz

I hold Simon against me, wanting him closer than I can get him. Wanting him deep inside of me, completely covered with my skin and blood, completely safe. I let my shoulder relax a little. I still can't believe that worked. I'm profoundly relieved that the ghosts are gone, and Simon is here, alive, against all probability. I guess I never really believed that would stop them. I just didn't know what else to do.

We still have to deal with Gabriel, I remind myself. Simon isn't safe yet. This was only the first round.
I take a deep breath to steady myself before stepping away. I press my lips together and force my arms to drop away from Simon, against their will. My eyes are still lingering on Simon's gorgeous blue ones when I turn to the Mage and his cowering, speechless sycophants. "Gentleman," I say, deliberately drawing out the word. Letting the insult and command linger in the shocking stillness of the chamber. "Let's get the chains off these bars."
I'm With You

Simon

The Mage and his men are thoroughly rattled. They work silently under Baz's direction, with bent heads and shaky hands. Even so, it doesn't take them long to unwind the chains and pick a final hidden padlock.

By the time Baz pushes open the rusty door, the dark-haired man on the floor is stirring. Not surprisingly; those squeaky hinges could've wakened the dead. (My stomach lurches – I really don't want to think about dead people awakening right now.)

"What happened?" the man stammers, pushing himself into a sitting position and glancing around fearfully. His eyes widen as he takes in the cell. He looks outright bewildered when he notes Baz and me among the group.

"Never mind that now, Mark – be thankful you were unconscious," Premal snaps. He takes the man's hand and hauls him to his feet. "Also –" He gestured towards Mark's brow, "hurry up and clean that mess off your forehead." Premal had already rubbed the blood off his own face the moment the ghosts departed.

Mark paws at his face clumsily, then does a double-take at the reddish smear on his hand.

"Not your blood," Premal says shortly, answering the unspoken question. He glances about at the rest of the group expectantly, and they all quickly wipe Baz's blood off their skin.

I'm boiling at the exchange before I even realize it; I have to force myself to turn away. The wankers couldn't even thank Baz for saving their lives! They swipe away his blood like it's nothing! They-

The Mage suddenly interrupts my train of thought, moving to the open door and attempting to reclaim command of the situation. "All right men – follow me now, and be on the lookout for more traps. Be careful where you step!"

As an afterthought, he glances back at me. Apparently noting the blood still marking me, his eyes narrow and he swipes at his own cheek where Baz reluctantly touched him. (I look back at him rebelliously; I think I'll keep Baz's blood right where it is.) "Simon, hurry up now. You're last."

My rebellion unexpectedly sputters out in a wave of relief that we're not alone in this anymore. That for once, we can let the proper authorities take care of things.

I nod and wait for the other men to make their way through the bars. I glance back at Baz. "You were brilliant," I whisper. "You saved us. All of us."

He's glaring at the Mage. But his eyes soften when they fall to mine, lips twitching in a quick smile before he touches the small of my back to lead me out of the room. "Come along, Snow." He shadows me closely. Regardless of the Mage's order, he clearly has no attention of allowing me to bring up the rear of our little party.

I can't help but smile down towards the floor in response to his soft touch. He can be so fierce when the situation calls for it. It makes the times where he's gentle and loving that much more profound. Like he saves up every bit of the warmth he has left in him for me.

We make our way around the corner. The hall is just as dirty and poorly lit as the cell. The Mage has
his wand out, but in this dead spot, he's mostly using it as a guard against all the spider webs. I can't make out much of anything in the dim light, but it's hard to feel too worried with Baz's cold hand gripping my side, pulling me against him, like he can't keep me close enough.

"Tripwire here," the Mage says, high-stepping over it. "Careful!"

I get to the tripwire and raise my leg to get over it just as a commotion up front draws my eyes forward. The Mage is pulling someone back as darts slam into one of the walls.

A blond man cries out in pain, grabbing his leg – "I'm hit!"

"Merlin!" the Mage curses. "Motion sensors."

Mark steps forward, beside the blonde man. "Daniel, you alright?"

Daniel nods, but sucks in a breath when he takes his next step. Mark wordlessly wraps an arm around him, supporting some of his weight.

The Mage pauses a moment to swap his wand for his sword, which is longer and waves it in front of him, setting off another barrage of darts. He sets off a few more as we follow slowly behind.

Baz

By the time we make our way to the narrow, winding staircase the Mage is halfway up. I place a hand on Simon's arm before he can step onto the first wrought-iron step. "Wait," I whisper, my eyes on the Mage. I don't want us to be on those steps if someone shoves the Mage from the top. We'd go down like dominoes.

Adrenaline is pumping through my veins as I pull Simon another step back just to be on the safe side. I stare into a room to the right. It appears to be a wine cellar but it makes me nervous. I tense, waiting for something to jump out at us, but nothing emerges from the shadows.

I hate this place. And I hate being on the same side as the Mage, however briefly, and especially against a relative. (Even though said relative is clearly evil, if not downright insane.) (Crowley – no matter how this ends, I'm sure to be in loads of trouble with someone.)

I feel my fangs pop – I'm so angry at the Mage and at Gabriel that I can't decide who I hate more. I'd like to suck them both dry and leave their corpses lying in this house to rot.

I glance over at Simon, who's warily staring up, the light from the upper floor illuminating his perfect face. No. Stop. Retract the fangs. I push the hatred down, forcing myself to focus. I'll do whatever I have to do to keep him safe.

He must notice my stare because his eyes slowly meet mine. "Baz, I-

I don't want to share any of his words with these other men and I can't afford to get distracted. I reach out and squeeze his hand. "We'll talk later." If he knew the horrible things going through my mind, he would never want to talk to me again.

I deliberately tear my eyes away and watch the Mage step onto ground level. When the other men follow without repercussion, I lead Simon up.

We emerge in an enormous study. It's in stark contrast to the wreckage below. There's a bar in the corner, and lavish couches surrounding a fireplace. The walls are lined with bookshelves and studded with lovely electric sconces.
Simon's grip loosens a bit, even as mine tenses. I'm not fooled into thinking we're safe now. We're only closer to the man who wants him dead.

We follow the men across the room as the Mage peeks into the hall. He leads them back towards the front door.

I glance over my shoulder at the other side of the house. I have a feeling he went the other direction. At the very least, the Mage could have split everyone up to check both ways.

I take a deep breath. I can smell his cologne. Fuck. Gabriel definitely went the other way.

When I turn back, Simon's already following the Mage. I curse but keep behind him. I don't know how to tell them we're going the wrong way without garnering suspicion, so I keep all of my senses glued to Gabriel's scent and listen for him to make a noise while we file past a stairway, to the front entrance.

"We'll get reinforcements and come back for him," the Mage says while striding towards the main doors.

"You're going to run?" I demand incredulously. There's so much adrenaline rushing through my system right now that all of my senses are honed. And I'm not the only one – I can smell the fear of everyone around me, hear their racing pulses, see the arteries pulsing in their necks. Even the Mage, for all his bravado, smells as if he's on the edge of panic. None of them want to be in this house – in this dead spot – for one more second.

But all I can think about is neutralizing Gabriel. Ending the threat. I have a feeling that if we leave now Gabriel will simply disappear, only to try something else on another day. I don't know how I'd ever sleep easy knowing he was still out there somewhere, plotting Simon's death and willing to strike without warning and without mercy.

The Mage turns, his dark green cape sweeping the ground behind him. "I'm going to get Simon out of here and come back with more men." His eyes are intense, but it's hard to take him seriously with that thin mustache and costume. Without his magic, he's a coward, plain and simple.

My scorn is instinctive and immediate but tempered by my thoughts which are spinning furiously as I consider and discard moves and counter-moves. Simon. The Mage. Gabriel. The dead spot. The amulet. Pieces on the chess board. How do I keep him safe? Safest with the Mage? Safest with me? I can't underestimate Gabriel again. But Simon and I have always worked better together. Fuck – I almost have it –

I take a few steps closer, making sure to steer clear of the trap door. "Where are you going to take him? A boy's home where they'll starve him half to death?" My voice drops into a growl. I've waited a long time to say that. And now it's not only satisfying but serves a purpose. I need to distract him a few moments more. Find a way to raise the odds in our favor.

The Mage slices the air with his sword, holding it inches in front of me. Bingo. His eyes narrow and I can hear the fury leaking out from the edges of his measured tone. "Really Basilton? That's rich coming from you – you've always tried to hurt him and now you've led him straight into the arms of a family member who wants to kill him."

Simon

I race forward, trying to shove myself front of Baz, but he doesn't budge. He holds me back with one arm. Merlin, he's strong.
"Baz saved all of our lives!" I remind them. Daniel nods slightly, but none of them rush to his defense.

Baz didn't flinch a muscle when the sword was thrust in his direction and he's not flustered by the accusation. "You can drop the act. You never cared about him." His voice is low and creepily calm as he takes a step forward, his chest centimeters away from the blade. He casually runs his finger up the smooth underpart of the sword, lifting it towards his sternum. He lets it drop off the edge of his finger as he sneers, "Go ahead. Show the world how much you value your students. Especially the talented ones. I imagine it'd start quite a war." He leans into the sword and the Mage has a pull it back a bit to keep it from cutting him. "But that's what you're really gearing up for, isn't it?"

I grab Baz's arm. "Baz, stop. He's not the enemy here."

"Come along, Simon." The Mage gestures me forward. I hesitate, glancing at Baz.

Baz takes a few steps back and I relax for a moment, thinking that he's backing off. Instead, he grabs the round finial off the newel post at the bottom the staircase. He kicks it at the Mage's hand like a football and it hits the hilt of his sword with enough force to knock it free. It clatters to the ground.

Baz is already running towards the Mage at full speed, his limp only slowing him slightly, but at the last second his left leg seems to go out altogether. He dives feet-first onto the ground and he executes a brilliant slide tackle, his right foot effortlessly hooking the sword and kicking it back in my direction. It slides within a foot of me and comes to a halt.

Crowley! My jaw drops – he did that on purpose. He used his limp, fell into it, to throw the Mage and everyone else off. He rolls to his feet and strides towards me without giving the Mage another glance. "Coming, Snow? I believe we have a murderer to catch."

I pick up the sword, overwhelmed by how easy he made that look. How flawless.

He comes to a stop before me, his dark hair brushing his temples. He has a kingly aura about him that makes me want to bow at his service and kiss the living daylights out of him all at the same time. Thoughts of the Mage – of temporary safety – fade away. I'd follow him fucking anywhere. His dark gray eyes search mine. "If you're willing."

"Yeah – I mean, yes," I stammer, adjusting the sword so it's pointed to the floor.

"All right then." He marches back the way we came, calling over his shoulder. "If there's any brave among you, feel free to follow me. The rest of you," he pauses to glance over his shoulder, a sneer twisting his lips, "May flee with your master."

"Simon, get back here!" The Mage insists, "Do you want to die?"

I glance over my shoulder to see that Baz has paused, waiting for me. "We've been through worse."

(And we've never had his help before.)

I start to turn when he yells, "But you had magic then! You're nothing without magic, Simon."

Part of me always knew he felt that way, but the words still cut deep.

Baz takes a few angry steps back towards the Mage, but I shift the hilt of my sword to my left hand and hold out my right arm. He allows me to stop him.

"I don't need magic. I have Baz." I glance up towards the stripe of blood that still adorns my forehead. "And so far, we've done just fine." I drop my arm and turn away, bringing the sword up in
front of me. "I'm with you," I whisper softly.

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