

## CHAPTER ONE

Sweden, Scandinavia.  
1665 AD

Horse hooves hitting the dirty ground resounded in the air as the men in armor sitting on the horse rode the horses through a rowdy market road. On each side were market vendors selling their goods and customers in middle class-like clothing from buying from vendors or walking back and forth with their food baskets.

Behind the armored horse riders was a black carriage with gold trimmings. People stared at the carriage, wondering which rich person was within the expensively designed carriage. It was, after all, not a new thing for one to see different carriages or armored guards guarding a beautifully designed carriage.

Within the carriage sat three elegantly dressed people; two older ones and a young man. Their slightly curly hair was swept back; the older man had salt and pepper hair while the younger man had pitch black hair. The woman with them was dressed in a long corset gown, her hair styled like that of a noble woman atop her head. The two older adults spoke between themselves while the younger man stared at his clean fingers, his thoughts on how he was not interested in the event his parents, sitting across him, were forcing him to attend. All he wanted to do was to spend time on his own, painting out his innermost thoughts. But being born into a noble family came with responsibilities that overshadowed one's personal dreams which hardly fell on dos and don'ts of being part of an elite or noble family.

"Sit up right, Mikael," his mother's soft yet authoritative voice reached his ears. He rolled his eyes and realized that he was idly sitting on the leather seat. He grunted as he sat up right and placed his focus on the dirty narrow road through the hazy small window of the carriage. His eyes took in the poorly dressed people of the small town, buying the goods the vendors were selling. Most were dressed well; the others were clad in faded clothes. Their pale skins were dull, and few had dirt coated on their clothes and skins.

If there was something that left him bothered, it was the way that these people lived. There was barely food or good water and clothes in their small Swedish town, meanwhile the elite members of the court lived lavishly; even when most goods that came in was for their community, it always ended up in their own storage units. Even the few things that the people saw on market were expensive.

Mikael sighed in frustration before casting his eyes on his laughing parents. They were talking about the great banquet they attended during the week, and it made a wave of realization wash over him when he remembered that he was part of an elite family who enjoyed a great many privileges wherever they went.

"Ah, we have arrived." His father's deep voice brought him out of his thoughts. Mikael nodded and watched as his father adjusted the big sleeves of his clothes and glanced at his mother who was pressing down the white ruffs of her gown, before she tentatively touched her hair.

"Shall we?" His father asked his mother, who nodded and took the hand he had been offering her. Mikael could only roll his eyes at their display. The door of their carriage opened and Mikael sat back and waited for his parents to get down before he followed suit. The sun made him squint his eyes, before he bowed his head and started walking with his parents towards the entrance of the grand house in the distance.

Soon enough, they walked into a crowded ballroom filled with richly dressed nobles, talking to each other while soft instrumental music played in the background. Mikael regarded the scene in distaste since everyone had an air of pride around them. The only conversation they were going to have according to his guess would be about what they achieved or the riches added to their names.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the court, welcome to another celebration of life and success in our sorcery world. May the magic of our forefathers be upon us," a loud masculine voice boomed around the large hall.

Mikael watched as the witches and wizards raised their glasses and took a sip out of their drinks after the man left the podium he had been standing on. Mikael walked away from his parents and leaned against a wall, observing what was happening before him.

Each and every one in the room, even the few lower-class people in the room, were witches or wizards, most were born with the power while a few learned the art of sorcery later in life. It was a mystery that no man could understand till this day. None knew how their powers came about, how great men and women had the power to become powerful witches and wizards. Although it was frowned upon in some parts of the world as they were labelled as black magicians, their hierarchy made the rest of the world respect who and what they were regardless.

It had caused war between them and the pure humans years back, which brought up a rift between the other worlds that was rumored to exist. For Mikael, even though the pure humans lived in their own land, and they in theirs, books stated that there was a realm of the undead, which he believed in even though the others didn't. There was something out there beyond their horizon that made him believe that they weren't the only beings with great powers, and for years, he had felt determined to find out the truth.

The event still went on as the sun went down. More people had arrived and the aura was already becoming too much for Mikael to keep up with. As a young wizard in training, there was one thing he hated, one thing that made his mind crowded and losing focus—too much energy oozing off the people around. It felt like he could hear their thoughts, feel their aura and their own magic. Mikael wanted a breath of fresh air when he noticed that some older wizards boasting with their crooked wands and spells. He needed some space, and he took it and started making his way towards the entrance of the grand hall, but froze in his spot when his parents called to him.

"Mikael, come over here, will you?" His mother called once again.

"Yes. I want you to meet someone," his father added in a cheery tone, and Mikael sighed before he turned around and saw them standing beside a tall, buff man with a white beard and well-designed clothes. Mikael walked over to them and gave them a tight-lipped smile.

"Good evening, noble man," he greeted with a curt bow, then stood straight. Mikael snapped his eyes to his parents, and cocked a single eyebrow in question.

"Ah, this is our son I told you about. He has been training so well to become a powerful wizard. Soon enough, he will become part of the court, and someday be part of the great men that rule our world," his father boasted and chuckled, his chubby hand on his round stomach.

"I can already sense it in him, Oliver," the tall man replied, while Mikael drifted off after his father's words.

Mikael knew that his father saw him as nothing but a pawn he could use to get into the court. The court was made up of the strongest wizards and witches in Sweden. They were respected and looked upon like royalty, which is what made his father train him with all the vigor so that he mastered day and night to become a powerful wizard. According to his parents, there was only one great wizard who had existed, and he had been from his father's side of the family. One of the founding wizards which brought about the rise of their reign and their rights. Unlike before, their kind were burned at the stake, they were hated and killed, even hunted by pure humans, but the founding wizards had brought a great liberation.

Knowing that a great wizard was from their bloodline and a prophecy existed about the rise of a great wizard from their bloodline who was going to rule nations, his father made him train him like a soldier ready for war. Mikael didn't want any of it at all, and most importantly, he felt he was not the chosen one or the one the prophecy spoke about.

"Mikael, we have discussed and Sir Ludvig here will start teaching you another level of the training we've been talking about. Trust me, by the end of the year, you may become the most fearsome wizard of Scandinavia," his father boasted and Mikael instinctively pressed his palm against his pocket that held his wand. All he wanted was to zap his father and have him understand that this was not the path he wanted.

"Very well then," Mikael said. "When will my training start?" He glanced at Ludvig.

"As a lecturer who teaches other young witches and wizards, I will have to check my time table once again and know where to fix his private lessons. Hope it is fine by you, Oliver?" Ludvig asked his father who nodded with a slow blink of his eyes.

"Okay, father. With your permission, I'd like to take a stroll around the courtyard, and maybe practice a little?" Mikael asked, and waited for a response from his father. He was not expecting a positive response from him, since his father hated when he was nowhere close to him for him to brag about. But as long as he made a mention of training, there was a possibility he would agree.

"Okay, son. Be mindful of whatever spell you cast. This is a public place. Carry on," his father waved his hands and Mikael smiled tightly before walking away after nodding at Ludvig.

Mikael strolled around the cool outdoors, taking in the twinkling stars, the sounds of the crickets in the bushes, and how the breeze made the leaves dance. He felt at peace and wanted nothing more than to remain somewhere quiet to collect his thoughts. As he continued his stroll, he came to a stop when he suddenly realized that he was in front of a grass maze. He looked around the area, before taking a step into the maze. He raised his fingers and brushed the rough grass.

Mikael ended up in the deeper part of the maze, and as he walked further, he suddenly paused when a cold and unusual breeze blew. He furrowed his eyebrows and looked around for the corner where the breeze was coming from.

After searching around, he spotted an opening the size of a cannon ball on one of the walls and as he drew closer, he realized that it was from that spot where the breeze was coming from. Mikael extended his hand, and a strong force dragged his hand towards the hole. He grunted as he struggled against the force that drew him closer and closer until when he realized that his lower body was being pulled forward, so he tried to push his hand with the other but failed.

A soft glow began to form in the center of the hole, and he watched with wide eyes as the glow expanded, going as far as crawling towards his upper hand. Mikael groaned when an ice-cold feeling filled his system as the glow moved around his body, until it covered his face. He shivered as the glow seeped through his body and pulled him closer to a bright light that made him squeeze his eyes shut for a few seconds before he felt the cold quickly leave his body. Mikael slowly opened his eyes and gasped at the sight before him in awe.

## CHAPTER TWO

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Mikael was awestruck at the sight before him; the tall buildings on each side of the tarred road were white and had a glow to them. It was almost like the buildings were made of clear glass, and the plants he noticed were all white. It was night-time and the moon was full and bright, adding to the glow the place exuded. It looked like heaven to him, and he felt a clean aura all around. The tarred road stretched forward, and curved at the end of where his eyes could take in.

"Out of the way!" A loud voice made him jerk to the side of the tarred road and a man riding a giant rabbit passed by, muttering insults at him. Mikael looked back at where the man had come from and saw nothing but smaller white buildings and the road. He started taking note of the people around him, and how they stared at him suspiciously. He took in how they were dressed in simple dresses and their hairstyles were not as complicated as the ones the ladies in the court had had. That was when he looked down and realized that his dressing was far more complicated than what they wore.

Mikael felt his cheeks heat up at the thought, before he followed the road. As he did, he noticed how flawless their skin was; pale, or golden. He also saw that they all looked different. From his many travels and the many books he had read, these people around him were of different skin colors, down to blue.

They laughed and talked, children even ran around in groups, laughing and playing with toys, flowers and kites in the streets.

The beauty of the place made him want to explore the area more to fulfill his curiosity. As he made his way through unfamiliar streets, he ended up in a dark alley between two tall buildings. He furrowed his eyebrows and looked around the dark place, and turned around to go back to retrace his steps.

*"Stop! Please!"*

A feminine voice made him spin around. He looked around the dark corners, narrowing his eyes to find the source of the voice. He heard a struggle within, and he quickly fished out his smooth wooden wand. He poised it before him, and made his way into the dark alley. He leveled his breathing, trying to keep an eye out for wherever the sound was coming from and whoever it belonged to. Mikael finally arrived at a different corner with very little light; three feet away from him were two tall men, full of muscles, pinning someone in a white flowing gown. He could not see the face of the person due to their height and size.

"Please, let me go. I won't do anything or say anything to anyone." The feminine voice was shaky and full of fear, and a strong pull of anger filled his gut when he saw that the men barely moved. Instead, they laughed and pushed her further into the wall she was pressed up against.

"I believe that is assault, gentleman," Mikael said in a deep voice, and he took a small fighting stance with his wand when they turned sharply.

"Oi, who er ya?" The one with an eye patch asked, an accent slipping into his speech.

Mikael looked past the shoulder of the silent man to see who they were pinning against the wall, and he felt his breath hitch. The woman had long brown hair that flowed down her back, her face was round and her skin was pale. His eyes swept down to the gown that suited her small frame, which also hugged her slim waist. His gaze went back to her face, taking in her parted rosy lips, and furrowed arched eyebrows. Mikael thought she looked like an angel before his eyes, and when he saw something flicker in her eyes, he remembered the men backing her.

"... get 'em!" The second man ordered and the one with an eye patch ran towards him with a speed that shocked Mikael. Before he could dodge, the man knocked him in the gut, making him lose his stand and fall to the ground.

"Get up, you! Who'd ya think ya are, eh? Comin' up ere! Teach him a lesson, brotha'!" The second man ordered angrily while Mikael staggered to his feet. He tightened his grip on his wand, then took a deep breath and focused on the burning anger within him.

Just as the man with an eye patch grabbed him by the sleeve, Mikael smirked and flexed his hand that had the wand, an electric bolt forming at the tip of his wand before he flicked his wrist, and the bolt extended towards the man, circling his body and sending him across the alley. The other stood in shock and was about to run towards Mikael who pointed his wand at him, then flicked his wrist, and a white cylindrical light shot him in the gut, which sent him in the direction his friend was.

Mikael lowered his hand and glanced away from the unconscious men, to the woman pressed up against the wall with fear written all over her face. He took in her form and took a single step forward and the woman gasped.

"I will not hurt you," Mikael said in a soft voice and his gaze automatically went to her arm where he saw a bruise. "You are hurt!" He watched as she looked down at her upper arm, then stepped forward. "Is there a place you can sit and get better?"

The woman was about to reply but froze when the men groaned in their corner. Mikael shared a shocked look with her and raised one of his eyebrows.

"Come with me," her voice was smooth and light. Mikael nodded and stepped aside for her to pass, before he followed after.

### CHAPTER THREE

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Mikael had followed the silent woman through a more hidden path with shrubs and bushes on each side of the narrow path. On one too many occasions, he noticed that she would hiss or walk in an irregular way, almost as if her feet hurt. He was tempted to ask but held his tongue, he didn't fully know her and he wasn't too sure of where he was. He needed to keep his focus in check, and read her aura. The fascinating part of it all, he could not read her aura to sense her mood or get an idea of what she was thinking. It came up blank.

Mikael was brought out of his thoughts when she paused in front of a curtain of white flowers. He watched as she lifted her hand and parted the curtain made of flowers before walking into the area before them. Mikael followed her motion, and froze at the sight in front of him. There was a small glowing pond in the center of the small garden-like area. The place was secluded with concrete walls that had white climbing flowers and some fireflies floating around the air. Mikael stepped into the garden and heard a crunching sound under his feet, which made him look down in shock. The grass was glowing green, like it had life and, as he took another step, the glow faded right under the foot he had moved. Everything left him curious.

"Come forward," the woman beckoned him with her hand. Mikael looked up and saw her standing at the edge of the pond, then silently walked over to where she was. He realized she looked more beautiful up close, he could see her bright blue eyes, the tiny freckles on her pointed nose, and her slightly puffy cheeks. Mikael snapped out of his dazed state and stepped back a bit.

"Your wound," he said and pointed to her arm. She gasped before she blushed, which made him confused for a second, but it did not last long when she stepped into the pond, and a white mist started to form around the hem of her long flowing gown. Mikael stepped back when the pond started to glow brighter and the mist filled everywhere. He waved his hands in front of his face, trying to clear the mist that smelt like dry ice.

After a few seconds, everything cleared as if a strong wind had blown it all away. Mikael cleared his throat and raised his gaze to the woman. His jaw slackened when he saw her look cleaner than the way he saw her before in the alley. Her long hair was restyled and her dress was whiter. He watched as she stepped out of the pond, and until she stopped in front of him, did he blink and scratch his neck.

"What is this place?" Mikael asked, and her eyes widened. "I am sorry if my question sounded rude."

"Are you not from around here?" She craned her head to the side.

"I-"

"You must surely know that this pond is for the wounded or sick. It cleanses our sins, illness or wounds. Are you new to the city?" She asked again, and Mikael felt tongue-tied. He didn't know how he was going to explain to her how he had found himself in her place.

"I am not from around here, uh," he waved his hand at her, trying to get her name.

"Alice. Alice of the Horace ghost family."

Mikael jerked back at her answer, his eyes widened, searching as his mind took in what she had said. He felt his heart begin to pound heavily as he got flashes of the many times the court had made statements about another realm beyond theirs and how they concluded that it was all a fictional story made up by drunken Vikings to scare their enemies.

"Excuse me? You are a g-ghost?" Mikael stuttered, and Alice nodded in confusion.

"I am. You should know by now since you are on our land, sir." Her voice was innocent and all he could do was rub his face.

"I-" He licked his suddenly dry lips. "How? How am I seeing you? How did I touch those men back there? You look human. I cannot see through you."

Alice winced. "That is offensive."

"I am sorry. Where are my manners? I am Mikael Forsberg, wizard of The Forsberg family, and I am from Sweden, Alice of the Horace ghost family," he said with a bow, and frowned when Alice gasped.

"Did you say wizard? You are a wizard?" Horror was all over her face as she stared at him. "No, you have to leave right this moment. Go back to where you are coming from, right this instant. You do not belong here. This is not your land."

Mikael was stunned at the way her mood changed drastically.

"Why?"

"Your kind does not belong in this dimension. Go back to your dimension, wizard. Go back now before trouble arises." Her tone was deep with an emotion he could not read.

"How do I leave then? I accidentally came here. I cannot find my way back," he retorted, and felt the change in her aura. "If you wish for me to leave your land, find a way then." Mikael saw a change in her blue eyes before she grabbed him by the arm, which made him wonder how a ghost could touch him.

"Stand here." Alice pushed him slightly, then took out a necklace from her neck. He watched as she whispered into the necklace that had a tiny crystal attached to it.

Suddenly, he felt a cold breeze similar to the one he felt before he came here. Alice pushed him, and he squinted his eyes against the bright light around him. The light seized and Mikael found himself in front of the building where the event was taking place.

## CHAPTER FOUR

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Mikael grunted as he glared at the building before him. He hissed in disappointment at the fact that he was brought back when all he wanted was to discover more about the place. He ran his fingers through his curly hair and punched the air in anger. There were so many questions he wanted to ask. So many questions surrounding the things she said. How was she a ghost and how was he able to see her? How was he able to feel her touch, and what part of the world were they in?

The many questions made him massage his head with his hands. Then the sound of footsteps made him look towards the entrance of the building. He straightened his slacked posture and dusted his clothes before stepping into the bustling hall. He looked around for his parents, and when he could not find them, he strolled over to a table and sat on one of the empty chairs. His thoughts immediately drifted back to how he got to Alice's world, the fear in her eyes when she forced him back. Mikael was curious about the reason why she suddenly wanted him gone, since he was a stranger in her land. He wanted to understand the fear in her eyes and what prompted it. And he had a feeling it may be something serious.

Mikael sighed and took in his surroundings half-heartedly. He placed his chin on his hand and placed his elbow on the table. He didn't want to be around the nobles in the room. They were known to be fake or dishonest about one another, their prides made them see each other as a competition. Mikael never went along with their kind of lifestyle and his father always wanted him to adopt such lifestyle, since he was their only son.

Mikael dropped his hand when he saw that his parents had found him. He reluctantly stood up and cleared his throat before heading towards them with a blank look on his face. He felt the urge to let his parents know about the new discovery he made, about the fact that the ghosts that were told in folktales were true. At the same time, he could not. Mikael knew that his parents would not believe him, especially when there was no proof. Which was why he was going to keep the information to himself and try to find a means to learn more about the ghosts.

"Where were you, son?" His father asked in a gruff tone.

"It is disrespectful of you to leave the event without notice. We looked everywhere for you because we wanted you to meet the head of the court. Do you realize how you made us humiliate ourselves in front of him?" His mother added, anger burning in her brown eyes.

Mikael gritted his teeth, and rolled his eyes away from them. "I was outside. I apologize."

*I never asked you two to go ahead and brag about me again. Neither did I ask you two to talk to him in the first place,* Mikael thought and looked back at his parents, with a forced smile on his face.

"Mother, father. Why don't we go and try our luck with him once again?" Mikael suggested, for he knew that if they did not see the man, he would not hear the end of the matter.

"Never mind. Your father already invited him for tea. But we will not tolerate any more of this behavior next time. You need to learn how to behave like a nobleman. It is disgusting when we look around and not see you behave like the person we want you to become. Meanwhile, the sons and daughters of other noble men and women have gone so far in becoming one of the greatest wizards and witches of Scandinavia. While our son wanders off with the desire to become a painter. Ha!" His mother spat angrily, then walked away, leaving him and his father who shook his head at him before he walked away.

Midnight had struck, and the grand clock in their home played a tune, making Mikael who was laying on his bed sigh. Ever since he had come home, all he thought of was Alice and her place. He had tried to think of ways that would take him back to the place, but nothing came up. Mikael felt a soft throb in his head, and he groaned.

"Now, I am developing a headache," he murmured, and sat up on his bed. His eyes swept around his room, taking in how the lamps gave the room a warm yellow glow. His eyes landed on one of his many paintings on the wall, and smiled at the painting of the setting sun he had painted one evening. A thought crossed his mind, and he jumped out of his four-poster bed and rushed to a corner where he placed blank paint boards. He lifted one and rested it against the aisle, then prepared a few paints he would use.

Mikael grabbed a brush from its holder and poised his hand on the white board with his bottom lip between his teeth and a face masked in concentration. He closed his eyes and counted to five before he opened them again and started to paint with different colors. He didn't stop until he was done, his mind replaying what he had seen while he painted and his heart beat fast, hoping to get a result of what he was thinking. After one last stroke on the board, he stepped back with beads of sweat on his face.

Mikael dropped his hand to his side, and took in the painting of Alice in the glowing pond. The mist surrounding her as she floated, her hand stretched out like she was beckoning on him to take it. Her long hair floated in the air, and so were the white strips around her gown. Mikael smiled and tucked his brush behind his ear.

## CHAPTER FIVE

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A few days had gone by since his journey to the ghost world, and questions still formed in his head each time he thought about it. He had barely gotten a good sleep, since his dreams consisted of the events that happened in Alice's world. He always dreamt about the thugs who had tried to assault Alice, and how she had led him to the pond where she had healed herself. All of those things left him wondering what kind of magic surrounded their own part of the world. The designs and nature of the place did not look like something he would see anywhere around the world if he traveled to find Alice's place. Mikael had considered the underworld, but he was convinced that they weren't in the underworld.

It made Mikael angry that with all the powers the wizards and witches had, there was not a spell that gave them a passage to the deeper things in the world. Mikael wished there was something like a spell, even if it was an ancient one that could take him or at least teleport him to the places he wanted to go.

"Sir, the horse is ready," the stable boy said to him with a small bow. Mikael nodded, and adjusted his long coat jacket before walking down the steps leading to his home. Today was his first lesson with Sir Ludvig and Mikael wanted the day and the lessons to be over quickly.

Mikael mounted the horse and tightened his hold on the reins, then kicked the side of the horse's body. The horse neighed and galloped out of the courtyard and onto the dusty road, starting his journey to Ludvig's Manor.

An hour later, he arrived and jumped down from his horse. The tall man was standing in front of his house, waiting, which made Mikael hasten his steps. As he, his eyes shifted to the direction where he had gone and where the maze was located. He felt the urge to check if the hole and the passageway to Alice's world was still there. Mikael took his gaze away from the pathway and kept it on the older man when he approached the steps.

"Good morning, Sir Ludvig," Mikael greeted.

"Good morning, Mikael. Come in. We do not have all day, you are already late." Ludvig turned around and walked into his home, leaving Mikael wondering where he would keep his horse.

As if on cue, a young lanky man jogged up to him, bowed and took the reins of the horse. Mikael nodded at the man and walked through the double doors of the manor, and with the knowledge he had of the place from yesterday's event, he passed through the main hall and entered a room when he saw the door open and Ludvig's back. He saw Ludvig sitting on a leather chair with scrolls and books spread out on the low table in the center of the wooden table. Mikael strolled in and took a seat opposite the man who was nose deep in a scroll.

"Let us begin," Ludvig said, dropping the scroll on his lap. "As you already know, magic has its levels and types. We mostly use clean magic and not dark magic that destroys. Our kind of magic can be used for good and we are known to be more powerful than those dark magic witches and wizards. You already know that there are no more dark magic witches and wizards, ever since the era where they burned our forefathers on stakes. And..."

Mikael listened attentively to his lessons, reminding him on the stages each up and coming witch or wizard have to go through before becoming a strong and powerful wizard or witch. He knew all of these but he had to force himself to learn it all over again. Many scrolls and books later, Mikael was filled with the need to check the maze. He wondered how he was going to ask nicely, since Ludvig was a no-nonsense man. Mikael gave up after a while and kept his focus on Ludvig, and an idea popped into his head. He cleared his throat and leaned forward.

"Any questions?" Ludvig asked.

Mikael felt like stopping himself from asking about the other worlds, what existed outside of their world.

"Well?"

Mikael nodded. "Sir Ludvig. Do you believe in other worlds? That there is actually a different world from ours somewhere around? Also, in one of the few books I read as a student in school; it was stated that ghosts walked amongst us before. That when our loved ones died, they would be in that state for a year before rising with their soul that left their bodies. What happened to them?" He asked, and he saw something in Ludvig's eyes before the older man glared at him.

"Those are tales told by Vikings, pirates and hunters. There is no such thing that exists. When our loved ones die, they leave the world of the living to where they belong," Ludvig said. "You should stop embarrassing your family with your kind of mentality. Stop being delusional and face reality. This isn't an art class where you paint images that tell a fictional story."

Ludvig rose to his feet and clasped his hands behind his back with squared shoulders. Mikael looked up at the man, then slowly stood up.

"Our lesson has ended for today. Our next lesson will be about spells. We'll read about that. You may leave, Mikael." Ludvig motioned towards the door and without any hesitation, Mikael walked out of the room, and lastly, out of the manor. The first place his eyes landed on was the pathway that led to the maze. He stood for a few seconds while staring at the pathway in contemplation and when he was about to walk towards the maze, the lanky man blocked his way with his horse. Mikael sighed.

The days went by, and Mikael could still not stop thinking about Alice and her world. Even when he tried to stop, something always made him remember or pulled him back to what happened when he met her. If there was something he loved about himself, it was the need to learn more and try to be practical about the knowledge he acquired newly. It was something his father also admired in him, since he used the behavior to practice and learn more about becoming a good wizard.

While growing up, Mikael was a kid who loved to read, buy books and even learn about other countries, their culture and traditions. He learned the ways of the people from around the world, and how a few were rumored to be wizards and witches but the discrimination and mortality was high for them, since sorcery was still frowned upon in some parts of the world by the pure humans. Mikael had even met a countable few wizards and witches on his journey around the world but unfortunately, they never survived the hate thrown at them.

A knock on his bedroom door made Mikael move away from the painting he was working on to glare at the door. The occupants of the house knew better than to disturb him whenever he was painting, he made sure he placed a sign outside of his room whenever he was painting and whoever it was did not acknowledge it. So, he dropped his paintbrush and marched to the door. Mikael held the door handle and yanked it open. In the hallway stood one of the maids. He exhaled and leaned on the door frame.

"What do you want, Jeanne?" He asked the red-haired teenager who blushed out of nowhere. Jeanne was the only maid he knew and was close to, he could tolerate her presence and kept her as a friend ever since he returned from schooling abroad. And each time they both had a conversation, Jeanne always looked flushed in his presence and he found out through her aura that she had feelings for him. Mikael saw the eighteen-year-old as a younger sibling, and he wished he could let her understand why she needed to not develop amorous feelings for him. He was someone who never wanted to settle down. Jeanne was a beautiful young woman; she had even developed more than her age but he could not return her feelings.

"Your parents demand that you have dinner with them tonight. They will not take no for an answer, Mikael," Jeanne said and leaned on the other side of the door.

"But I barely have dinner with them. They know that, why are they asking me to have dinner with them this evening?" He asked and stared at her under his thick lashes.

"I do not know, Mikael. But I overheard that it has to do with some kind of announcement of some sort, according to what I heard your mother say this morning. She also said it is business." Jeanne nonchalantly shrugged her shoulders and he exhaled.

"Thank you for letting me know. You can go."

"Are you doing, okay?" Jeanne asked the moment he turned his back to walk into his room.

"What do you mean?"

"You have been different for some days ever since you came back from the event at sir Ludvig's manor. Did something happen with your parents?" Jeanne drew closer but he stepped back and smiled.

"I am fine. You do not have to worry yourself about me. Have a good day, Jeanne." Mikael walked into his room and closed the door. He placed his forehead on it, then backed away afterwards.

The moment the sun went down and colored the sky with a mix of yellow, dark and orange clouds, Mikael freshened up and made his way down the grand steps of the house after leaving his room. He strode into the dining room and found his parents already in their seats, eating.

"Good evening, father. Good evening mother," he greeted with a bow and drew out one of the chairs across his mother. Once he sat down, the maids plated his food and he began to eat.

"Son?" His father called, and he dropped his utensils to face him. "There is something important we want you to know. It may be on a short notice but we just want to tell you that you need to start seeing yourself differently soon."

"I don't understand, father." Mikael took a sip out of his golden cup of wine then glanced at his mother. "What are you two planning with my life again?"

"Son, we believe that this new development will make ways for the generation that will spring from this family. This new development will honestly bring forth a fruitful and lifelong commitment. And we understand that this isn't what you want, but to make the court understand that we do have hierarchy, your mother and I decided that you will be getting married to Ludvig's first daughter."

Mikael widened his eyes in surprise, and took a look at the older adults around the table with him. His heart started beating fast as he replayed what his father had said.

"What?"

"Yes, son. Maja is a beautiful, young, and powerful witch. The bond between us as a family will bring respect and give us a great reputation," his mother said, and all he could feel was anger boiling in him at the thought of an arranged marriage to someone he did not even know.

Mikael silently stood up and wiped his mouth before walking away from the table. He stared at his parents for a moment before he turned around and left their presence, with an invisible trail of smoke behind him. He ignored the calls of his parents as he walked fast towards the grand steps.

"They can't keep doing this to me. No," Mikael said in a deeper voice.

The first turn Mikael made was the library in the hallway. He needed to do something to clear his head, and the library was one of them. If he could sit in a silent and dark corner with a book, he would get himself back and think over what his parents had said to him minutes ago. Mikael found his way to one of the many tall shelves in the wide room. His fingers grazed the spine of the books as he walked past the shelf and paused when his eyes caught sight of a book titled *An Anthropology: Science and War*. He pulled it out of the shelf and opened it, then flipped through the pages. He stopped at a page and sat down, then read the passage.

"The ghosts of the other worlds is a tale told by the fire pit when soldiers fought wars. These soldiers had stated that they had experienced an unusual occurrence where they felt like they were transported to a place where their wounds and scars were cleansed by cool water. These soldiers recounted that they were rewarded with beautiful maidens that satisfied their needs and desires while they were cleansed by the cool water. According to physicians, it is believed that these great soldiers were suffering from the aftershock of the battles they had fought in and they were experiencing some kind of hallucination. Other symptoms consisted of fever, tuberculosis and some went into coma during treatments. These soldiers also made mention of the world they had slipped into. Boasting of the magnificent buildings and-"

Mikael stopped reading out loud and stared into space as he remembered the glass buildings he had seen upon entering Alice's world. He looked down and ran his index finger around the page in search of a line. When he found it, he looked up with parted lips.

"A cool water. That must be the water Alice used in healing herself. This was actually what happened with the soldiers but they never took them seriously. The question is, how did they get into that realm and see all of the things I also saw?" Mikael whispered to himself, then stood up and rushed to a table with stacks of books and scrolls. He scattered the table as he looked through different books and when he found one with blank pages, he breezed back to the place he had been sitting on and dragged the ink with its feather close to him. He took a deep breath and picked up the feather and dipped it into the small box of ink, then began to write.

"This is my first log. I do not understand the things going on after I came across a place that I did not know existed. It all happened..."

Mikael looked around his bedroom, clutching the book he had snagged from the library. He took one deep breath and took his cloak off the hanger beside his door, then threw it over his body. He marched out of his bedroom and quietly walked through the hallway. The only thing he could hear was the sound of crickets as he walked through the house until he was outside. His eyes flickered around the courtyard before he jogged across to the stables. Once Mikael reached the stables, he looked around for his horse. Upon finding a suitable one, he quietly dragged the horse out of the stable and mounted it. With a sharp kick to the side of the horse, it neighed and galloped out of the courtyard.

Mikael stopped the horse at a safe distance away from Ludvig's manor. He kept his eyes trained on the few windows with light before he dismounted the horse and tied to a tree branch. He silently walked towards the manor and ducked behind a statue at the entrance when he saw Ludvig standing in front of a window facing the courtyard. He took a deep breath and peeped past the statue, waiting for him to move, which he did and Mikael instantly ran towards the maze, simultaneously looking over his shoulder and ahead of him. He finally got to the entrance of the maze and looked around before he ran into the maze. He did not stop running until he found the particular spot he had been the last time, and a wave of disappointment washed over him when he saw that the hole was covered up, almost like nothing had ever happened. It took him aback as he ran his hand over his face.

"No, it can't be. It is supposed to be here," he whispered. "It is supposed to be here. How is it possible for this to grow back?" Mikael backed the wall of grass and placed his hands on his hips. He nibbled on his bottom lip as he tried to think of a way out of his current issue. "I need more answers and the only way I could get to Alice was through that hole, but it's gone. Like nothing ever happened. How am I supposed to find a spot like that again?"

Mikael kicked the ground and ruffled his hair in frustration. He took a deep breath and exhaled, then pulled out his journal from inside his coat.

"Log two, I have gone back to the very place that brought me to the other world, a ghost world as stated before. The hole is sealed, and it is fascinating and frustrating at the same time. How do I get in touch with Alice when my only way is gone?" He closed the journal and tucked it back into his coat.

Mikael held his breath when he heard noise coming from outside the maze. He stealthily made his way back to the entrance and found a cow eating the grass a few steps away. He exhaled in relief, then scanned the area before racing out of the courtyard. He got to his horse, mounted it, and rode away.

## CHAPTER SIX

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Multiple shoes hitting a white marbled floor echoed around the wide hall, getting the attention of the many men and women, young and old standing on each side of the hall with white crystal walls, forming a pathway that led to a white crystal throne that sat on a high podium. On each side of the throne were tall, buff guards in their protective uniforms, with their swords strapped to their hips. The people dressed in elegantly patterned or colorful clothes, murmured as ten guards walked towards the throne with a tall, elderly man with white hair and beards in the middle.

They all watched as the guards made a formation on each side of the throne after they got to it, and the man sat down and peered around the set of heads. He cleared his throat and the audience bowed.

"Arise, my people." His voice was loud and bounced around the hall in authority. "Today, we have gathered here to remember our warriors who fought for our rights. Today starts with a ray of joy, laughter and hope that our forefathers brought upon us. As your ruler, you will go forth and celebrate, dance, dine and remember that you are all supreme beings. Let the celebration begin!"

The people cheered and the sound of drums, trumpets and other musical instruments started to fill the hall up with a melodious song. They started to dance and sing amongst themselves, and as they did, a lone figure in the corner watched with a weary expression.

"What is the problem, Alice?" A soft motherly voice made the young woman jump in fright.

"I am fine, mother. I was just thinking." Alice shrugged her shoulders and laced her slender fingers together and propped them on her lap. Her eyes were on the activity before her but her mind was on the man she had met days ago when she was being attacked by ghost rogues. Alice had been running away from her demanding parents when she was cornered and almost assaulted. She wished the wizard had not come into their dimension, and all the while, she was scared of what would happen if they found out that a human wizard had come into their dimension.

Meeting Mikael left her restless, and numb. She could barely focus on what she did, and when people around her asked her what was wrong, she would deny that she was fine. Meanwhile, fear ate deep into her core as she was bothered about the stranger she had met. Alice sighed when she remembered how the tall, and good-looking man had saved her from rogues. That night, she could not look away from him and she was glad that he had not noticed.

At first, she felt that something was different about the man but did not want to push it further. It made her more worried when she saw that he had a reflection on one of the walls of the building in the city. Shock was not what she felt, but fear. She did not know why he had a shadow, since it was something her kind did not have. Her questions were answered when he revealed who and what he was. That was when panic filled her body.

"Alice?" Her mother called to her again and she snapped her head in the direction of her white-haired mother. Her eyes were narrowed in suspicion, making the skin around her eyes and forehead to wrinkle up.

"Yes, mother?"

"This evening, you will have to go visit your betrothed."

Alice sighed at her words, and stopped herself from rolling her eyes. For so many years, her parents had made her avoid any contact with male ghosts and when she turned a new age five years ago, her parents announced that she was already engaged to be married to Isaac, the son of one of the most influential families in the city. It shattered the dreams she had, the dreams of looking beyond their world, to go further into the lands that they were forbidden to see things and obtain knowledge. She wanted freedom from the life at court, the strict rules on their city by the king. And her dreams were shattered by the mere fact that she was engaged to someone of a royal family.

"Where will we be meeting?" Alice asked, and her mother beamed.

"Well, this is a first. You did not resist or decline. Anyway, his mother and I have planned for you two to meet and interact with one another during her meeting with the women of the court. It will be a great time for you two to have a time to know each other more. Isaac will be coming."



*We've been getting to know each other for five years, what else am I supposed to hear him say to me? How he has so many women coming after him because of his riches?* Alice thought in distaste as her mother spoke without a care of if she was listening.

Alice shook her head and looked away from her mother, and as she idly stared at the other guests in the hall, she thought of Mikael. Worry ate deep in her gut as she wondered if she had successfully teleported him back to where he had come from. She was not yet good with the powers she had as a ghost and the last thing she wanted was to hurt the wizard and cause another war that may bring about more issues the humans had with her kind.

"If only I can check up on him," she muttered, then mentally face palmed. "Where is this sudden concern coming from? He does not belong here, and I am sure he is where he belongs. Besides, I should not care what happens to his kind. Since it was his kind that left us after everything we did for them. Ghosts, wizards, and witches do not mix. It is against the law."

Alice was sitting on the high stool, setting herself for the hairstylist to style her long hair into a knot, leaving a few locks around her hairline. The moment the celebration was over, her mother had dragged her with her until they got home and shoved her into the arms of their stylist and the women who added a coat of makeup on her face. All throughout the activities happening on her body, she stayed put and allowed them to do their jobs. She was used to it; she was used to her family treating her like royalty when they weren't even one. She was used to how her mother would tell her to talk, walk, eat and act like a lady. Alice was tired even though she tolerated enough of it. All she wanted was to get freedom to do what she wanted.

"We are done," one of the stylists said and moved away from her. "You are marvelously looking good. I am sure Isaac will surely feel something once he sets his eyes on you."

"I doubt it," Alice muttered and stood up from the stool. She walked over to her white dress that was hanging on the wall. She took it off, then slipped into the dress. Her clothing stylist rushed to her sides and fastened the sash of the dress firmly around her small waist and flat stomach. Alice spread her arms and waited for them to shape the slim upper arm and the bell-shaped sleeves.

An hour later, she was ready and feeling uncomfortable with how she was dressed to impress someone who did not care about what she wore or how she looked before him. All Alice wanted was to be done with the event and take a rest in her room. Alice made her way out of her room and walked through the hallways until she got to the wide sitting area. Her parents were elegantly dressed in silver-colored attires and she could not help but admit that they looked good.

Their carriage stopped in front of a glass mansion with white and red drapes across tall walls. Each of the drapes had symbols on them, which were golden wings. Alice regarded the designs of the courtyard in nonchalance after they had stepped out of their carriage. Two guards marched up to them, and showed them their way into the house. It was filled with guests and the chattering from every angle made Alice want to be trapped in a box.

Alice remembered her mother saying it was just a meeting for the women of the court, but she saw their spouses and other single guests. She glanced at her mother who equally glanced at her sheepishly. Alice sighed and followed her parents when they walked into the crowd.

"Ah, you are here! I was beginning to think you won't make it. And I can see your beautiful daughter," a thin woman in a white gown said in excitement and wrapped her arms around her mother in a hug. "How are you, Alice?"

"I am well. Thank you," Alice responded meekly and smiled at the woman. A movement behind the taller woman made her shift her gaze to the direction where it came from. She raised an eyebrow when she saw Isaac walking up to them and she resisted the urge to walk away from them.

"Hello, Horace family," Isaac greeted with a bow of his head, before lifting his brown eyes to make eye contact with Alice who rolled her eyes. "My, my, my. Alice, you look beautiful tonight. Can I steal her away for a moment?"

"Go ahead, Isaac," her father replied.

Alice hissed inaudibly at her father before she forced a smile on her face. She looked at Isaac, taking in his well stitched white suit and the red cape resting on his right shoulder only. He extended his hand and she took it, then walked away with him.

"You can let my hand go, Isaac. I really do not want to spend another minute in your presence," Alice said in a monotonous voice.

Isaac chuckled. "But I was just about to show you the new set of trophies I have received with the *freedom* that I have."

Alice pursed her lips at the man towering over her. Isaac knew about her love for freedom, to be free to do what she wanted, to become who she wanted to be. And ever since he found out about her desires, he had mocked her and why she would never be free to do what she wanted.. It irked her that she was going to be tied down to a misogynistic man forever. Isaac made her understand that he was going to teach her the way a lady was to behave and he made it known severally how unladylike she was and how she had never been attractive to him.

Alice had always known that Isaac wanted a woman who would silently obey every rule he made. She learned that he did everything he could to hurt her, so that she understood what she was to do as a woman. Which was why he bragged about the trophies he won in sports and games. Those were one of the few things she wanted to experience but the rules of the court frowned upon any woman doing the things that they were not supposed to do.

Alice suddenly wondered if Mikael's world was full of opportunities for people like her to exercise their freedom and wants. Just as she thought about it, she shook her head and silently reprimanded herself for thinking such. She unconsciously touched the necklace around her neck, remembering how she had forced Mikael away. Alice winced once again when she realized she was thinking about someone she barely knew.

"Excuse me, Isaac," she said to him but he barely noticed and she didn't care.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

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Alice was so focused on where she was going that she did not hear a blonde-haired young woman in a gray flowing gown call out to her. It was when the woman had grabbed a hold of her upper arm, did Alice snap out of her dazed state.

"Astrid?" Alice called in surprise, while she eyed her panting friend. Her blonde straight hair was almost disheveled and her face had a grin plastered on it. Astrid was an old school friend of hers, they started as kids and became close when they started going to classes in their teenage times. After their final year in school, they separated and had not come in touch with each other since.

"Hello, Alice. I have missed you so much, dear friend!" Astrid squealed and held her arms. "I even heard that you are engaged to Isaac. Alice, you are so lucky. Isaac is like the most handsome ghost known to our world. I am so happy for you!"

Alice noticed the strange way the people close to them glanced their way. Astrid was someone that knew how to talk without caring who was around or close by. It was one of the reasons why she liked her. On many occasions, Astrid had stood her ground in the presence of noble men and women who tried to silence her for being loud.

"Anyway, what have you been up to, Astrid?" Alice linked her arm around Astrid's slender arm, and began to walk away from the crowd.

The old friends caught up with one another, telling stories and sharing as they took a stroll outside the mansion. They laughed and told jokes and for once in a long time, Alice felt like she did not need to keep her lips sealed and behave like a rich, snotty noble. She felt comfortable around her friend as they shared more stories with each other.

"Oh, over there. Let us sit there. My feet are hurting from walking around for too long."

"You are still the same old lazy Astrid. We have been walking for only twenty minutes. Tsk, anyway, let us sit," Alice giggled and walked towards the stone bench in the middle of the white rose garden. Once they had taken their seats, they tilted their head back and admired the twinkling stars in the dark blue sky.

Alice sighed in relief when a soothing breeze blew and caressed her skin. She began to count the stars in the sky, and traced out a few shapes it formed.

*I wonder if Mikael is also looking at the sky. No, you have to stop thinking about him. You do not know him and he does not know you. Move him out of your mind, you need to learn that,* Alice thought and exhaled.

"Are you okay, Alice?" Her friend asked in a concerned tone. She kept her face forward, in order to not let Astrid look into her eyes to see what was going on in her head.

"I am fine, Astrid. Why do you ask?" Alice asked and chuckled nervously. She peeped at her friend from the corner of her eye, and was not surprised that she was looking at her in deep concern.

"Is there something bothering you? I know we may have been separated for so long but I am still a friend to you. You can still tell me if something is going wrong with you. Maybe I can help. Who knows!" Astrid placed a hand on her shoulder and squeezed it tightly.

Alice felt tongue-tied; she did not know where to begin with her complaints. From how to speak up and tell her parents that she did not want to marry Isaac, how she wanted to seek permission from her parents to live on her own rules and regulations. Or how she was going to stop thinking about a wizard that had saved her from harm.

Astrid hummed. "You do not need to tell me anything if you are not comfortable with it. But there is one particular thing I want to know..."

"What is it?" Alice asked, and faced her friend whose eyes held somethings that she could not decipher. "You are making me worried."

Astrid began to play with her fingers while nibbling on her bottom lip. Alice watched as she looked around before leaning towards her, which made her lean forward.

"Why did you save that wizard?"

Alice immediately stood up and glared at a blank faced Astrid. She opened her mouth to speak but words failed to form. She wrapped her arms around her body before sitting down and held Astrid's hands.

"You need to understand that no one must know about this," Alice pleaded, then blinked. "How did you know?"

"I was back from the North when I looked for you. I wanted to surprise you. I saw you walking with a man but I did not know who it was. I followed you two and watched everything. Down to when you sent him back to his land. Alice, I want to know why you saved an enemy. You know that our kind can never coexist with their kind. We are in this dimension for a reason. Do you even know how dangerous it is for him to be here? If the ghost court ever senses magic in the air or some kind of shift, it will be very easy to find him and a war may begin. I do not know what you are thinking about, but you have to make sure that it does not happen again."

Alice slumped her shoulders and thought about the impact of his presence in their world. It would start up something that happened a long time ago and she hated to be the one to go down in history as the ghost who opened old wounds.

"I know. I will try to make sure it doesn't happen again," Alice said.

Two days later, Alice let everything her friend had said go. After seeing reasons in her thoughts about her kind and Mikael's kind never working, she felt guilty for saving him. She could have avoided him that night and walked away after he had saved her. Alice even remembered when Mikael had used his powers to save her and she felt panic and a heated sensation in her chest. What if the ghost court sensed the magic? What if someone else saw everything the way Astrid had caught them? What if the ghost court were already aware of what had happened? All these questions repeated themselves in her head but she learned how to control her emotions concerning Mikael. For if anyone else heard about what she did, a severe punishment would await her and her family and the last thing she ever wanted was to bring shame upon her family name.

"You seem to be enjoying your thoughts," Isaac's voice forced Alice out of her head. She pressed the heel of her hand on her face and sighed. They were having one of their meetings as future husband and wife, it was something they had been doing ever since they started courting themselves.

"Why do you care?" Alice shot back. "It is not your business how I slip into my deep thoughts, Isaac."

Isaac grunted. "Know your place, woman. Mind what you say back at me. I am your future husband and respecting me is the very first thing you should learn to do," he ordered in anger and all she did was roll her eyes at him.

"You also need to respect me, Isaac. You are nothing in my eyes and you will not command respect from me. If you want me to respect you, give me something to work with. Otherwise, hold your tongue and select the words that fly out of your mouth." Alice crossed her legs and picked up a biscuit from the plate on the small round table between them.

"One day, you will respect me and I will show you that I am of the higher being between the both of us. Do not tempt me, Alice. Be a good wife to be and mind what you also say. Because I could make up one story about you and everyone will believe and you will know your place."

Alice watched as Isaac rose up from his chair and walked away. She clenched her hands and tried to level the anger twisting in her head and body. Her hate for him doubled and all she wanted was to teach him a lesson but after she exhaled, her anger subsided. She could not do anything; her fate was all about settling down and shattering more of her dreams.

Night time came early and Alice thought it was fine to take a stroll around the city. She admired the architecture of her home, the many people walking around minding their businesses. After touring around the city, she ended up at the pond where she had healed herself in front of Mikael. Alice sat down by the bank of the pond and kept her eyes on the white water.

After a few minutes silence, she began to hum a song and as she hummed, her thoughts drifted off to what had happened between them here. Alice exhaled and leaned forward with her chin in her hand.

"I wonder what he is doing right now," she thought, while staring at the pond. Alice gasped when an idea crossed her mind, then she looked around the area before touching her necklace. Alice took in a long breath, and exhaled. She kept her focus on the wizard, and pictured his looks in her head before extending her hand towards the pond. She heard a twinkling sound, and opened her eyes.

In the pond was a mirror-like view of tall green trees. She waved her hand over the reflection in the pond and smiled slightly when she saw Mikael walking out of what she suspected was his home because of how simply he was dressed. She watched him walk around the courtyard of his home, before he stopped in the woods, and took out the smooth stick she had seen him use on the ghost rogues when they first met. Alice watched in deep concentration as he said something and a zap jumped out of his wand. Mikael moved in different directions with his wand poised in the air. Every few seconds, a zap would escape his wand and some of the plants would die, grow rapidly, or move according to his direction.

"Wow. The way he controls his powers is amazing," she said and smiled when he thrust his hand forward and a heavy blast knocked a tree down. He was panting with his sweat rolling down his face, and his hair he had tied up with a piece of fabric was almost slackened. She found herself leaning towards the view she had of him just to drink in his looks. His pale flushed skin, his sharp jawline, his strong arms and his light brown eyes. The features of his face were defined; straight nose, perfectly shaped eyebrows that she was envious of, slightly full lips. She was left wondering how a man could adopt such a beautiful look.

As she stared more into the reflection in the pond, she sat up straight when Mikael peeled off his shirt, giving her a clear view of his strong upper body. She felt her mouth go dry, and heart beat fast. Alice immediately closed the mirror when he had coincidentally made eye contact with her. She felt her cheeks heat up from what she had seen and the way he had looked at her, even though he was not really looking into her eyes.

"You need to control yourself, Alice. Why are you thinking of him in that manner or looking at him like that? It is wrong!" Alice stood up and left the pond behind her.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

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Once the cock crowed, Mikael woke up with a start and rubbed the remnants of the sleep out of his eyes. He stretched and hissed when his joints made a popping sound. Mikael got out of bed, and went straight to the window in his room. The window gave him a view of the woods surrounding their home, the tall trees in the distance below and a small pond in a clearing in the woods. When he was done admiring the

landscape view, he backed away and turned around. The first thing he saw was the scrolls and books in the corner of his room, scattered on the floor.

"Another day, another spell," Mikael said, and crossed the room, to the corner, then sat down on the floor. For over so many days, he had not rested. All he busied himself with was finding a means to get back to Alice's world. He checked every book, spell books and books that had to do with ghosts and other magical beings. Mikael found nothing.

Just yesterday, he had tried a few spells that were close to what he was looking for but none gave him the results he wanted. Everything came up empty and it made the frustration he always felt at the end of every discovery spread more every day. With everything going on, he had been avoiding his parents and was only getting information from Jeanne about their whereabouts.

Mikael picked up one of the many discarded books and flipped through the pages in a haste. He recognized a few written spells in the books and dumped the book in anger. He wished he could come up with a spell that would take him to the location he wanted. But for a wizard or witch to create a spell, they needed so many days of complicated offerings and sacrifices and most times, the spell ends up not working. He could not take that route, so he was stuck with reading old books written by scholars.

After sitting idly for almost half an hour, the sun began to rise in the sky and rays of golden light beamed inside of his room. Mikael rose up and dusted his pants and sighed.

"Today is practice with Sir Ludvig," he thought and crossed the room to another door in the corner. He pushed it open and stepped into the bathroom. Without wasting much time, he took off his pants and peeled his white shirt then picked up a bucket from the floor and walked to the tub in the center of his bathroom.

After his bath, he got dressed and made his way downstairs where he saw his parents having breakfast. He only greeted them and left the house.

After a long day of practicing with Ludvig, he made his way to the man's library with his permission and looked through his collection of books for anything that could help him. When he looked around and could not find anything, he groaned in frustration and took a seat on the bench in the corner. As he looked into the air in thought, something caught his eyes—a small book with a withering cover. He stood up and approached the shelf. The book was tucked in between two bigger books, making it almost invisible. He dragged it out and opened the book.

"This is an old spell book used in 845. It was a compilation made by a widow who was tortured and blamed for killing her husband because she was a witch. She used this spell book as a defense weapon but she ended up being executed. Her book was duplicated. There are only fifty in the world. And I am sure there is something in here that can help me," Mikael thought. He was full of hope and did not waste any more time. He sat down on the floor and flipped through the pages, reading the spells line by line but found nothing about teleportation.

The moment he saw a spell that caught his attention, he brought the book closer to his face and read the letter heading. He looked at a random spot in front of him.

"A whisper," Mikael said, and read it line by line, trying to understand what the spell was for. A line sparked his interest then he read out loud;

"It is a communication spell. It works as a quick way to send a warning when in danger." Mikael held the book in one hand and pulled out his wand. He read out the spell in a low voice while he pointed his wand in the air according to the charcoal diagram on the book.

After repeating the words on the page, Mikael waited for a change which did not come and when he was about to give up, a small bubble appeared in front of him. Mikael was frozen to his spot as he stared at the floating bubble. He slowly raised his hand to it and touched it, and it did not pop instead, a small opening appeared on the bubble then he put two and two together and whispered into the hole on the bubble.

"Alice, it is me."

As soon as he stopped talking, the hole covered up and the bubble popped. Mikael just stared around in shock, wondering where the bubble went and what purpose it would serve. He stood up on his feet and dusted his body. The book was on the floor and he decided on either leaving with the old spell book or keeping it back. He took his first option and tucked the book into his shirt and left the library.

On his way out, he met Ludvig and greeted him one last time before leaving the manor. He mounted his horse and kicked the horse. The horse neighed and galloped away from the courtyard of the manor. As he rode the horse onto the dirty road, his mind went back to the spell he had used and whispered a hopeful prayer to the sky.

The children at the orphanage were full of joy when Alice visited, they loved her and became used to her presence each time she came to see them. For Alice, seeing the children at the orphanage gave her a wave of relief. She loved spending time with them and sharing stories and the things she brought with her. They would also tell her how their lives were at the orphanage, narrating to her how some ghosts in the higher level never helped them even after boasting in public that they would. How the king never gave them the proper percentage of food. It always left Alice angry. The court had enough wealth, food and shelter for themselves and yet they still stole from the people. She was well aware of the treatment the people received under the king's rule. The corruption was high, and the crime rate kept increasing.

At some point, Alice saw her marriage with Isaac as a privilege for her to help the people, since Isaac's family had a good political influence in the court. If she could not be happy in her marriage, she would focus on helping the people with her influence as the wife of a political figure.

After spending time with the children and getting more updates about their food, medicine and other necessities, she informed her guards that she wanted to visit Isaac. Once she entered the carriage, she relaxed and thought of the plans she had in order to help the orphanage. Her plan was to explain things to Isaac, so that he could help them with their needs but a chance of it happening may be low. Isaac was her complete opposite in every matter, and anything positive coming out of her request would shock her.



The carriage came to a stop, making her sit upright. The distance between the orphanage and Isaac's family mansion was far and it confused her when the carriage stopped after a short minute. She shifted the curtain that covered the window and poked her head out of it. Alice rolled her eyes when she saw Astrid talking to the man riding the giant rabbit attached to the carriage.

"What are you doing, Astrid? I have somewhere to be," she said and her friend skipped up to her and opened the door. Alice shifted towards the other end of the leather seat and waited for her friend to board the carriage. Once she did, Astrid knocked the back of her hand on the body of the carriage and it began to move.

"Where are you going?" Astrid asked.

"To Isaac's place. I want to see him," she replied and caught her friend smiling coyly with raised eyebrows. "What is wrong with your face? Why are you looking at me like that?"

"You now go to visit him, I see. It seems like you two get along quite well this time around. Are you perhaps, falling for his charms, Alice?" Astrid asked and wiggled her eyebrows, then nudged Alice in the arm.

"What? No! That is all lies. I can never find anything about Isaac attractive, then you are talking about falling for him. No, not a chance, please," Alice scoffed, and looked away from her giggling friend.

"Who knows, you might tame him. I know that there could be some good in Isaac. He is just behaving the way he is because of his kind of family. Trust me."

"I am sorry to disappoint you, Astrid. Isaac is not a man that can change even though death dines with him. He is full of himself and can never change," Alice retorted passionately. "Besides, I am only going to see him to discuss the rations the children at the orphanage are receiving. It is bad and I only want to request that he increases what they have. I know it will be difficult, especially when he has to make sure the orphans around the city receive theirs, too."

The rest of the ride to Isaac's place was silent and Alice was happy about it. She hated when Astrid always tried to paint Isaac like a good person when she has seen the many sides of her future husband. Nothing would convince her that he was a good person and staying married to him was only going to make her lose her mind.

The carriage came to a stop and Astrid and Alice got down and thanked their rider. The duo marched towards the mansion in silence and once they got to the front doors, Alice asked the guards about Isaac. They let them in and they walked into the sitting area.

"Wait here, Astrid. I will go see if Isaac is in his quarters," Alice said with a smile, and left the sitting area when Astrid sat down on one of the expensively designed seats.

Alice climbed the transparent, glass steps and made a turn into a hallway. She greeted a few maids and guards she saw on her way to his room. When she arrived in front of his quarters, the guards let her in through the double doors and she continued her way through the grand hallways until she arrived in front of his room. She knocked but the door opened, so she shrugged and stepped in. She looked around his anteroom before walking towards his bedroom that was open. She quickly walked into his bedroom and

froze. Isaac was on the bed with two women, naked and busy with one another sexually. She slapped her hand over her mouth and backed away when tears filled her eyes.

Alice wasted no time in dashing out of his room, she did not stop running until she got to the sitting area, where she grabbed Astrid by her wrist and ran out of the mansion to their carriage.

"What happened?" Astrid asked in concern.

"Let us go, Astrid. We will drop you home first." Alice boarded the carriage and Astrid followed suit. "And everything is fine."

## CHAPTER NINE

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With an anger boiling deep in her, Alice marched straight to her parents' room the moment she got home. When she got to their door, she knocked hard on it and waited for an answer. She knocked again and when no one opened the door, she grabbed the door handle and pulled it down, then pushed the door but grunted when it did not move—the door was locked.

Alice pressed her forehead to the door and took deep breaths. She moved backwards and walked to her bedroom. Before she could walk in, a maid rushed to her and bowed slightly.

"Can I help you?" She asked in a rough voice, which made the maid flinch.

"Ma'am, Sir Isaac is here to see you," the young woman replied in her small voice.

"What does he want?" She asked under her breath and looked at the maid. "Where is he?"

Alice came to a stop at the top of the stairs and stared down at Isaac who was sitting on one of the chairs in the sitting area. A flash of how she had caught him sleeping with those women in his bedroom filled her head and she clenched her hands tight in anger. She took a deep breath and climbed down the steps. Isaac heard her footsteps and turned around, she eyed him from his head to his toes then approached him.

"What are you doing here, Isaac?" Alice asked in a venomous tone, she saw how he squared his shoulders at the tone of her voice before he relaxed and stuffed his hands into the pockets of his pants.

"What did you see?" Was his random question which made her raise a single eyebrow at him.

"What do you mean by that?"

Isaac smirked. "You think I did not see you come into my bedroom? My problem is, who gave you the permission to walk into my bedroom just like that? You had no right to do that."

"You came all the way from your house to say this to my face, Isaac? Well, I am no longer surprised at the kind of things that you do but what I did not expect was you to bring women into your bedroom. The room which you expect me to stay when we are married. There are a few things that I do not expect to continue once we are married, Isaac. I know I may not mean anything to you, but you better uphold the self-respect you claim you have in your personal quarters because I know it will not look good in the eyes of the court if they find out that you are bringing concubines into your bedroom, it is against the court's rules. It is a sign of impurity and your bedroom is your sacred space."

Isaac closed in on her and grabbed her upper arm. He pulled her against his chest and glared down at her with his teeth bared in anger.

"You are just a woman, Alice. Remember your place. And that rule only applies to the women. You are to keep yourself pure all throughout your marriage. What a man does outside of his marriage does not matter to the public, and remember that if a man goes out of his marriage to sleep with another, the fault is the wife's for not satisfying him enough. Watch your mouth, Alice. The rules aren't in your favor." Isaac pushed her away and walked out of her home.

Alice sat down on one of the chairs and mulled over what had just happened between her and Isaac. She felt like escaping away from the harsh treatment of the court, the rules that made people not live their lives to the fullest without getting into trouble by breaking the laws of the land. Alice felt cold tears roll down her cheeks as she thought about the laws governing the city. She began to think of the many things she would pass through while being married to Isaac, the little freedom that would be snatched away from her and she did not want any of that.

"I have to stop this marriage. I cannot get married to him," Alice thought and wiped her cheeks. "Mother and father need to be back from wherever they are and we have to talk about this marriage. I cannot do this." She rose up from the seat and circled it.

*"Alice, it is me."*

A whisper filled her ears, making her freeze in a spot. Goosebumps rose on her skin and she shuddered. Alice swallowed loudly and looked around the area, and saw no one close by.

*"Alice, it is me."* The voice filled the room this time, increasing the fear in her. Then something clicked in her head, she recognized the voice and who it belonged to.

"M-Mikael?" Alice stuttered and looked around, her eyes darting here and there in search of the wizard. She walked around the whole place, checked every corner and when she did not find any trace of him, she stood at a place. "How was I able to hear his voice when he wasn't even here? Did he use ... oh, no. I hope he did not use magic. If the court senses it, they might trace where it came from and hunt him down. Then I will be responsible for another war between us and them."

Alice wrapped her arms around her body in dread. She racked her brain for what to do and when she felt her necklace on her chest, she grabbed it and loosened it from around her neck. She raised the necklace

and stared at the tiny crystal attached to it. Alice closed her eyes and concentrated on materializing Mikael in her head before she brought the necklace close to her lips.

"Mikael, please stop trying to reach this dimension. You need to understand me, please." She opened her eyes when the crystal glowed.

Ever since Mikael spoke into the bubble, he had been busy with reading through the spell book he had stolen from Ludvig's library. He had read every passage, memorized every spell, and understood the few that he could. Along the line, he had found a spell that could transport him to places he wanted to go but the caution attached to the spell made him have second thoughts. He was either going to be stuck in a realm of darkness if he did not use the spell right or land in a place he was not supposed to be.

Ever since he found out about the spell, he had not done anything or tried to cast the spell due to fear of making a mistake. But the urge to go back to Alice's land was greater than his fear of being stuck in a dark place. The sooner he got his answers about this part of the world the better, which was why he woke up at the crack of dawn and walked into the woods with a satchel filled with water pouch, the spell book, some herbs, some bread and dry meat and his wand. He had to keep himself prepared in case he did not make it back.

Mikael stopped in a clearing in the deeper parts of the woods and pulled out the old spell book. He took a deep breath and flipped through the pages and lifted his wand up in the air above his head. He cleared his throat and brought the book closer to his face to read the lines. He read the words out and snapped the book shut. He felt a strong pull around his wand, and kept his footing on the hard ground. He grunted when a strong wind started to blow around the area, shaking the trees and its branches. Mikael closed his eyes when particles of sand started to fly around, and pieces of dried leaves and twigs too.

Mikael screamed in pain when it felt like his skin was being peeled off his bones when he pivoted into the air. He felt like his body was about to rip into two as he stretched and within a second, he was pushed into the swirling sand, twigs and leaves that had formed in the air. Mikael screamed as his body traveled through a dark path, his skin aching and bones cracking. Then everything paused, and Mikael started to panic when everything all around was darkness. He looked down at his body, and saw that he was floating in the darkness. He looked around and all he saw was endless darkness. The only thing that had light and color was his body and his satchel. He heard his heart pounding loud in fear, as he realized that he was stuck in the darkness the book had warned him about. Mikael opened his mouth to speak but could not speak, he wrapped his hand around his neck when his breath started to seize and the panic started to increase. Something tugged his ankle and he tried to scream when it dragged him so fast until he landed with a thud on a hard surface.

Mikael opened his eyes that he realized had been closed and shook his head. He looked down and saw a tarred road before raising his head upwards. A smile appeared on his face when he saw the tall glass building, and people of different races walking around. He slowly stood up and gasped when he saw a ghost-like horse galloping towards him. He realized that he was in the middle of the road and jumped to the side.

"I made it. I actually made it," he said in disbelief, and dusted his clothes. Mikael looked around the place, trying to remember where Alice had taken him. With a new found-feeling in him, he started his tour around the place. People stared at him but he did not care as long as he found Alice. He was tempted to ask but he did not want to draw too much attention to himself or Alice while he was here.

Fortunately, he found the path that he recognized as the one where Alice was being held down by the thugs. With that, he navigated his way to the turns Alice had taken until he stopped at the entrance of the pond.

A tall young woman in a white gown walked with her nose high in the air and back straight. She held a golden staff as she walked through a wide hallway. Behind her were two guards who followed closely behind. They came to a stop in front of a large double door and she nodded at the guards stationed outside of the doors. The guards bowed and opened the doors for her. She smiled, then proceeded to walk in, but froze in shock when the transparent gem that was floating in a light beam blared red. Her jaw slackened at the sight and her hold on the staff weakened, making it fall to the floor. She backed away and barreled through the guards and raced through the hallway, her heart hammering fast behind her ribcage.

The young woman ran as fast as she could until she got to two guards guarding the meeting room of the ghost court. She looked between the guards and immediately ran past them before they could stop her. She ran into the meeting room and disrupted the meeting that had been held. The men and women in the room glared at her but she ignored and fell on her knees to bow to the king sitting on the high throne.

Your...highness," she said breathlessly. "Your highness, there is trouble. The...our enemies have finally found us. There is a wizard or a witch in our dimension, your highness."

The men and women in the room began to murmur in panic.

"Do you know where it is coming from? If no, find where he or she is and bring that person here," the king ordered.

## CHAPTER TEN

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Mikael walked past the curtain made out of flowers and smiled at the beautiful glowing pond before him. He walked further into the secluded area and looked around the place, admiring the way some of the plants around glowed and how cool the area was. He dropped his satchel and stood closer to the bank of

the pond, then knelt on one knee. He stretched his hand towards the pond but stopped himself from touching the water in it.

"Calm down, Mikael. Nothing will happen," he said to himself, and moved his hand towards the surface of the pond again. He gasped when his fingers grazed the surface of the ice-cold water and dipped his hand into the water. The water felt cool around his hand and the sensation of the water created a cold feeling in his gut. He felt like the water was trying to purge the heat out of his body as he circled his hand inside the water.

Mikael drew his hand back and stared down at his hand. It was so clean, as if he had washed it with the strongest washing soap. Secondly, his hand was dry, almost as if he had not placed his hand in water. He glanced back at the water, then glanced back at his hand before a thought crossed his mind.

"I need to study this water well," he thought and walked back to where he had dropped his satchel. He picked it up and searched through it and the first thing he touched was his water pouch. He dropped the bag and uncapped the water pouch then poured out the water on the grass. Mikael walked back to the pond and dipped the pouch into the pond, and waited until it was filled with water from the pond.

"What?!" Alice shouted at the top of her voice after Astrid informed her of the fact that the ghost court had found a trace of a being in their realm. Someone with magic and the first person that crossed her mind was Mikael. Alice felt angry at his disobedience and rose up from her seat in Astrid's home. She looked around restlessly as she wondered if the court had caught him already.

"What is wrong?" Astrid asked and she shook her head.

"I just remembered that my mother wanted me to go to the market and pick up a fabric she had purchased earlier today. I will see you later in the day. Bye, Astrid!" Alice raced out of the house and looked around for her rider. She stomped her foot on the ground when she remembered that she had asked him to go home until after two hours.

Alice looked around the place in search of anything that could help her transport herself in order to find Mikael. She saw a rabbit tied to a tree in the distance and ran to it. She untied the rabbit and dragged the rabbit out from under the tree before she mounted it and snapped the reins. The animal shook its head, and raised its front legs in the air, almost causing Alice to fall off the back of the rabbit. The rabbit steadied itself and hopped away.

"I do not know why you are stubborn. I told you to stay away from this place!" Alice snapped the reins again and the rabbit increased its speed on the tarred road. She wondered where she could find him, realizing that the one place she felt he would look for her was at the pond.

Mikael closed the mouth of his water pouch and shook it. He smiled at the sound of the water in the pouch, then walked back to his satchel. He pushed the pouch into the satchel and zipped it up, then slung it over his shoulder. He looked around with furrowed eyebrows when he did not see any signs of Alice, so

he strolled over to a tree bark and sat down to wait for her. He ran his fingers through his hair and sighed in satisfaction.

"At last, I can finally see you again, Alice," he said under his breath and chuckled. Heavy footsteps made him sit up with his wand in his hand. He kept his eyes on the entrance of the place and held his breath.

Alice dashed into the area and he sighed in relief, and put away his wand. He walked up to the silent woman and stepped back when she raised her hand out in front of her.

"What are you doing here?" She demanded through gritted teeth and that was when he saw the glare on her face. "I told you not to come here, Mikael. Do you realize what danger you are in? I warned you not to come here. You should give back, right now!"

Mikael watched her touch her necklace and a flash of what she did the last time they were here filled her head. He immediately pulled out his wand and zapped the necklace away from her neck, and made it land on the ground far away from them.

"What is wrong with you? I am trying to save you! You do not belong here. You will start something that has ended a long time ago. Do you realize what you are doing? A war will start if you do not leave right this instant!"

"I demand to know what you are saying, Alice! I will not leave this place until you tell me why you are not giving me a good reason why I should not be here? What are you so afraid of?" Mikael yelled at the top of his voice, rage in his body and eyes.

"I do not owe you an explanation, Mikael! Leave this place before you put me in trouble. If you really want to survive, I suggest you leave now."

Mikael chuckled. "You do not know how stubborn I am. Alice, I will not go until you tell me what is going on!"

"Because your kind is our enemy!"

Mikael froze at her statement. He craned his head sideways in confusion, trying to understand what she meant by what she had said about them being their enemies. He stepped closer but she moved backwards.

"What do you mean by that?" He asked, and she rolled her eyes.

"Please, do not pretend like you do not know where you are, the history between our people and yours," she retorted.

"If I knew about anything, would I be here? Would I be in a territory that is supposedly the enemies' territory? Listen, I am clueless. I have spent days and nights trying to come back here to understand what this place is because as far as I know, this place does not exist on Earth. So, please, tell me what all these are," he pleaded and tried to hold her but she moved her arm out of his reach.

"It is painful when I remember everything that happened years ago, Mikael. It is something that is hard to speak about and it is something that cannot be said in the little time that we have. You need to leave, Mikael. It is better that you know nothing and it is safer that you leave here because if the court catches you, I do not think you can survive whatever they do to you," Alice said in a strong tone.

Mikael threw his head backwards and laughed. He bent down and placed his hands on his knees and laughed harder before he stood up straight and crossed his arms on his chest.

"I am someone who does not brag but I have to do that now. I am one of the greatest wizards in training and I do not think you know what I am capable of. Do you think that some group of ghosts can harm a wizard?" Mikael asked and laughed once again while Alice stood with her hands clenched to her sides and face in a scowl.

"That is the problem! You are not supposed to be here or use your powers! Why are you so stubborn to understand? I am not supposed to be saving you because of the bad blood between our kind but here I am trying to save you and you do not care to go away!"

"All I want is the truth from you! I want to understand everything going on! Why do you desperately want me to leave? Why am I not welcome in your world? I have a lot of questions that need answers and at this point, if you cannot tell me the truth, I believe the court who wants me captured will tell me once they get me. So, my lady. I will sit and wait for them to come get me."

Mikael turned around to head back to the tree bark he had been sitting on and when he got to it, Alice called his name.

"Fine. I will tell you the truth but promise me that you will leave this place once and for all and never come back here again?" She asked and Mikael hesitantly nodded his head and approached her again.

"Hundreds of years ago, your kind had a war between pure humans and the humans who used magic or naturally had magic. It all started as a small problem but when a wizard wiped out an entire village in your world for a sacrifice to heal his ill wife, a great war started. Pure humans developed a strong hate for your kind and it did not stop there. Pure humans started killing the wizards, the witches and any new born child that was suspected to have magic. The idea was to wipe out any trace of your kind and while they grew stronger, your kind grew weaker. No amount of spell or potion, nothing. None of it worked. One day during the war, one of the wizards came across one of my kind. Of course, people in Dimension one cannot see us if we are in your lands," Alice paused when he raised his hand.

"Dimension? I am sorry, I do not fully understand what you mean by dimension," he said and waited for her response when she sighed and looked away.

"There are three dimensions that exist in this world, Mikael. Your kind of this era have no idea of them, only us do. Dimension one is made up of pure humans, witches and wizards. Dimension two is ours, we are ghosts. In our world we are fully fleshed and not like the ghosts of your dimension who die and go to the underworld or heavens according to their sins. The third Dimension is rumored to no longer exist. Like I was saying; people in Dimension one cannot see us if we are in your land. But somehow, that wizard saw a ghost from our dimension and they interacted with one another. The wizard was able to understand our world and it made him go back to his people to explain everything to them. It was later discovered that all witches and wizards can see us but pure humans cannot."



Alice brushed past him and sat down on the tree bark in the grass. Mikael silently followed her and sat down beside her. He crossed his arms on his bent knees and kept his gaze on her, while he digested what she had previously said. Everything seemed fascinating at this point. He felt the need to know more and waited for her to speak further. He gave her a time for herself before she sat with a straight back and looked into his eyes. He tilted his head as he stared into her bright blue eyes, even seeing his reflection in them.

"The wizards and the witches saw it as an advantage and decided to create a treaty between themselves. Our kind saw the pain in their eyes, they saw that your kind wanted to be liberated," Alice said.

"Then what happened?" Mikael asked, as curiosity dug deep into his mind.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

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Alice sighed. "My people are naturally kind at heart. We were even naive and poor at that time. We wanted food, new development and things that would make our dimension better. A better place for the children, women and men. We accepted the offer and decided to fight side by side with your kind. Because we had powers of our own and strength, and since the pure humans could not see us, your kind sent us to attack. My people fought and killed hundreds of the pure humans through disease, war and hate for one other. We initiated a lot of things that still exist between pure humans and few of your kind till this day. The war went on for almost one hundred years and when it ended, peace was drawn. The pure humans raised a peace flag and the wizards and witches reluctantly agreed. We were happy that we helped your people win because we knew what was to come as a reward for us. Years went by and the pure humans and your people learned to live with one another but there was still hate living within some

people. My people watched in the shadows of hunger, pain and suffering as your people moved on from the war."

Mikael held her hand, stopping her from speaking. He mulled over what she said while his heart ached at the little, he knew.

"Are you trying to say that my people abandoned your people after everything?" Mikael asked in a whisper. He saw her nod her head and his heart clenched painfully.

"We had used all our last resources to help your people win freedom and at the end of everything, we got nothing. So many times, we tried to reach out to your people but they never answered us. We begged for the lowest ration of food but your people sent us away. They said that we are ghosts and that we do not need what they have. That we can steal from the pure humans. Our king had to force us to go our way. Out of hate and for your people, we used the last of our powers to close every breach that was opened around your dimension, so that your people can never get to us anymore. We locked ourselves away from your dimension and strived on our own."

Mikael felt shame fill his body as he realized what his people were. The riches they boasted of, the things they bragged about, how they fought for their rights as witches and wizards, and how they had lied to the generations that had gone by. When they had not been the only ones who fought for their rights. Mikael moved his mind away from his people's crude behavior and furrowed his eyebrows when he remembered something.

"If your people were so poor and unstable at that time, how did your dimension end up like this?" Mikael asked and saw her smile. It brought relief to him, since he knew her former state was as a result of what had happened years ago because of his kind.

"A miracle happened. This is where the third dimension comes in. These creatures appeared in the sky and helped us. They came and gave us what we all wanted. Our king and the court at that time welcomed them and before we knew it, our dimension transformed into a beautiful city. It took over so many years before it became what it was. They gave us insights, knowledge and power. We lived happily and according to what I know, they did not need anything in exchange. Even though we forgot about your dimension, the hate we feel for your kind has not died since history is being told to every child. Our cultures and traditions are passed on to the next generation and we are reminded never to trust anyone from your dimension."

Mikael parted his lips and stared in awe at her. The story of their people fascinated him, made him feel bad and also made him want to change the thoughts of each dimension of each other. He still could not believe that the founding wizards and witches were thieves and deceptive people. For him, the real founders of their rights were Alice's people.

"That is why you have to leave this place, Mikael. I can sense that you are a good wizard and I am helping you because of that. My dimension has a gem that tells us when the slightest magic has been used. If they find you, they will use you to start a war that my people have always wanted. A war in the name of revenge," Alice said and stood up. Mikael followed suit with a new found understanding and nodded.

"I understand now, but I am not here to hurt anyone. I want to know more about your people and I promise to never bring harm to you or your people. This place gives me peace, and I will not be myself

after finding all of these. Is there a way I can come here without using my magic, please?" He pleaded and saw the emotions in her eyes. She was considering his request and when she said nothing, Mikael sighed and watched her pick her necklace from the ground.

"You have to leave, Mikael. Your presence here will bring war and destroy the peace that has been existing for many years. I-" She paused when she heard ruckus outside the place they were in and she wrapped her hand around the crystal. "You have to leave now."

Mikael readjusted his satchel on his shoulder and nodded, then he watched her whisper into her palm and the crystal began to glow. He felt an ache in his heart when he realized that he might not see her anymore.

"Please, let me see you again, Alice," was the last thing he said before a bright light blinded him and took him away from her dimension.

Alice watched with wide eyes as the light brightened the whole place until she felt his presence leave her dimension and back to his. She put her necklace back on and placed her hand on her beating heart, then exhaled in relief. She closed her eyes for a second before opening them and walking towards the pond. She sat down on the grass and ran her fingers through the cool water while she reminisced on what her people were based on and how his people made them suffer. Despite everything that happened years ago, she could not bring herself to hate people from dimension one. She knew that the current generation and the previous had nothing to do with what happened to them.

Alice knew that through the obliviousness written all over Mikael's face. It left her wondering what his people had lied to them about, the kind of history they had that was built on betrayal, hate and dishonesty. Alice took her hand out of the water and sat up. She sighed and looked around the place in case Mikael left anything behind.

"I have to get back," she said and headed towards the entrance of the place.

Alice stepped into her house and the first thing she noticed was her parents sitting with Isaac. Astrid was standing in the corner and a few wrapped gifts were on the table in the middle of the room. A wave of worry washed over her body when she met Astrid's eyes, she had fear in them and another look she could not decipher.

"Where have you been?" Her mother asked from where she was sitting.

"I-" She licked her dry lips and looked at Isaac who had a frown on his face. "I went for a stroll."

"That is funny," her father said. "Your friend Astrid said you went to the market. That your mother sent you there. And now, you are saying that you went for a stroll."

Alice felt her heart drop in the pit of her stomach as she realized her slip up. She played with some of the material of her dress and bowed her head in shame.

"I am sorry for lying. Please, forgive me." Alice raised her head and made eye contact with Isaac.

"Well, it does not matter. I know that you are trying to avoid me, Alice. Ever since you told me that you no longer want this marriage. Do you realize the disrespect you are placing on my family name? But because I actually love you and respect you, I came to apologize to your family for doing anything that may have caused you to end our upcoming marriage," Isaac lied through a perfect smile on his face.

Alice felt the anger that she had discarded after speaking with Mikael erupt in her heart. She gritted her teeth and squeezed the piece of her gown that was in her hand hard as she felt the bitter taste of hatred for the man in the room. She wanted to wipe the goading smile on his face and beat him up with the strength she had. Alice felt her eyes sting from tears as she stared at him, her breath started to seize a little at the burning sensation in her lungs and the weakness growing in her knees. She bit her bottom lip and took a deep breath, then raised her nose in the air. A smile crept up on her face before she strolled towards them.

"It is a good thing that you came to apologize, Isaac. I was beginning to wonder when you will come to your senses. I cannot wait for the day I become your wife and I will show you the many things I have kept in my heart for you, one by one," Alice said in a different tone and sent a subtle glare in his direction. She placed her hand on his shoulder and pressed her sharp fingernails into his skin while she maintained her smile on her face. She watched as he gritted his teeth at her while also maintaining his own smile.

Alice backed away and marched towards the stairs.

"Where are you going? You should sit with us, Alice." Her father's voice held authority and all she did was scoff and climb up the stairs.

"What happened?" The king asked in anger when the gem's glow died down.

"I do not know. I made sure that I blocked every entrance the wizard may have used with his magic but he was able to escape the barricade. Any being from dimension one cannot pass once the barricade has been activated but something within let him go," the young woman said as her slender fingers ran around a large blue globe.

"What exactly are you trying to say, Magdalene?" The king demanded and grabbed her upper arm. He spun her around so that she was facing him.

"Only someone from amongst us can help him escape. And I sensed that one of us actually used their powers to send him back to where he came from. Whoever it was knows that he was here and this is not the first time this gem has glowed. From what I saw in the globe, this wizard was here before and the same energy that sent him away is the same that saved him again today. Whoever it was knew we were after him and saved him before we could get a hold of him, your highness," Magdalene replied in a tensed tone.

The king let go of her arm and hissed, then stomped his scepter on the glass floor.

"I want guards on every corner of the city. I do not care how long he takes to come back to our Dimension, I will catch him and teach him a lesson he will never forget. If the witches and wizards from Dimension one have come to start a second war or steal from us, I will not hesitate to destroy them this time around."

## CHAPTER TWELVE

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Mikael was at a spot the moment he returned to his part of the world. His limbs were weak, his head was filled with the things Alice had told him. A part of him wanted to believe everything said, and another part believed every word she said. He could not understand how and why his people would do such a thing to a group that helped them. A series of questions started forming in his mind and he thought of places he could get answers from, how he could understand more about the history between his dimension and Alice's dimension.

Mikael ran his fingers through his hair and blew out air through his mouth. He looked around the place he stood, and realized that he was in the back of his family house. Just as he was about to take a step towards the back door of the house, he heard voices from the front and strolled towards where it was coming from. Mikael stepped back when he saw his mother and a young woman dressed in a red gown. She had blonde hair that was styled on top of her head. Makeup caked her face, and she stood taller than her mother. Mikael leaned on the wall beside him, and strained his ears to listen to their conversation.

"...no, he will be happy to see such a beautiful maiden. Look at you, so beautiful and of a noble born. My son will be bewitched—no pun intended— to see you, dear Maja." The sickening way his mother giggled made Mikael roll his eyes. He took in the woman he was supposed to marry in distaste. She looked like the typical proud member of the court, who boasted of her achievements as one of the strongest witches in Sweden. He had a feeling that Maja was nothing like Alice.

Mikael stood straight when he realized where his head had gone. He wondered why Alice crossed his mind and why he compared her to his wife to be. He shook his head and saw his mother and Maja separating; his mother back into the house, and Maja heading towards her horse-drawn carriage. He waited to see if his mother had gone in completely, before he pulled out his wand and with a flick of his wrist, he transported himself from where he had been standing to Maja's carriage with a silent spell. And before he could speak, Maja spun around and hooked her wand under his chin. His eyes widened and raised his hands up in surrender, then saw a flash of recognition in Maja's green eyes.

"Mikael?" Maja backed away, and bowed her head in respect. "Forgive me, sir. I thought I was being attacked when I sensed magic."

Mikael dusted his body and placed his wand back into his satchel. He swept his locks of hair that had fallen on his forehead, away from his face and crossed his strong arms. He swept his gaze over her body before looking away from her.

"What are you doing here?" He asked and Maja craned her head to the side with confusion on her face.

"Excuse me, Mikael. What do you mean?"

Mikael smirked and nodded at the innocence in her eyes. It did not surprise him that she acted cluelessly, but all he wanted was to get his point across.

"Maja, you are a very good-looking young woman, someone that is prestigious and intelligent," he turned away from her to face one of the trees in the distance. He let a smile appear on his face. "All I have to tell you now that I am not interested in a marriage or whatever it is our parents are doing. I have ambitions and a future to look forward to, and being married is not on my list of ambitions. Please, kindly start letting yourself know that I will never marry you. With your permission," Mikael said with a bow and walked away from her. A feeling of accomplishment filled his body as he walked towards his home with his hands behind his back. His head was raised high and the one thing that filled his thoughts was how to meet Alice once again.

"What abomination did you just spew out of your mouth, Mikael?" His mother's voice rang in his ears as he paid attention to the painting he was focused on.

"This will bring disrespect to our name and also ruin our reputation in the eyes of the court! Why would you say that to Ludvig's daughter? Have you lost your mind, boy?" His father's deep voice echoed around the confines of his bedroom, and still, Mikael never responded to their words.

"So, you are trying to tell me that painting is all you ever want to focus on? You do not want to become one of the strongest wizards of Scandinavia? You want to waste all your life being a painter? No, you will do no such thing!" His mother hollered at the top of her lungs and raised her wand at him.

Mikael glanced at the adults in nonchalance before going back to his painting. He moved the tip of his brush over the board and began to hum. He knew his mother would never hex him into doing anything he would not like.

"I am trying to remember when I asked for a wife, dear mother and father. I am not ready to settle down and you shall not force me into doing what I am not comfortable with. Tell Ludvig and his family that there will be no wedding taking place, not now and not ever. I will choose my own wife by myself, understand?" Mikael asked in a deep voice while his gaze remained on his painting.

The room was silent for a few seconds before his father snorted loudly and left. His mother stood in silence before following suit. Mikael dropped his hand from the board and exhaled in exhaustion.

Night had fallen, the moon was bright in the dark sky, bathing his bedroom with its white rays that brightened the room. The weather was cool and refreshing, the breeze ruffled the curtains on each side of the windows as it blew. The night was calm, but Mikael was not. His attention was not on what was going on around him but on Alice, and the things he found out through her story she had told.

His mind was still in shock at the revelation and he wished he could get more historical information from Alice. His log book was filled with the things he had found out and his plans were to one day put it out there for the world to see, and understand what actually went down in the making of history. Mikael twisted and turned on his large bed, since he was uncomfortable.

Another thing that crossed his mind was the thought of marriage. How he was going to escape the tension between his family and Ludvig's family if he was to fight against the arranged marriage between Maja and him. Something told him it was going to be hard making his decisions in the current issues. One, he had to understand the kind of person Maja was since she had ratted what he had said to her to his parents. Secondly, he needed to let the court know about his side in all of this. For him, the court would side with his story since there was a law against forced marriage if one of the parties was passionately against it.

The sound of the ticking clock in his bedroom brought him out of his deep thoughts. Mikael looked around the silent room for a while, and when he remembered the spell he had used in getting into Alice's dimension, he sat up from the bed and jumped out of it. He glanced around the room, while snapping his fingers, thinking of where he had dropped the book. He gasped and ran across the bedroom, where he found his satchel and searched through it. He pulled out the worn-out book and ran his fingers over the body before searching through the bag. His fingers felt the smooth, leather body of his water pouch, then pulled it out. He eyed the pouch as he remembered how he had fetched some of the water from the pond. Mikael shook the pouch, and heard the sloshing sound of water. He nodded and pushed the water pouch back into the bag and backed away with the spell book.

Mikael walked back to his bed, and took his wand from under one of the pillows on the bed and flipped through the pages of the book. He sat on his bed when he got to the page and sighed.

"Alice, I am a very curious man and I really need to know more about these dimensions. What historical facts surround them? I need to know if there's a way that our dimensions can ever be one again," he said while staring at the book. After a few seconds of sitting, he stood up and walked over to a clothing rack, and took off one of his cloaks from the wooden rack.

After wearing the cloak and picking up a hat from the same rack, he opened his room door and peered around the dim hallway. He listened for any sounds, and when he could not hear anything, other than the sound of crickets, he stepped out of his bedroom, locked the door and speed walked through the hallway. He did not stop speed walking until he was out of the house, through the back door. Mikael walked into the thick woods and only stopped when he was away from earshot.

He pulled out the book from behind him, and flipped through the pages. He stopped at the spell that sent a message in the form of a bubble and looked into the distance in thought.

"I have to let Alice know that I am coming. So that she can meet me at the pond." Mikael closed the book and raised his wand in front of him, then whispered the spell into the air. The bubble appeared in front of him and he smiled.

"Meet me at our usual spot, Alice."

Alice hissed in anger after she heard Mikael's message to her. She sprang out of bed and paced around the room with her fingers in her long hair. She did not understand why he was so stubborn, why he did not understand that he could get caught. Before night fell, she had heard that the king was on the lookout for a wizard and ever since then, the city was in panic. Parents had their children locked indoors, businesses had closed early and people were barely on the street around the time they had announced that a wizard was in their midst. Only royal guards patrolled the streets with the few busy people still out on the street.

"I have to get there and have him leave before anything happens to him." Alice ran to her closet, and changed into a simple and light black gown. Once she was done, she grabbed a cloak off a hanger and raced out of her bedroom and out of the house. She took a rabbit from the stables and mounted it, snapping the reins on the rabbit

A short while later, Alice arrived in front of the path leading to the pond. She jumped down from her giant rabbit and tied it to a corner, before running into the area. A frown masked her face when she saw Mikael sitting on the log of wood in the corner.

"What are you doing here, Mikael?" She demanded as she walked up to him. "Do you want to get killed? I told you not to come back here. What is wrong with you?" She backed away when he stood in his tall height, towering over her.

"I came here to know more."

"Ugh! Well, you will not know more the moment you are captured and killed, Mikael. Why are you so stubborn? You do not belong here. The king has set a trap for you and even though I am your only way out of this place, you really need to understand me when I tell you to run, and never look back. Everything happening does not have anything to do with you wanting to learn more. The history you wish to know is deeper than your curiosity. It is not something you should be learning, Mikael. It is better you know nothing. So, I beg you to leave." Alice closed the small space between them and grabbed his bigger hands with hers. She looked into his eyes and silently pleaded with his looks.

"I really mean no harm, Alice," Mikael whispered.

"I know, but not right now. You should have nothing to do with us, with me," she whispered the last two words and bowed her head. She gasped when he placed his curved index finger under her chin, and tilted her head backwards.

"I understand your fear but I am not afraid of anything, because I am capable of protecting myself. I just want to know more. After that, I will never come back here," he said, and Alice leaned into his touch. "I am sure there are ways we could not alert them of our presence. Is there, Alice?"

"I do not know. I will think about it and get back to you. But you need to leave, wizard. Please," she said and held the hand that was under her chin and watched his light brown eyes. "Go, Mikael."

Alice stepped back and cupped the necklace around her neck, then whispered into it. She watched as a bright light began to form around his body and gave him a smile before the light transported him away from her dimension. She exhaled after the light died down and looked around the glowing place before walking towards the exit. The moment she stepped out, a dark cloaked figure jumped down from the tree



across the pond and stared at the exit. A pale hand came out of the sides of the cloak and pushed the hood shielding the figure's face.

Isaac smirked. "Well, well, well. My betrothed has a lot of secrets and I wonder what the ghost court would think of this information," he chuckled darkly and covered his face.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

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Once the sun had risen, Alice woke up and ran her bath, as she cleaned her teeth and set out her dress for the day, she could not help but think about Mikael. Specifically, the way they had been so close to one another. The way they had touched each other, and how the touch had set something ablaze in her heart. The feeling was foreign and her body felt comfortable with the way he touched her. Unlike any other day, she would feel uncomfortable with the way other men stared at her or the way they would touch her even in the friendliest manner, but for her, Mikael's touch made her feel different and craved more of it from him. She loved the way his light brown eyes had darkened when he was staring down at her. The way his fingers felt under her chin and his scent, it was a mix of a sweet herbal plant, and a masculine perfume.

Alice stomped her foot on the floor and rubbed her forehead with the pads of her fingers. She began to hit her head with the heel of her hand, while biting her bottom lip.

"You need to stop thinking about him like that. Why should you do that? Mikael is not someone that you should think about like that. If Mikael knew what you were thinking, he would never feel comfortable in your presence again," she said to herself and sat down on her bed. "Why am I even thinking about him coming back here again? I will make sure that he does not come back here. It is for the best. It is best if I move on and act like we never met." She sat up and walked into the bathroom.

Alice's hurried footsteps through the wide hallway of Isaac's family house echoed, including her parents' footsteps. Immediately she had taken her bath, her mother had informed her that Isaac's mother had invited them for tea, and Alice knew it was code for Isaac and her to grow a bond, which she dreaded at all cost.

Finally, they arrived in the anteroom. Isaac was already sitting with his parents and a few maids and guards stood in the corners like a statue. His mother was opposite him with a tea cup in between her hands. Once the owners of the house saw them, they stood up and greeted them, while the maids bowed their heads.

"Welcome, welcome. Come sit," Isaac's mother said as she motioned at the empty chairs in the room. And when Alice wanted to sit on a single chair, his mother rushed to her side with a mischievous glint in eyes.

"What is it, ma'am?" Alice politely asked and the older woman grinned.

"Why don't you and Isaac take a stroll around the garden. Son, please take Alice around? You two need some time together," the woman said and Alice saw Isaac from the corner of his eyes make a face before he rose up and motioned towards the door.

Alice walked up to Isaac and waited for him to offer his arm, but he did not and walked out of the room instead. Alice wanted to feel happy that he was nonchalant but she felt like something was off about his behavior. Alice brushed it off and let the room.

The duo toured around the place in silence, a silence that Alice had always wanted from Isaac. She had been expecting him to say something about the way she had lied about where she went when she chased Mikael away but his silence surprised her. It made her suspicious of what he was planning. After their tour, Isaac had dropped her off in front of their house after one of the maids had announced to them that her parents were ready to leave.

By the time Alice got home, she was happy about Isaac's new behavior and she wished he would continue with it if they were eventually married each other. It was peaceful and helped her mentally and emotionally. It was like a breath of fresh air for her.

"It seems like Isaac made your day special," her mother teased and Alice smiled happily.

"Yes, he did. Mother, I have to retire to my room now. I have important papers to look through. Call me whenever you want my attention," Alice said and walked away without waiting to hear her mother's response.

Alice got to her room and exhaled in excitement. She twirled around her bedroom and ended up against the frame of one of her windows. She looked at the sky and gasped when she remembered how she had driven Mikael away. She laced her fingers together and nibbled on her lip.

"I need to send a letter to Mikael. He needs to know that I do not really hate him. All I want is just for his safety and that he is my friend... Yes, he is a friend." Alice ran to her study table and tore out a clean sheet of paper from a book. She picked up her quill and began to write a letter to him.

*Dear, Mikael.*

*I hope you are safe at home? Do tell me if my powers did not harm you in any way.*

*Also, I am writing this letter to let you know that I am sorry for everything that is happening. I only want you to be safe. You are a friend to me and I will not forgive myself if harm befalls you.*

*You must be wondering if you can reply to this letter. Yes, you can. The bird I have sent will come back to me, so place your reply in the small purse attached to the bird.*

Alice stopped writing and let the ink dry. While it dried up, she walked over to a corner of her room where a caged bird was. She opened the cage and carefully carried the bird out. She caressed the neck and its back while waiting for the ink to dry. After some minutes, she walked back to her study desk and rolled up the letter, then placed it in the purse on the side of the bird's body. She kissed the bird on its head and walked out of her room. She did not stop walking until she was at the entrance of the courtyard.

"Find the most available pathway between our world and the wizard world. You will find the man you see in my eyes," she whispered to the bird and placed it eye level with her face. She made eye contact with the bird, and envisioned Mikael in her head for the bird to capture. Once the bird flapped its wings as a sign that it understood, Alice let go of the bird and watched it fly away before walking back.

Unknown to her, the bird had been caught by a trap laid out by a guard with a symbol of Isaac's family on his armor in the woods. The guard carried the bird to a tent and handed the letter to Isaac.

"Thank you," Isaac said, and unrolled the letter. His eyes danced around the cursive hand writing on the white paper until he was done reading. He crumpled the paper in his hand and snapped his fingers at the guard standing behind him. "Paper and a quill."

The guard hurriedly brought the things he needed and handed it to him with a deep bow. Isaac dipped the quill into the ink bottle and started to write a new letter.

Bits and pieces of broken items littered the floor, chairs and a table were turned over. The large bed in the room was scattered, with the pillows on the floor and some on the edge of the bed. The pictures in the room were hanging sideways, while some were broken or had a hole in its center. In the corner of the untidy room was Isaac, sitting on the floor with his back pressed against the wall. His brown eyes were dark in the raging anger in his chest, and his hands were clenched.

Isaac remembered how he wanted to speak to Alice about their marriage. The court had reminded him that he would not get any high title if he did not marry and Alice had been the only good choice his parents had for him. And the fact that Alice hinted that she was no longer interested in the marriage made him uncomfortable and afraid, which made him wait for her in her favorite place. Only to see a strange-looking man run into the place. He was still currently glad that he had hid in the tree, that way he saw everything that happened between Alice and the stranger.

The things that filled his mind was what he had seen between his betrothed and the wizard. Something told him that they had been meeting on numerous occasions from the way they touched each other and the way they felt comfortable with the intimate way they stood close to.

"So, Alice does not want to marry me because of that wizard from Dimension one? Those nasty creatures with a dark heart? She chose one of our enemies over me?" Isaac felt a boiling anger in his chest as he thought deepened. "All these times, she had someone she was having an affair with while we courted ourselves? This is disrespectful and a very big abomination." Isaac staggered to his feet and looked around the room with red eyes. "You talk about being a woman of standards and self-respect but behind that mask on your face and personality, you are nothing but a-

Isaac clenched his hands and gnashed his teeth. His body shuddered in anger as flashes of Alice and the wizard filled his mind. He took calming breaths and leaned on the wall.

"I have to do something. Something to expose this enemy in our city. And I am very sure that if I am the one who captures that wizard, the king will surely reward me something greater than what the court has to give. I may even not need the marriage anymore," Isaac said with a sly glint in his eyes.

"We were informed that you demanded our presence. What is it you want from us?" An elderly man with white hair, sitting behind a high, long table with other older men and women behind the table.

Isaac stood before them in the wide room with a smirk on his face. He bowed to them and stood straight with a full smile on his face. He eyed them from the first person to the last person behind the table.

"You must be aware of the current issue we have, great men and women?" Isaac asked and watched as they murmured amongst themselves. "There is no need to be confused. Honestly, revealing this to you breaks my heart because the one person that I hold dear to my heart has betrayed me. This makes my heart bleed from the betrayal and hurt she has brought upon me and my household."

"Speak up, Isaac. There are other issues we have to solve," one of the elderly women behind the table said with a hint of impatience.

"I apologize," Isaac said, and cleared his throat. "I recently found out that my betrothed, Alice of the Horace family, is having an affair," he said and they gasped.

"Affair? With whom?" Another member of the ghost court asked in surprise.

"I do not know if you all will handle this news. But it is sad and must be told. Members of the court, the very person my betrothed is having an affair with is an enemy. Now, this is not a mere enemy but an old time enemy. My betrothed is having an affair with the very wizard that breached our dimension and there is proof of it," Isaac confessed and watched their multiple expressions.

"Are you sure about this, Isaac? You do know the penalty behind false accusations, hm? Quick execution," the same elderly woman from before said in a stern voice.

"I do not lie. This is the truth and like I said, there is proof," he retorted and forced himself from rolling his eyes at them.

"And that is?" One of them asked, and the others murmured in unison.

Isaac sighed. "My betrothed sent a letter but because I was keeping an eye on her movement, since she is the one helping this wizard out of our dimension, I was able to see what she wrote to him. As a smart man, I swapped the letter with another one, which was written by me. In that letter, I asked him to visit and by the time he comes here, we will capture him and demand what wants from us!"

"Dear, Mikael. I know you must be thinking about everything. I have thought about them too. I now understand that it is best for you to know everything that your heart wants to know. Use your magic and come see me this morning. You do not have to reply to this letter. Just let the bird go," Mikael read out the letter he had taken out of the bird's purse. He looked at the bird thoughtfully and placed the letter in his pocket. Mikael arranged his satchel and hung it on his shoulder, then wore his cloak. He looked at the bright sun in the sky and tightened the grip he had on his wand, then sighed.