

Many years ago, before the Americas were discovered, a legend was told about fallen angels from the heavenly skies. The legend went on to say that Miguel Warlin picked a fight with Angelico Ruem, for reasons unknown. For their misbehavior, they were expelled from the heavens and forced to live in ancient earth, during the year 1015, Common Era. The angels reproduced with human mates to continue their line. Their children would sprout wings at their turn into adulthood, making their mark on the world as angels.

This didn't stop the quarrel between Ruem and Warlin but only fueled it. Their children displeased with being angels, gave up their wings for witchcraft, animal forms, human blood and aquatic life. There was no telling what could stop the bloodshed that was to come.

The prophecy came from the first witch, who claimed that a child born with symbols of dark and light on their wings would bring peace between the Ruems and the Warlins. This would only occur on the eve of the thousand year anniversary since the angels had fallen. Said child would bring peace to the earth once and for all.

The child, however, must be protected at all costs.

Nico tilted her head at the mirror in front of her. She didn't like the image reflected, what she looked like. It was her image, clearly, yet... she seemed, or felt for that matter, different. She shook her head at the mirror. Today was a day where getting dressed meant grabbing whatever was clean. She fixed her bikini top once more, grabbed a shirt and walked out the door without glancing back. She ran her hand through her silky brown hair, sighing softly with the wind that swayed through it. The cream color sky showed how early it was; the dark circles under her eyes expressed her lack of sleep.

She stood a mere two blocks from her house, waiting for the bus. Though kids crowded around her, Nico felt alone. She climbed on the bus when it came to a halt before her, getting the usual curious stares. Nico didn't try to glare at them like she usually did. With a sadden look on her face, she sat on an empty seat and leaned her head against the cold window, shutting her eyes as the bus began to move.

Her high school graduation was tomorrow, after that she'd be an adult, a seventeen year old adult, but an adult nonetheless. It felt strange, suddenly being thrown into the adult world. She had neither a choice nor a say. Would she be trapped in the adult world? Stuck in a misery she didn't like? Would this summer truly be her last before college?

The scream was high pitched and sharp and before she knew what was happening her hands were crowded in front of her face, ready for the impact.

It'd been a laugh not a scream, Nico was on edge and she knew it. She sighed and closed her eyes again, trying to forget what today held. She would visit them after school, like she always did. The bus halted abruptly to a stop in front of the blue and white school, the last time it would do so for the senior. Some kids complained loudly to the bus driver. Nico remained silent with her head rested safely against the window. She waited for everyone to get off before reluctantly standing from her seat. She exited the bus, waving a sadden goodbye to her bus driver.

The chirpy redhead was planted at the door of the bus like she always was, every morning of every day. Nico would be worried if she wasn't there waiting for her. Her brown eyes shined brightly against her hair, something that she loved to point out about herself.

“Okay I’ve decided he is really not that bad.” Ryan Rogers smiled more to herself than to her best friend. The redhead made a disgruntled face soon after. It was like this almost every morning. The best friends had fallen into a routine they were both comfortable with and, though they would never admit it to each other, kept them sane at the same time.

“You change opinions about him almost every day,” spoke Nico taking small notes of her best friend’s face. It wasn’t something that she would likely miss.

“Yes, but I – I don’t know, I mean, we’re done with high school and then there’s summer, then college-,” Nico rolled her dark eyes and placed her hair to one side, clearly bored at the conversation already. “Plus he’s been in love with me for three years, how am I supposed to end it if I need to?” Ryan’s voice became a whine.

Nico stopped walking towards their usual hang out spot. “Don’t make your relationship a pity thing. If you need to end it. End it.”

“I’m not making it a pity thing. He’s just too nice and cute... and I won’t end it – any time soon-,” Ryan turned to face her but all Nico did was shake her head before walking again. It was very difficult to talk to Ryan. She was insecure about herself, though Nico could never see why, the girl was beautiful. Ryan would also always go back and forth about her feelings for her boyfriend.

Nico opened a door to the hallway. “You’ve been dating him for four months, you don’t have to marry the kid.” Nico flinched at the word and before Ryan could notice or respond, her boyfriend had entwined their fingers and kissed her on the cheek lightly. Clearly drew away Ryan’s train of thought. Nico could tell that much.

Carter Mitchell was a few inches taller than his girlfriend. The boy always kept his hair short, the way Ryan liked it. It matched his dark orbs for eyes. Over the years that they had known him, Carter had put on a good thirty pounds of pure muscles and, although Ryan would never admit to it, Nico knew it was for her.

“Marriage? Too soon, sorry Nico.” He smiled at her obviously joking. Ryan couldn’t stop smiling at the six foot tall boy beside her. This was why Nico never pushed Ryan to break up with him, she always looked happy when she was with him. He was also the only boy to have ever respected Ryan’s no PDA rule. She

hated couples that made out in front of people, and assured Nico she never wanted to be one of them.

"I told you, I'd consider it when I'm twenty," joked Nico right back smiling. Carter laughed but Nico had already unwillingly flinched once again at the subject, and this time Ryan had noticed and nothing was distracting her. Her best friend, unfortunately, wasn't stupid. Ryan's face came over with a look of pure shock and shame simultaneously.

"Oh my god... it's today! Why didn't you remind me?!" she asked slapping her own forehead in disgrace.

"Ry it's not a big deal." Nico placed her hand on Ryan's shoulder. Why she was comforting *her* was strangely odd, only for the fact that it was today.

"Yes it is! It's your parents' marriage anniversary!" Another flinch. Ryan didn't display any anger in her voice. The only emotions Nico felt were to crawl into a hole and cry all day.

"Yeah and they're dead." Nico's face was flat of emotion, Carter' mouth gaped softly.

"Nico-," Ryan made a move to reach for her hand.

"I've got - class." Nico pushed open the nearest door to her and walked away from her friend, something she'd never done since she was twelve.

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Jack Smith  
Mar. 1, 1970 - Nov. 17, 1994  
Beloved Father, Brother  
Son and Husband

Renzi Leraoux  
Jan. 16, 1971 - Nov. 17, 1994  
Beloved Mother  
Daughter and Wife

Nico placed a rose on her mother's grave, then another one on her father's. She didn't say anything as she looked at their graves. They'd only been married a year and a half before their untimely death, but pictures showed they were very much in love, at least she chose to believe they were. It gave her hope that true love did, in fact, exist. Nico had been exactly five months old when they died. She'd been told it had been the first time they had gone out without her, almost taken her with them. Some part of her always wished they had. She brushed her

hand over her mother's name and closed her eyes, allowing a small tear to escape. She wondered what it would have been like, growing up with a mother, someone who actually loved her and wasn't going to throw her out when she turned eighteen. That wasn't the case.

She didn't want to be alone, didn't want to live in an orphanage; she wanted to have a family, or at least she wanted to be happy. She wasn't asking for too much, she didn't think so. She sighed, she knew it wasn't in her fate. Nico didn't believe in fate, why would fate be so cruel to a baby if it existed? Nico felt her eyes start to water horribly and she sucked in a breath as quietly as she could. She wouldn't cry in the middle of the Denver Cemetery at eleven in the morning, she was above that.

"Need a tissue?"

The voice came out of nowhere; she hadn't heard anyone coming up the long path. If anything she'd been expecting it to be Ryan's voice. She was the only person who knew the exact location of her parent's grave. However, Nico highly doubted it was her, since she wouldn't find out that Nico was missing until sixth period and it was barely lunchtime at school. She stood and slowly turned around to face the person behind the voice.

The boy stood with a tissue held out in his hand. That was the first thing she noticed. Her eyes moved up his arm, the muscles slightly flexed and visible, including the veins popping out. Her eyes stopped for a second at his bicep, her secret weakness with guys, then to his shirt, a white v-neck and finally to his face; only noticing for half a second that he had a bathing suit bottom on.

His face was almost like a sculpture, crafted by the hands of Donatello himself, only better. This mystery guy's blue eyes shone brightly against the morning sun. His hair, barely taller on the top than on the sides, was so beautifully dirty blonde, she didn't want to look away. His eyes held a burning gaze in them, as if he was trying to figure her out. His entire face was quite distracting.

Her mouth gaped slightly but she shook her head in response. Nico wiped the tear away with her own hand instead. "No thanks." She picked up her bag from the ground. If she wanted to make it into town for the final bell, she needed to catch the bus leaving in a few minutes.

"I'm Ashton Jones." His hand was extended before Nico could blink or make a move to leave. The tissue no longer in visible sight.

"Nicolette Smith," she said taking a small step forward and shaking his hand. Ashton nodded towards her parents' grave.

"Do they have a story? I've heard when you have someone to listen to you, things are a lot easier," he spoke, smiling softly. He shrugged his shoulders, making it seem like it was no big deal if she didn't want to talk. Strangely, Nico didn't like that or him.

"They do, but - I don't tell stories to strangers, Ashton." Nico took the half a second when he looked down to smile, to look him over again, before beginning to walk away.

"Ash," he corrected softly. Nico stopped and turned to look at him.

"Sorry." Her voice was flat from any emotion. She turned once more beginning to walk toward the exit of the cemetery.

"I'm guessing you're Nico, right? You look like one." Nico stopped for the second time, turned, and gave the Ash kid the weirdest look she could physically muster. "Your key." Nico looked down at the key on her backpack, NICO'S KEY, it read. She glared at it, blaming it for making her stay with this Adonis longer.

"Getting a little cocky now, aren't we?" Nico plastered a satirical smile on her face before she walked away from him. She distantly heard him laugh, though he quickly covered it up. Against her better judgment, Nico glanced over her shoulder. He was gone.

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"Gone? Just like poof?" asked Ryan, using one arm to block her eyes from the sun, as she turned to look at Nico. On the last day of school, Rodway Park made itself available to the students, or anyone for that matter. The authorities even looked away when some jumped in the lake, something illegal year round. That's why everyone came in bathing suits; it was the only day of the year the lake was opened for swimming. Nico currently found herself lying next to her best friend and her best friend's boyfriend in the middle of the park, next to a large shadowy tree. Carter was sitting under the shade, reading a book, shirtless - to no complaints -, while the girls tanned only a foot beside him in the sun.

Nico propped herself on her elbows and sighed. "Yeah... just poof," she repeated softly thinking back to the events. Nico pushed herself softly off the ground. She pulled her shorts up then promptly began to look through her bag for her wallet. "I'm gonna go get water, want some?"

"Yes please," said Carter looking up from his book to grin at Nico, his attention was quickly reversed back to the clearly interesting book he was reading, about a magical school. Nico smiled at him. It was really rather a strange sight, seeing such a strong fit boy reading a book when he could be swimming with his girlfriend or tanning or doing something other than reading, especially on the last day of school.

"I'll share," Ryan whispered, flipping herself over to her stomach. Nico nodded and walked towards the nearest water station. They were scattered all over the park, the city provided them to avoid dehydrated teens.

If there was one thing that Nico could say she adored about living in Denver, was the seasons. Unlike other places, there were four. During the summer it was nice, and though they had to use almost every snow day possible and some extra this year during winter, the snow hadn't been that bad, it had been tolerable to say the least. She ran a hand through her hair as she approached the end of the water line.

"Couldn't stay away from me I see?" the voice was unmistakably familiar. Nico went slightly rigid; she hadn't expected to hear it so soon.

She turned her body only so he could see how big she was rolling her eyes.

"If I was looking to get away from you it would not have been a problem. Of course, that was before I knew I was dealing with an extremely cocky person." She turned herself back to look at the front of the line, forgetting for a few seconds about the boy behind her.

"Just living up to your word." she could feel his smile burning the back of her head. Nico couldn't help but roll her eyes yet again. She'd never rolled her eyes this many times at someone in such a short period of time.

"Do you need something?" Nico sounded meaner than usual but this boy had been there at her lowest point, a point that she didn't let people see, unless it was Ryan. She had known Ryan since she was four years old. Ryan was her exception to everything, including her sanity. Ash cleared his throat.

"Uh, no actually, I was just trying to joke around with you. You know,

humor?" His smile was infecting, like a zombie virus ready to spread. She refused to be infected.

"Well, don't," Nico spoke flatly. She turned back and smiled at the girl behind the counter. "Two waters please." Her voice completely changed, she sounded quite nice. She gave the girl behind the counter two dollars and grabbed the cold drinks. Nico thanked her and began walking back to her friends, a certain speed in her walk; she couldn't wait to get away. Ash was right behind her though, a water bottle in his hand.

"I don't understand what I did to you." His tone was demanding yet curious at the same time. He tilted his head softly, trying to figure out Nico's next move. Surprisingly she liked that. She was used to people knowing what she was going to do, but having someone not knowing... was oddly comforting.

"Nothing. You did nothing, so pretend we never met." Nico shook her head and pressed her lips together before she picked up her pace.

"Why?" He was a persistent bird, clawing at answers. She stopped.

"Because!" she snapped angrily.

"Because? That's the only answer I'm gonna get outta you?" he snapped right back. Nico flinched in surprise. She was expecting him to back down. She tilted her head, eyeing his face for any sort of reaction.

"Why do you care?" her words dripped with venom, though her features had softened greatly.

"Cause I want to see where we could go," he shrugged it off, as if it were no big deal. Nico kept her eyes from drifting down to his pecks and biceps when he said this. Why couldn't they have made everyone be fully clothed today? Make him jump in the lake in his winter clothes!

"You barely know me," she battled back, crossing her arms but then uncrossing them when the cold bottles touched her skin.

"Exactly. I want to get to know you." Ash's tone was calm, a little too calm for Nico's liking, however she let it slide.

"No." Her voice was forceful and the way she shook her head was even worse.

"Why not?" He sounded like a child who wasn't getting the cookie he wanted from his parents. Nico felt too much like said cookie.

"Because, we met on my parents' marriage anniversary!" she snapped once



more. Tears brimmed her eyes but by the life of her she would not let them fall.

Ash seemed immediately taken aback by this, but the curious look that remained on his face made Nico uneasy and queasy.

"Talk to me." his voice was softer, he was trying to reach out to her on a more personal level.

"No." her voice was stern, as it had been before. She didn't want to talk to this Adonis creature she'd just met. She'd rather talk to her friends.

"It's how I'll get to know you," he urged her causally.

"If I talk, will you finally leave me alone?" he seemed reluctant to answer. It was the only thing she could think off. At least this way she would never have to deal with him again.

"Yes."

"Good, come on." Nico walked up to Ryan and Carter, throwing a bottle in their general direction. Carter caught it with one hand, his brown eyes filled with confused. Nico held up a hand signaling for Carter to check up on her every five minutes or so. She glanced at her two friends one more time before heading over to the lake. She sat down slowly dipping her feet in. Silently, Ash sat next to her, also dipping his feet in. Nico was silent for a few seconds as she stared at the lake. There were people who walked around it, jumping in, having fun, overall enjoyed themselves and then there was her. "What do you want to know?" she asked the water.

"Everything."

"There's a lot." Her urgency to dismiss talking about her life was quickly shot down.

"I would figure." Nico shot him a look and he held up his hands in defense. She liked being in charge.

"It all started when I was five months old, my parents left me with a sitter when they went out to dinner for the first time since I had been born. They never made it to dinner... they died on the way there, a car crash. I was immediately taken to an orphanage. My mother was an only child and my father's sibling could not be located." As Nico dug further into her past she could tell that Ash became really interested in what she had to say, his facial expressions changed at the perfect times. She talked about her childhood, how she had met Ryan, and how Carter had moved down from Canada in the ninth grade, and how she'd

had three boyfriends, but none of them had gotten close to her angel.

"Your angel?" He seemed especially curious in this. Nico sighed; she knew how stupid it sounded every time she said it.

"Don't laugh at me but when I was six and asleep there was a soft crack, a window breaking but it was so soft not many heard it. I'm a light sleeper and as soon as I heard it I rushed downstairs as quickly as I possibly could and there, on the counter was a kid, maybe eight or nine, no older than that, I'm sure. As far as I remember he placed a finger on his lips and jumped right out the window. I call him my angel." Ash smiled softly as she spoke.

"That's sweet."

"And childish, are we done?" Nico got up as soon as she saw Carter making what seemed like the fifth move to stand.

"Why don't you like me?" Ash urged, his tone holding a soft ring. He stood up as well, his eyes digging into hers.

"Why? Does everyone like you?" she laughed, feeling the sarcasm tickle her voice. It felt nice to mess with him, almost fulfilling.

"No, nothing like that.." He looked down for a moment, as though he was uncomfortable. "I was wondering if maybe you'd wanna go get dinner or something? Tomorrow night?" He smiled and Nico felt her stomach flip. A boy this attractive had never asked her out before, at least not one that enjoyed her sarcasm.

"Are you asking me out?" she questioned raising an eyebrow softly.

"No, I just want to get to know you." He shrugged lightly as he smiled. She knew he was lying; he wasn't very good at it.

"But you know everything," she said moving her eyes to the floor away from his gaze. This wasn't a very easy task.

"Then, if you want to get to know me you can meet me at Rock Jets, 7 tomorrow, if not I'll eat alone." He smiled knowingly and Nico felt her insides melt.

"Don't hold your breath," she said sharply. Ash smiled.

"I won't, goodbye Nicolette Smith." He did a mini bow towards the brunette then began to walk backwards in the direction of, she could only figure, his friends were.

"Bye Ashton Jones." Nico turned towards her friends and walked silently to

them.

"Who was he?" Ryan and Nico watched him turn around and walk away. "He was hot," Ryan commented as Carter made a look of disgust and snorted.

"He looks overrated." Both girls quickly ignored Carter's clear jealousy.

"He asked me out," spoke Nico, a dream like tone taking over her voice.

"Are you going?" asked Ryan curiously.

"Good question," Nico slowly laid on her towel. Ryan lightly rolled her eyes.

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*"She's the child? The one?" The first voice in the pitch-black arena demanded.*

*"Yes she is," whispered the second voice happily.*

*"Good... grab her."*

Ryan gasped awake, feeling her heart jumping out of her chest. What's wrong with me? she questioned softly as she got out of bed. These dreams had been happening way too often and she didn't like them one bit. They were always about a girl and getting her, killing her, torturing her, always something horrible. She walked into the kitchen, opened the fridge, grabbed the pitcher of juice and poured herself a glass. The dreams were getting worse, more realistic. She shook her head softly, and went back to her bed. Dreams were just that, dreams.

Ash leaned against the wall of Rock Jets feeling the soft pain shoot up his spine, somehow he managed to pull off the cool and causal look rather easily, after all he had felt this pain dozens of times. His wings had only been retracted a few seconds and the skin on his back still burned from opening and closing. It was completely painless when his back didn't touch anything, but he decided leaning would give away a façade that he wasn't nervous. As he was waited for Nico to arrive his thoughts began to drift off.

Strangely, she attracted him, almost like a connection. It's why he had spoken to her in the first place and why he wanted to know more about her. The thing that really stood out to him, however, was not something she could have told him. She had no idea there were angels surrounding her. Oh Angelico, if only she knew that it had been him when he was nine, popping in to steal some bread. Not for hunger or anything of the kind but because it was part of the angel tests required of children. He recalled the night perfectly, even if her recollection had been slightly different.

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The sound of footsteps froze nine year old Ash in mid-move, currently on the counter top looking for the hidden bread. The noise he had made coming in had been incredible and he knew he had to hurry.

"Who are you?" six year old Nico asked, a soft blue blanket in her hand. He knew he wouldn't be able to complete the test of getting in and out of a house with her there. "Are you hungry?"

"No I just, I--," he stammered. She was beautiful, even at such a young age and looked more like an angel than the nine year old thief stealing bread.

"Why are you stealing our bread?" her voice was so pure, so perfectly beautiful and so innocent it stung Ash's heart.

"I'm so sorry." His finger went to his lips to tell her to be silent. Before she had a chance to blink, Ash had been out the window, vanished, without a trace of his presence ever being there, except for her memory... and the stolen bread.

He hadn't known it'd been her, never crossed his mind he'd see the six year old all grown up. That six year old girl he had met long ago was Nico... but now she was older, sassier, and sexier too. He pressed his lips together. Did she notice that he was actually an angel? That what she had been calling him for the past eleven years, actually existed? That he, Ashton Jones, was the only child to complete the 50 children tests before the age of ten? Did she know that he was protecting the most sought after angel in the world? That if he failed his mission all would be lost for another thousand years? Did she know any of this? He knew the answer to that final question, but he almost wanted her to know the truth. However, he couldn't do that. It would mean letting his feelings get in the way, the worst thing an angel as important as him could ever do.

"Have you been here long?" Her voice shot him out of his coma daze.

"No, not really." He pushed himself off the wall immediately smiling at her. He took a long look at her up and down, making sure to not stop at her chest. She was dressed in relaxed clothing, which was just how he had figured she would be dressed, since her graduation had been that morning. Her sandals were black with some unrecognizable design on them; she was also sporting white shorts with a black shirt to match the shoes. It made her look "beautiful, I mean you look - just wow. You look beautiful." She smiled softly, her face tilting downwards as blood crept up her cheeks.

"Thanks," she whispered as the red drifted from her face. A different Nico was meeting him for his date and he liked this one much more than the one at the cemetery.

"Come on, time to get some food in your stomach. You do eat, right?" he asked, a light tease in his voice.

"Course! I can clear out an entire table if I'm hungry enough." She smiled.

"Good." Ash let her in the restaurant. Rock Jets was one of the few places in the city that was operated fully by angels. It was Ash's favorite place to eat; he knew exactly what to order and what not to order, though there weren't many things that he wouldn't order. The light red walls resembled the spilled Ruem blood and on the far back wall there was a painting over a hole that Ash's friend, Darrin, had punched a few months back. The tables were all aligned perfectly.

Being a self-seat restaurant Ash immediately took a seat in a section he knew angels sat at constantly. A waiter came to attend them almost instantly after sitting down. Ash admired the perfect service.

"Hi, my name is Jon and I will be your waiter. Shall we get you started with some drinks?" he asked them nicely as he handed them menus. Ash's eyes flicked towards the waiter, he could have sworn they'd fought in a war together a while back. He placed cup napkins on the table.

"I'll just have water, thank you."

"And for the lovely lady?" Nico smiled again.

"Water too, please."

"I'll be back soon with your waters." And he was gone. Nico tilted her head at Ash, interest lighting up in her eyes.

"Now I want to know everything." The curious stare that Ash had known to be on his face when Nico had spoken her life story was now promptly placed on Nico.

"There are some things I can't tell you," he admitted. He could think of a few right of the bat. He knew from experience that girls hated when they weren't told everything.

"That's fine." Ash was at once taken aback by her reaction. Girls hated when they weren't told everything straight away, especially if it could lead into a relationship, yet she seemed completely fine with the idea.

Ash grinned at her.

"What?" Nico tried to look towards her nose, clearly self-conscious as though something was on her face.

"You're amazing." Nico blushed.

"Can't say that till date three," she whispered softly. Ash couldn't stop from grinning like a fool at her words. Nico cleared her throat after a moment of silence. "Your past? You promise I showed up, you'd tell me."

"That I did," Ash quickly rambled through his head for tid bits of his past. As he was about to begin to speak Jon came back with their drinks. Ash quickly ordered two hamburgers before realizing that Nico could have been vegetarian. When the look of pure shock took over his face, Jon was already gone. "I hope you're a carnivore?"

"Yes, but I can order for myself," said Nico, almost as if she could read Ash's

thoughts.

"I'll remember that for next time." He smiled, feeling the sudden weight lift from his shoulders.

"What makes you think there'll be a next time?" she tilted her head ever so slightly, not being at all seductive but genuinely curious.

"A feeling I suppose," a soft silence followed as Ash's eyes connected with Nico's.

"Your past?" Nico pressed after a few seconds the utter silence.

"Right, hmm let's see, well my childhood was a really uninteresting one." The stories of his life rolled off his tongue. How he'd finished pre-college education at the age of ten, strange to most but ordinary to him. How his best friend was a girl, and he'd never had any feelings towards her, though she was the most special woman in his life. However she had always been most special to him. He even mentioned how his father had passed away at the age of fourteen and his mother at sixteen. Most importantly, Ash mentioned that sometimes "I wish I was normal." The food arrived after those words were spoken, cutting an end to their conversation, or so Ash had thought.

"Why do you want to be normal?" Nico ate a fry and tilted her head softly; Ash was beginning to love that. His mind quickly racked over ways that he could possibly explain this to her.

"Have you ever felt like your life is planned out for you? Every second of every day? Ever felt like you can't change your fate? Your destiny?" Ash's blue eyes were locked on Nico's beautiful hazel ones; he searched in them for anything that could bring him a hint to what she might say next.

"There's no such thing as fate," she whispered. I wish, thought Ash, my life would be so much easier without it.

"Are you sure?"

"Your life can't be planned out for you," Nico's voice was stern. "It can't. Fate couldn't have said 'Oh I'm bored let's kill this baby's parents', it just happened. Things aren't planned, they just... happen." In that second Ash became extremely interested in her beliefs.

"Do you believe in vampires?" Ash searched her face for any note of reaction.

"Only the ones in my dreams. If we're playing this game. Do you... believe in... werewolves?" she asked pausing, to her this was nothing more than a joke.

“Wanna howl at the moon with me some time?” he asked laughing, Nico giggled softly. Ash smiled at her before looking down at his plate then back up to her eyes in a split second. He swallowed. “Do you believe in angels?” this time Ash could feel his own heart stop. Did she believe in his very existence? Did she truly believe that he could sprout from his back? Nico was quiet for a moment as she looked right back at him. Taking in a deep breath she uttered one word.

“Yes.”

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Ash searched her eyes for some sign that he was allowed to. He wanted to kiss her, right now, more than anything he had ever wanted. They had shared their past and Ash saw the possibility of a future with her. He knew fate hadn't been as lucky with him and love, but he wanted to try anyway, and he wanted to try with her. “I'm gonna kiss you now.” His voice was soft, barely above a whisper. She giggled quietly.

“You won't,” she whispered back, moving her face closer to his. She felt it; she wanted to close the connection they shared with each other just as much as he did. “I feel like this is something out of a really cheesy movie,” Ash smiled at her words, they were just inches away.

“I'm about to make it cheesier.” Ash grabbed her face with one hand and pressed their lips together in a smooth movement. Nico smiled softly against the kiss. Ash felt his stomach turn, love wasn't in his mission. How can something so wrong feel just perfectly in place though? It had to mean something; he knew it. All his life he'd been told to believe that his wings told him his mission and his soulmate, but Ash's wings had never showed a soulmate. He'd assumed that he'd die in war, or worse, alone. However, in those few seconds of the first kiss with Nico, feeling his lips against hers, Ash was almost positive that fate could be wrong. Fate had to be wrong.

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“When do I get to meet your famous best friend?”

Nico's head laid carelessly on Ash's arm as the newly formed couple walked



down a street holding hands. It'd been three days since their first official date, the day they begun going out. The question loomed over the air as Nico looked up at Ash.

"Why do you want to meet her?" it wasn't said roughly or mean, just curiously. It had been how most of their conversations were, filled with curiosity. She knew Ash dared not to look at the puppy dog eyes she was giving him.

"Because she seems important to you," shrugged Nico. It was the truth, though Nico still didn't know her name, every time Ash spoke about her his face lit up.

"She is, very," admitted Ash. Nico stopped walking suddenly causing Ash to stop. He gave her a curious look and at this point she was glad he wasn't exasperated with her.

"Then I want to meet her... tonight." She felt like a child ready to throw a tantrum but she didn't care. She wanted to meet the famous best friend, the one that Ash couldn't stop talking about.

"Just do me one favor." Ash looked down at her, pausing only to search her eyes. He seemed serious as he stood over her. "Don't get jealous." His eyes showed both kindness and worry.

Nico smiled glad to know that was the only thing he needed to know. What would she get jealous of anyway? She had Ash. "I'm not the jealous type." She shrugged off his comment.

"Good." Ash smiled.

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Twenty minutes later, they were standing in front of a mansion, so large it made the white house look like just that, a house. Nico felt flustered simply standing in its presence. Ash seemed completely relaxed; he pressed a button and said his name. "Ash? As in Ashton Jones? Well, why the hell are you using the gate, son of gun?" the voice on the intercom rang.

"I have a friend with me," The reason was enough to get the gate before them to open. Nico swallowed her worries away when Ash grabbed her hand and lead her up the driveway. Ash opened the door like there was no problem with just barging into someone else's house. The first thing to block Nico's eyesight was

the giant chandelier, high in the air. They were standing in what was the size of a small ballroom but was decorated like a living room. Nico could have sworn she'd seen an original Salvador Dali painting in the far right corner, which was impossible to own.

Who lived here? she pondered to herself.

"This way." Ash quickly pulled her through a giant door that led to a labyrinth. If Nico didn't have Ash she was sure she would have found herself completely and utterly lost. Nico felt dizzy by the time Ash was knocking on a door. "Hey! It's your boy! Open up!" Nico heard a bunch of rumbling from the other end of the door and three seconds later Nico wished she hadn't come at all.

Ash had not been exaggerating when he told her to not get jealous. If someone wanted to meet the absolute most gorgeous woman in the world they had to find the nineteen year old in front of Nico. She was dressed in a fancy plum colored shirt with a black vest that outlined her curves, black skinny jeans and tall black heels. She stood an inch or two under Ash with the heels, Nico on the other hand felt like a midget. Her hair, straight and the right shade of brown, hung completely loose to her perfect, tiny waist. Her face was more perfectly sculpted than Ash's, as if that was humanly possible. Her chestnut brown eyes looked Nico up and down a couple of times.

"This is the famous Nico?" she asked. Nico felt the color rush to her face, it was like being complimented by a living angel. She extended her hand, "I'm Selena Michaels, nice to meet you." Even her nails were painted a perfect plum to match her shirt.

"Nice to meet you too." Nico shook her hand. Selena moved aside.

"Come on in, I'm about to go greet Mommy's guests," Ash went inside first, Nico followed him like a lost puppy. Nico couldn't for the life of her decide which room was bigger, Selena's room or the living room. There was a king bed in the far corner decorated with teddy bears and pillows, and a small sofa set in the middle. There was no television in sight, but four fully stocked bookshelves stood side by side, opposite the sofa set. Nico felt completely out of place.

"Guests?" asked Nico as she sat on the couch next to Ash, he immediately placed an arm around her, pulling her closer.

"You were probably star struck by the house... I don't like it much myself."

Selena looked around her room as if taking it in, "but they were outside, the guests, so if you will excuse me for a moment." She made a move to leave but paused to look at Ash. Nico, who had actually been star struck by Selena, hadn't noticed that he'd been staring at her since they'd entered the room. "No funny business."

Ash moved his head to look at Selena and laughed, shaking his head.

"None shall be done." As Selena left the room Nico couldn't help but notice how gracefully she moved. She couldn't be a virgin, decided Nico, but immediately felt angry at herself for judging so quickly. "What are you thinking?"

"She's really pretty." Nico spoke the words softly, now that Selena was out of the room it was hard to believe that such a creature like her truly existed even though Nico had just seen her. It was like saying she'd seen a unicorn but never having actual proof. Ash made a face of disgust.

"I suppose." Nico became alarmed, if Selena wasn't pretty to Ash, then what was she? A barstool?

"You don't think she's pretty?" Nico couldn't stop the alarming tone that took over her voice.

"Well she's like my sister, I don't find her attractive in the least bit." Nico nodded and placed her head on his peck.

"I didn't know." She could feel her entire body relax.

"It's fine, got a bit jealous, huh?" teased Ash; Nico could feel his breath burn the back of her head.

"No," lied Nico, she'd spoken too quickly catching her own lie. It was rather difficult not to be jealous when someone as pretty as Selena was as close to him as she was. Nico had only just met him.

"I find you much more attractive," Ash whispered into her ear. Nico smiled softly feeling his breathe on her skin. She turned her head to kiss him.

"I said no funny business!" complained Selena as she gracefully emerged from the door, she sat down on the loveseat. Ash laughed lightly. "I'm gonna have to wash that couch now, thanks," she muttered crossing her arms before smiling proving that she was kidding.

Wings outstretched ready for battle, Selena landed on top of her house in one clear movement. Ash landed less than a second later more forcefully than Selena causing some tiles to tumble over. Her eyes scanned his wings for what seemed like the billionth time. They held a pattern of randomly assorted shapes at the bottom, keeping a darkness in, and the word *guerrier* at the top written out in beautiful letters. Hers were nothing like that.

On the higher part of her wings were symbols of dark and light with a dove above it, representing peace. Under that was an open mouth of a vampire, which meant one of two things, either she would be killed by one or would marry one. Neither relaxed her. The rest of her wings were intricate lines that made nothing in particular, this part of her wings she liked the most. The intricate lines, to her, meant that she was more complicated than the initial stare, or at least she wanted to believe that was what they meant.

"We need to pick up speed," whispered Ash, a frown shadowing his features. Selena groaned as soon as the words left his lips.

"I'm tired! We've been practicing for the last three hours, plus my hair's all wavy and my pants are going to get dirty," she complained, this was all true. Her naturally wavy hair was starting to make more notice and though her black jeans were stainless, she was scared to rip them. Ash made a face but quickly replaced it with a wicked smile. Selena instantly knew this wasn't a good sign.

"Fine, jump down and we'll be done." Selena rolled her eyes at him, she'd done this a million times. She began to walk towards the edge. "Without your wings," he added. She stopped and turned to look at him like he'd gone completely insane.

"What?!"

"You heard me." Ash retracted his own wings with ease. "No wings." He took a step towards midair and fell towards the pavement below. Selena looked towards the ground and spotted him perfectly still, legs crouched, a hand on the floor, looking more like a sculpture than ever before.

"Show off," she whispered. Selena could tell he was smiling, because of what he had accomplished, the next second his head snapped up as his wings flew open menacingly. Something was terribly wrong. She jumped, her wings keeping her falling speed to a minimum, until she landed next to Ash, next to her protector. He grabbed her hand and soared into the sky. Once they were far and

high enough, Ash let go of Selena's hand and she was able to turn around to see her home. It was perfectly at ease, no movement at all.

Within one blink it became a blur of red and yellow flames.

Selena made a move to scream but no audible noise escaped her. Ash instantly reached over to her as the chosen angel began to fly towards her home. She thrashed around violently trying to escape his grip. Salty streams ran down her features as she failed miserably to get herself free. Selena tried everything, even resulted to kicking and hitting Ash.

"Ash! Let me go!" cried Selena her moves more forceful. Her best friend remained silent as he held her. "Ash! Please!" Ash made a movement, but it wasn't to free Selena. Ash twisted the tip of Selena's right wing causing both of them to retract, protecting themselves from outer damage. She was in human form. Ash carried the powerless girl away from the danger bridal style. Barely a minute passed before Selena had begun to cry into his shoulder. She made a fist of his shirt, and punched him a few times for not letting her go. Even in her state though, she knew it was the best thing that he could have done. "Where are we going?" Her voice broke the silence they had been in.

"My apartment." His voice was hoarse; he'd been holding back tears as much as she'd been releasing them. "I'm going around in circles in case there's a tracker around though," Selena's eyes were closed, she didn't want to look around. She didn't want to think about fighting or Warlins or anything of the kind.

"Do you think they're dead?" asked Selena her voice breaking. It'd not been higher than a whisper, she didn't want to know the truth.

"I believe Andrea might have taken them and blew up the house to draw you in," answered Ash. He stopped suddenly before he turned around. "Company." He threw Selena into the air. She extended her wings the second gravity kicked in. She pulled out her sword and floated beside Ash ready for battle.

"Andrea?" she questioned.

"No, she wouldn't come out until the thousand year was, I think its Jeremy." There was a laugh behind a tree before the man came into view. Despite his handsome features, he was just as ugly as Selena remembered him the first time he attacked her. His dark wings were extended; he was just as ready for battle as they were. His wings were a third black, meaning he was third in command. The

other two thirds of the wings had structures but Selena wasn't sure what they were there for. His spiky red hair was short and his dark orbs for eyes spewed nothing but hate and lust for Selena. Selena immediately began to think of a strategy. The first step in taking down an angel was to make them human by ripping out their wings. It took a couple of days to grow wings back, but it was a tortuous painful process. Selena couldn't wait to see Jeremy in pain... or better yet, dead.

"Jeremy," spat Selena

"Oh dearest Selena, how have you been?" He was trying to seduce her, but Selena wanted to barf every time he opened his mouth to speak. Ash went into defensive mode, positioning himself in front of Selena. Jeremy narrowed his eyes, he was good at combat but Selena knew Ash was better. Ash had improved a lot since their last quarrel. Jeremy pounced and Selena was thrown against a tree for protection. She climbed up to a branch just in time to see the swords collide. If the swords and wings weren't different shades Selena would have not known who was who. They both moved with the same aggression, fury and speed. Both wanting something valuable: her.

"It was easy blowing up the house," Selena paid close attention at Jeremy's words. Ash didn't speak but Selena noticed his blows get harder, the sounds thickening. "Too bad her parents were in there, probably didn't have time to get out," Jeremy laughed.

Selena wasn't sad nor depressed, as a matter of fact, she wasn't any synonym for being distraught. She wanted revenge, sweet merciless painful revenge... on him. Selena headed for the fight as Ash was able to strike Jeremy in the stomach, the tip shinned through Jeremy's back. Selena cut Jeremy's left wing in half then the right one in a swift movement. He groaned in pain and turned to face her, his eyes brimming with hate and tears.

"This one's for my mother." Selena cut off what was left of the left wing. "This one's for my father." She cut off his right wing. She swung her sword across his neck, positioned it to a standstill. "This one's for me." Selena began to move the sword across his neck; halfway through Jeremy's body exploded into dust, falling quietly to the ground below.

After the death of an angel, they became a pile of dust, this way the body of said angel would never be researched by mortal scientists. Angels had air

pockets behind their lungs to hold their wings, something that mortals didn't.

"Ash," Selena whispered, her wings and the world before her retracting.

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Nico had knocked on the door a million times before Ash was finally able to answer it. The dark circles under his eyes were darker than usual, he knew that much. He hadn't slept at all that past night and he prayed she couldn't tell. Nico's face shined with confusion as Ash stepped aside. Clear as day, was Selena on his pullout bed, looking strikingly dead, in the same clothes as the night before. Nico looked to Ash quickly, before he rushed to her side. Ash knew exactly how bad things must have looked to Nico, but bigger things were at stake than his relationship.

"What happened?" asked Nico, her voice no higher than a whisper.

"What do you mean? She's just sleeping." Ash kept his voice calm as he walked over to cover Selena with a blanket. They had just gotten in just a few minutes before Nico had showed up.

"Oh, it's... she looks... well... dead." Nico ran her eyes over Selena, like a worried sister.

"Nah just exhausted from the party last night," spoke Ash. Nico didn't speak as she continued to look at Selena.

"I know." Ash stopped dead in his tracks, afraid. No, she couldn't know. Did she know? How could she know?

"Know what?" asked Ash fake curiosity filling his voice.

"I know about the fire at her house." Ash's body relaxed but tensed up again when Nico seemed to take notice. "Was she in the house?"

"No, she was with me." Instantly Ash knew that was the wrong answer. Nico's face showed no change in emotion. This was just as bad, he wanted to see if she was angry or jealous or feeling something.

"With... you?" Nico repeated the words slowly; Ash knew he was about to drown unless he swam his way out.

"Yeah you know, we hung out after I dropped you off at home." Ash moved to his left to grab another blanket, Selena's lips were beginning to turn purple. She'd used a lot of physical and mental strength the night before.

“With you?” Nico repeated the two words once again. Ash could tell it was more to herself and chose to ignore them.

“We went out for ice cream. The house was on fire by the time we were back.” Ash tried his best to keep his tone calm as he continued his story.

“Ice cream at 4 in the morning?” asked Nico stopping Ash in his tracks for what seemed like the fifth time. Damn it, Ash thought, she knew the exact time the house had blown up.

“Are you jealous?” asked Ash. The blow was low but the twenty year old needed to switch subjects and fast.

“I hate you,” she muttered angrily. Her eyes on the other hand, gleamed another phrase. Ash kissed her cheek.

“I highly doubt that.” He smiled and waited for her to smile back before he placed some water in a pot. He then moved the pot over to the stove and turned it on.

From the corner of his eye he watched as Nico looked over to Selena. He could see the way Nico was looking at Selena, how her hair was messy, curly and hung loosely around her features. He wondered if Nico was really jealous, like the other angels he’d dated. He’d never dated a mortal before. Angels knew why Selena and Ash were as close as they were, yet it still caused problems. He didn’t like the silence that he was receiving from Nico. It made him uneasy as he cooked.

“What are you making?” Nico whispered, her voice soft. She leaned over to see as Ash spoke.

“Pasta.”

“You can *cook*?” her voice was filled with disbelief though Ash could tell she was simply pulling his strings. He raised an eyebrow before taking a step towards her. She immediately took one back. In a matter of seconds, Ash had managed to get her pinned against a wall, a hand snaking around her waist. The other barely touched her cheek.

“I should be angry because you think I can’t cook... do I look like the type of man that can’t cook?” He breathed down on her, their lips barely grazing. He could feel her shiver underneath his touch. He smirked lightly. “But I should have seen it coming. I’m too much man for you, huh?” he spoke softly into her ear and heard a slight intake of breath from the girl. He leaned down to kiss her;



she made a jump for his lips. Years of training, however, made him quick to move away. Nico glared at him.

"You suck." She sighed loudly as she crossed her arms. Ash moved back to the boiling water, chuckling quietly. He adored when she acted like an immature child, it was oddly amusing. "Is she going to stay here the entire time?" Nico asked slowly, one word at a time. Ash laughed lightly, noticing the change in her tone.

"Yes, her house is ashes at the moment." Nico raised an eyebrow, Ash knew instantly that meant to not tempt her. "Is that a problem?" he asked softly, getting uneasy again. He added the pasta into the pot.

"No, no, no, no, it's just, you know... she's going to change here... be all like naked here and you are going to be in the room and, like, you know." Ash rolled his eyes at the pasta before him. He'd lost count how many times he'd seen Selena either trying on clothes or undressed. To him it was scarring but he'd grown used to it, it wasn't a big deal anymore.

"Like I said I'm only attracted to you." As the words were uttered, a lonely rock flew through the window, breaking it to pieces. Glass shattered all over the apartment floor. The rock landed neatly in the middle of the room while the sleeping angel remained calmly undisturbed.

"Shit," cursed Ash, looking directly at Nico, who, confused, walked towards the rock. She picked it up the same second that another one approached her head at rapid speed. Ash didn't think twice, only moved and yelled "Selena cover!" Selena woke with a start, throwing the blanket aside, as more rocks flew in by the dozens. Her wings covered her body like the protective shield they were supposed to be.

Ash's massive wings covered not only his body but Nico's too. He read the look of utter confusion on her face and felt speechless. He had no clue what to tell her, but could only register the rocks slamming into his wings. Her eyes were wide as ever, as they looked down to the rock in her hand, she was still crouching on the floor. It was dark inside his wings; he wasn't leaving chances that any rocks could enter through possible holes.

Ash could notice every single emotion on Nico's face, curiosity, confusion but most prominent of all, fear.

"You should have let her die," spat Selena angrily. Nico swallowed back the lump that covered her air way.

"We know that my apartment isn't safe anymore. We need to move quickly. Warlins are everywhere. They know you're here." Ash pulled Nico around like a raggedy doll as he spoke. He seemed to ignore Selena's comment. She wasn't sure if she should have been thankful or concerned.

"Ash, we need to leave the city."

"No, I - I won't leave."

"Ash, we have too," argued Selena. Ash turned his body to look at her, stopping his hasty walk.

"I can't leave her here, alone and unprotected," Selena raised her eyebrows in disbelief at Ash's words. Nico wanted to jump into a hole and die.

"Why? You just met her. What does she matter?" questioned Selena, her voice hard with anger. Ash moved his eyes quickly as he explored Selena's. It made Nico's stomach turn.

"She does." His voice was firm.

"More than me?! More than my safety?" She seemed to know exactly what to say to make him change his mind. As soon as she spoke, Ash's eyes shifted away from hers. "If you forgot, we were brought on this earth for something greater than a girl. We are heroes of our kind, and we have to stay alive till then. Our fates were chosen, Ashton! We have to abide by them." A tree moved above them causing both their heads to snap up. Selena turned her gaze to Nico, her eyes full of anger overshadowed a bit of resentment. "She's human, she's no use." Selena's voice cut through Ash like a knife, this much Nico could tell.

"I can't just leave her Sel -"

"Then hand me over to the Warlins!" Ash's mouth feel open when Selena snapped at him. Silence fell over the pair. Ash turned to look at Nico in the eyes before dropping his arm, no longer holding her in place. Nico almost lost her balance.

"We'll leave tonight." Nico's mouth gapped in horror. "Go," he ordered her a few seconds later, "now," she didn't move an inch.

"Take her home." Selena sighed in exasperation as she looked down at her watch. "We'll meet at Rock Jets in exactly ten minutes. Not a second more." Selena looked both ways before crossing the street. She turned a corner,

disappearing from Nico's sight. Nico felt extremely faint.

"You - you have - w - wings," she sputtered. Finally alone, she wanted Ash to explain. Ash sighed and grabbed her arm again, this time pulling her in the direction of her house. "You're an angel," Ash stopped walking when she uttered the word. She could notice it, how every line in his features changed, waiting to find out more... more of what she was thinking. Ash turned to look at her, his blue eyes piercing hers. "You asked me on our first date if I believed in angels... if I believed in you," Nico's features turned into a ball of confusion as her brain processed the words after she spoke them.

"And you said yes." Ash said in a matter of fact way.

"I never thought you were actually an angel!" Nico could feel her voice rising as she fought for words. This didn't seem right, it couldn't be right.

"I never gave you a reason to think it in the first place," Ash shrugged trying to make it seem as though it were no big deal. Nico stared at him for a few seconds before speaking.

"Why didn't you tell me?" she sniffed.

"What was I supposed to tell you Nico?" He was angry, his voice was becoming harder and more distant, she was beginning to hate angel Ash. "Hi I'm Ash and I'm a twenty year old angel?" He laughed sarcastically.

"Do you age?" she asked softly. She was walking barefoot on broken glass; one wrong move and she could cut a vein.

"This isn't a movie Nico! Yes, I age. Yes, I can die! And yes, you are in great danger just talking to me! Don't you see that?" he threw his hands into the air tired of this conversation with her.

"Why am I in danger?" her voice cut through the dry tears. Her eyes cleared as she looked at Ash worriedly.

"Because - because I'm the protector. My only fate is to protect the child who will bring peace to earth. The most sought after child since never. Without her, all hope is lost for another thousand years," he looked at her directly while he spoke almost as if he was waiting for Nico to not believe anything he was saying. Strangely enough, she believed every word he spoke. She most likely wouldn't have believed him yesterday, but today after being saved from a rock attack by his massive wings, was a different story.

"Selena." Nico nodded at the one word.

“Yeah.”

“What do you mean by peace?” she added quickly. She couldn’t think of any war that she had seen with angels in them. Ash sighed, clearly annoyed with her. Nico didn’t care; if she was in grave danger she wanted to know every detail.

“You know, Hitler?” it was a rhetorical question but Nico nodded anyway, “he was being controlled by Warlins who wanted to clear the world of all humans, make it for the supernatural... The Ruems took control of the American army and Pearl Harbor was our excuse to attack and end that war. Columbus? Controlled by a Ruem woman looking for her long lost Viking lover,” his voice took the role of a historian trying to prepare a six year old for the AP exam. Nico’s head was spinning. “Everything you humans think you have done, the Warlins have been there but, always, the Ruems, have overpowered them. There has been nothing we haven’t been involved in.”

“Stop, just stop.” She tried to take the information in. Her boyfriend, if he was even that anymore, was an angel who protected the most sought after angel in the world. It was too much for her to handle in one intake. “Supernatural? There are more... non humans, not only angels?”

“Holy crap, Nico! Do I have to tell you everything?!” He sighed, rubbing his hands over his face. “A few of the first angels gave up their wings for witchcraft, the ability to turn into any animal they chose, the ability to drink human blood, and the ability to live under water,” Ash said softly.

“Vampires? Werewolves? Witches? Mermaids?” Nico’s eyes widen in shock. The very things that she never believed to exist were actually real.

“More like shape shifters and mer people but yeah, you get the point.” Ash nodded his head.

“Oh, I’m dizzy.” Nico had to place a hand on her head to keep it from spinning internally. It didn’t do anything to help the growing headache.

“Go home... please. Go home for me, and stay there. Lock your door and don’t come out.” He kissed her forehead as soon as the words slipped from his mouth. He started to walk away from her. Nico turn to look at his back, the spots were the wings had been, his clothes looked untouched. She wanted to see them; after all they had been the most beautiful things she had ever laid eyes on. Then again, those wings were driving a wall between the blue-eyed perfection and her, his brown-eyed contradiction.

“Are you going to die?” Her voice called out. It didn’t sound like something she would ask. Ash paused mid step and Nico swallowed. She knew what his response would be.

“It’s in my fate.” Ash’s wings exploded from his back, shooting him straight into the air. Nico ran towards Ryan’s house without hesitation; she needed her best friend now more than ever.

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Ash walked into Rock Jets, his heart bolting out of his chest. The place was completely trashed from the ceiling to the floor. All the furniture was destroyed except one chair perfectly placed in the middle, he knew exactly who had sat in that chair.

Anger rose in Ash quicker than wildfire. Before he could punch anything he spotted Darrin out of the corner of his eye. The black hair boy had a bloody gash on his right arm, running down from elbow to wrist and blood trickling on the back of his head. The twenty five year old was helping his mother stand up as Ash approached him.

“What happened?” he asked, trying and failing, to not sound angry.

“Warlins,” groaned Darrin as he took a look at his own gash. His green eyes showed furry, he wanted bloody revenge. “Selena sat at my table and, I swear, about two minutes later, four or five Warlins walked in. They blew up everything in their path. I stood in front of her but it was no use, they threw me aside, picked her up and walked out,” Darrin closed his eyes in pain. Ash took a look at the gash on his arm, he was lucky it wasn’t extremely deep.

“Should heal in a couple of days.” Ash gritted his teeth together as different scenarios ran through his mind. “They’re going to Andrea in France, probably by train and boat. Plane would be too obvious, they’d have to use her passport or get a fake one and they need money for that. They’d have to rent a car, and for that they’d need more money.” Ash’s ideas were running through his head as though gunshots were being fired over and over again. “I have to catch up with them,” Ash muttered to himself.

“I’m coming with you.” Ash shot Darrin a look. He was extremely glad to have a friend like Darrin, with the bravery he processed, but he knew how

dangerous the trip would get.

"I'll leave tomorrow morning," added Ash quickly.

"I want blood... I want revenge. Nobody can destroy my parents' restaurant and get away with it so easily," Darrin said angrily. He groaned in pain as he moved his arm. Once again Ash couldn't help but think how lucky Darrin was that it wasn't his fighting arm, or he would have been no use to Ash on the road.

"Oh my god." Ash cursed under his breath as he turned to look at Nico. She was standing in the doorway, Ryan right beside her.

"I told you to go home," said Ash angrily. She had directly disobeyed the one thing he had told her to do, the one thing that could save her. Why in Angelico damnation did he have to like the stubborn ones?

"Yeah but I'm also a legal adult tomorrow so you can't tell me what to do anymore," said Nico crossing her arms.

"This is much bigger than you, stop acting like a child," her face combusted into a look of complete and utter shock. Did she expect him to be nice?

"I want to help," her voice was as stern as his was angry.

"You're human, you can't," Ash spoke simply. "But I'm not," Nico sighed softly, rolled her eyes and shoot Ryan a glance when she spoke. Ash pressed his eyebrows together.

"You aren't an angel," Ash had made sure to know of every single angel in the Denver area when he moved back with Selena and her family. Ryan was not on his very long list.

"Witch, thank you very much," Ash's face held a disbelieving look as Ryan walked over to Darrin. She ran her thumb over Darrin's wound; any part she touched would heal immediately. "Believe me now?" she asked nonchalantly. "Nico told me you were an angel about three seconds before I got this call." She took a sharp intake of breath. "Who's injured?!" Ryan smiled at Ash before getting to work. He did the same thing, thinking of an elaborate plan to get his girl back.

"We need to get Selena before she steps foot in France, she's dead as soon as she gets there." Ash grabbed Selena's unbroken chair and pulled it up to a half blown table. He took out his knife and quickly drew a creepily accurate map of the world. The map had been imprinted into his mind and Ash knew every single inch of it. "Darrin," he started to explain to Darrin their plan. "We'll gather

today anything we may need. I know for a fact there are no trains for New York leaving until tomorrow so we shall be fine. From New York the Warlins will take a boat most likely headed to England in six days. From there they will catch the train to France. Andrea will kill her at first sight. There's no time to waste. We stock up on food, weapons and maps tonight, we leave at dawn," he said nodding to himself and his self made map.

"Who's Andrea?" Nico looked at Ash as she spoke. Ash's gaze didn't lift from the table.

"She's the ruler of the Warlins. No one crosses her, not even her own husband," Ash explained softly, letting his anger slowly fade away.

"I'm coming." Nico's voice was stern and steady.

"No, you aren't." Ash's voice was sharp and to the point, his anger quickly returning. He was not in the mood to argue. He shouldn't have left Selena alone for even those ten minutes. It was his fault she was gone but it wasn't going to be his fault she was dead.

"You can't control me... I'm not a child," spat out Nico

"But you are human, therefore you aren't powerful."

"It's just cause I'm human?" Nico was taken aback by her own words. Ash knew the way he was acting was hurting her but he didn't care. He had one objective on his mind and that was Selena. He had lost sight of it at first but that wasn't going happen again. He wouldn't let it.

"Yes!" Ryan, Ash and Darrin said at the same time. Nico huffed and crossed her arms angrily.

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"Ryan's been kidnapped." Carter's jaw set tightly before he ran his fist into the nearest tree cracking it. Nico took an instant step back as the crack in the tree.

"What happened?" his voice remaining dangerously low as he looked past Nico. She swallowed before divulging into the story.

"She went outside to grab healing materials from her house and I went to follow her, about a minute later, to make sure nothing happened to her and all. A Warlin came, swept her up and flew away. I screamed for Ash and he tried to follow him but it was already too late. The Warlin was too far." It felt strange to

her using the word Warlin as if she had known it her entire life. "Don't change out of anger," Nico added quickly. Carter simply stared at her as if her eyes were popping out of her skull. "Ryan told me you're a shifter... a tiger shifter."

"I'm guessing your little angel boyfriend knows too?" Nico flinched. There were a lot of things that the girls had shared in the last few hours. Things like Ryan knowing what Ash really was from the first moment she saw him.

"He says you can come along and help them," nodded Nico, this was true. In Ash's words 'they could use all the help they could get.'

"Them?"

"I'm human, I can't go." She almost started crying at the thought of standing on the sidelines not knowing if Ryan was okay or not. She wasn't even allowed to help find her. It was ridiculous but seeing how easily they had taken Ryan, who was a witch... the thought both frightened and enraged her. Could they really just pick her up as if she were some doll? Ash had finally convinced her to stay and it had undoubtedly gone through her head that it was an intelligent idea.

"Where are they?"

"At, um, Rock Jets?" said Nico smiling uncomfortably.

"Go home Nico, get some sleep. Don't forget to tell Ryan's mom I took her to Europe or something for a week or two, we'll be back by then. Make something up. Bye," Carter sighed and moved his neck to crack it. Nico liked the way he said firmly 'we'll be back', not 'if we'll be back'.

"Good luck," she spoke softly. When Carter turned back to look at Nico, his face had blue and white strips beginning to appear. He nodded towards her before he changed completely and ran off into Rodway Park. Nico turned to walk, in the utter darkness, towards her house.

There were so many things she hadn't known before. Many unseen creatures roaming the planet as if it wasn't a big deal. They were just like in the books she had read but in there, never had an actual war going on. She couldn't wrap her head around how the angels were fighting their battles, through them, the humans. She hadn't known any of this, this morning, but now new revelations didn't seem to stop appearing. Was it possible to have her head explode from all the information that had been given to her? Could her head literally explode from knowing too much... too quickly?



Before it could actually register, Nico was standing in front of the orphanage; the place she had tried to call home for so many years. Now it looked like it wasn't even a part of her anymore. The building felt strange to her. It was obvious though, she'd figured this out years ago, an orphanage was not a home, no matter how lively, nice and welcoming Nico's had been to her.

It was barely nine in the night when she dragged herself through the front door. She crashed immediately on her bed, her clothes still clinging to her body. Sleep would make everything better, it always did.

*"Nico listen, we're headed to Miami not New York. The Warlins were confusing Ash with fake information! The boat leaves in six days at 5 am. The boat will take us directly to France. We can't reach France Nico, we just can't. It's all that I've gathered but it should help. Give this information directly to Ash. I can't reach his mind, he's not asleep. Hurry! Wake up! Nico wake up!"*

The breath erupted from Nico's lungs as she jumped from her sleeping state. She looked at her clock. Barely half past eleven. Her dream, could it be real? Had Ryan reached her mind while she was sleeping? Nico didn't care; she used it as an excuse to see and talk to Ash again. It was always a possibility.

-

"Could... could it be real?" asked Nico. Ash pressed his lips together in thought. He ran a hand over his face. It was very difficult to tell what his emotions were that exact moment. She hadn't expected to find Ash sleeping, simply because of the information Ryan had given her. She found none of the boys asleep.

"Possibly the Warlins knew we would head towards New York. After all the boat to England was the obvious choice. Are you sure it was Ryan and not someone who was pretending to be her?" asked Ash. "Was her voice pure Nico?"

"I know my best friend's voice!" Nico argued, crossing her arms angrily at him. Ash shook his head and sighed.

"That's not what I meant, baby," Nico was taken aback by two things. First, was the way he didn't fight back with her, he usually didn't mind arguing, he

usually did. Then, there was the fact that for the first time he called her a nickname other than Nico. Oddly enough she loved the way 'baby' was directed at her. Something in the back of her mind told her she would only hear it if she was lucky.

"Then what did you –" Nico sucked in a breath, something strange was taking over her body.

"Nico?" Searing pain shot through her entire body in a split second. She yelled in pain. This was more pain that she had ever experienced. It was as though something was trying to escape her body, fighting it way out, clawing at her skin repeatedly. Ash grabbed her face, looking straight into her eyes. She could feel sweat dripping down her forehead. He quickly pulled his hands away as though her face had burned him.

Nico screamed, her body convulsing in pain. Ash moved quickly to her back side, as Nico fell to the floor. Ash lifted her shirt, exposing her back. A stream of curse words flowed from his mouth. Another strong hit of pain shot through Nico, she yelled once more, tears brimming her eyes. She wanted this to end.

"Darrin! My knife! Now!" Darrin ran in quickly handing Ash his knife. Nico had no idea why Ash would need a knife but she wanted him to end her life if the pain would go away. Darrin took a look towards Nico's back and cursed. Nico's vision was gone due to the clouds of tears covering her eyes. "I'm so sorry baby," said Ash softly. Nico felt as the knife dug straight into her body down two lines. It was painful but it relived her of the pain that she had been in a few seconds before. Ash moved to stand in front of her, his hands held her face lovingly. "Stay awake, please, it's almost over." Nico felt something pull completely out of her body. She yelled in one last outburst of pain. She felt as though she had just gotten rid of a deadly parasite. Her breath was ragged and heavy but she was no longer in pain. She praised the heavens for getting rid of the pain that she had been in. Only then she noticed that his knife had not a drop of blood.

"What was that?!" asked Nico trying to catch her breath. Ash took a step back staring in disbelief. Nico lifted her head; he was staring at something right behind her. "What?" Had the parasite come back to haunt her?

"You have wings."

Nico felt them as soon as Ash acknowledged their existence. They were a part of her; she could move them like she could move her pinkie. Ash ran his hands over his face softly and carefully. Nico's eyes averted toward the clock hanging on the wall. A few minutes after midnight, at least, through all the pain, she was officially an adult.

"An angelic child's wings sprout at their turn into adulthood." Darrin sighed as he spoke. Nico stared at the men in front of her, frightened to say anything. Darrin was against a wall, silent. Ash began to pace around the room, leaving Nico slightly light headed. They didn't weigh anything, the wings, they were simply there.

"How - how do I put them in?" She didn't turn to view them. She wanted to ignore their very existence; those things that clung to her back had given her enough pain to last a lifetime.

"It's just like making a fist." He didn't look at her as he spoke. Nico felt fully responsible for that. She gazed at her hand, making it into a fist then tried the same with the new muscles she had acquired. "You got it," whispered Ash after what felt like an eternity of trying.

"It gets easier," promised Darrin, as he left the room. Nico moved her shoulders. It didn't hurt receding them, not like she had imagined.

"Don't lean back. If your back touches anything after you retract or release, it burns you... like a candle burning off your finger slowly," Ash didn't seem to want to provide her with this information.

"Does it burn you?" Nico lifted her eyes to look straight into his. Ash nodded his head before he sighed.

"Pack a bag. You must be the only one that Ryan can communicate through. The more things we know about the Warlins' plans the better," he spoke through his teeth. Nico felt frightened by his stance.

Nico took a step forward to touch his shoulder. "Ash! Ryan said she couldn't contact you because you weren't asleep," Ash avoided her touch by inches. Something new shined in his eyes. Nico couldn't pin point what it was, though it gave her an empty feeling inside. "Are you sad?" Her voice shook as she questioned her boyfriend. He took a step towards her sighing his features turning away from any anger.

"Nico, wings show an angel's soulmate." Nico's heart began to race. Could

her wings show Ash as her soulmate? Or could he not be her soulmate? Could this be the end?

Unable to make even feeble words, Nico simply nodded.

"Your wings have falling rain at the top, with structures at the bottom and surrounding. The entire thing has a lining of blue." Nico's face filled with confusing, what was he getting at? "Your soulmate relates to water and I have none." He snapped out his statement like poison to his lungs and walked out of the room. He left Nico more alone than she had ever felt before.

Her heart shattered in two, tearing down the middle. She'd never given herself so quickly to someone only to be broken into a million pieces. No tears threatened to escape. All she could think about was how fate was his religion and how in his eyes, fate was never wrong.

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Selena played with the multiple rings and bracelets in her possession as she laid in her cell. It was a simple cell made up of only one thing, a twin sized bed. There was no room to walk around. Out of the edges of the bed grew the invisible walls of the cage. All she could do to stretch was sit, lay or kneel.

"How are you still wearing heels?" questioned Ryan from her own cell a few feet away. Selena smiled at her newly formed friend. They had only known each other for a couple of hours but being each other's only companion they grew close rather quickly.

"These are \$345 shoes, they aren't leaving my feet even if I'm dead." She fixed the pillow underneath her before going back to playing with the rings on her fingers. They were in the storage area of a recently departed train. Selena had been able to gather information by the small hole on the ceiling between the cells, like around what time it was, and other things.

"I've never been to Europe," whispered the redhead after a moment of silence.

"It's not a big deal," sighed Selena softly. This was, however, a blained lie. She adored Europe. Since she'd been unable to reside in a place for longer than two weeks after her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, she'd lived all over Europe... twice. "Can you reach Nico again? Is she sleeping?" Selena questioned, raising an eyebrow at the

girl to her right. Ryan closed her eyes.

"No, she's wide awake but she's different. Her molecular structure has rearranged it's like - no - I - can't believe it!" Selena sat up, suddenly interested in what Ryan couldn't possibly believe. The redhead's eyes flew open.

"What? What is it?" urged the raven-haired beauty when Ryan said nothing, only stared into the space before her, completely in shock.

"Nico's an angel."

-

Nico ran a hand through her brown hair. "So let me get this straight. We're flying to the train station? Like with our wings?" Nico made flying motions with her hands before touching her back quickly, she shivered. She wasn't liking the idea at all. She hadn't extended her wings since the first time they had forced their way out.

"Not you though, Ash is carrying you," said Darrin as he tied his backpack to his ankle.

"And Carter? Carter can't fly, not since the last time I checked." Nico tightened the backpack on her back. All this was completely new to her, not to mention frightening. Her thoughts wandered to Ash and their conversation that morning. Was he still upset?

"I'm taking him of course." Ash walked in as Darrin spoke. Nico wished she didn't have to be carried around like a doll but at the same time was glad she didn't have to use her wings. She wasn't please with the mixed emotions they were giving her.

"Ready?" Ash's flat tone remained the same since Nico's wings had come into light. She swallowed, nodded and followed Ash outside the trashed restaurant of their first date. "Straddle me." He looked and continued to sound unemotional. It made Nico's stomach turn. She jumped into his arms, his hands on her bottom holding her in place. Nico stared into his eyes as his wings expanded. "Put your head down, either side doesn't matter," he ordered. She did as she was told, her head going to the crook of his neck. Ash kicked off the ground and, instantly Nico felt a pleasant splash of wind on her back.

"Ash." Her soft voice broke the rhythm he had been flying in, she noticed his

wings made a slight twitch.

"Yeah?" Flat once more. Nico had so many questions for him. Like, who was her supposed soulmate? who she didn't want at all, but she knew that subject would only get her into trouble or an official break up.

"Where are Darrin and Carter?"

"Probably back at the restaurant, trying to figure out a way to carry Carter without making it look weird." There was a long silent pause before Nico looked at his neck and softly placed a single kiss on it. "Don't." His voice wasn't angry but rather soft, as if he was forcing himself to stop her.

"I still want to be with you." Her voice as soft as his. Ash sighed as his wings continued to beat to the steady pattern.

"It's not going anywhere, there's no point." His voice showed clearly how much he hated to say those words. Nico would have to fight for both of their sakes, for what both of them wanted.

"There is to me," urged Nico. "I feel happy when I'm with you and I know we haven't been going out for long, but you make me think about my future... I've never thought about it before," she stared off into space as she spoke. Ash landed next to train tracks in a dessert type zone, his wings retracting quickly. Nico saw the figure of Carter moving in the distances before he halted in front of her, Darrin landing a second beside him. Nico's eyes landed on Darrin's wings before he retracted them from her view. There was a skeleton ball in the upper part, it's lining a delicate gold. It made Nico's stomach turn from sheer beauty. Right under the ball, there seemed to be three long gashes and gusts of wing surrounding them, but Nico couldn't be sure.

"We didn't figure out a way." Carter shifted back into human form as Darrin spoke. He looked dangerously pale, his breath heavy and raggedy. Nico was shocked that he was still standing.

"That's... why ... we ... took ... so ... long." Carter gulped down the water Darrin offered him as soon as he finished speaking.

"What are we doing here?" Nico broke the silence as she watched Carter down water like it was air. She knew that wasn't good for him. Ash squinted his eyes at a fast moving object in the distance.

"We're waiting for the next train." Ash looked closer.

"And we couldn't use a train strain because...?" Nico waited for Ash to pick

up her statement but he never did.

“Don’t jump on till I tell you. Carter you’ll go first,” said Ash ignoring her. Carter’s breathing had calmed down by miles. He drank more water before shifting back to tiger and taking a few steps back. Nico watched him closely. The train got closer and bigger and the only thoughts that were running through Nico’s mind were to not jump on it. Before she knew it the train was moving in front of her at fast speeds, a swirl of color before her eyes, making her hair fly out of control. “Now!” Carter took off running and landed in the only open storage compartment. Ash opened his wings and extended his hand to Nico, she shook her head stubbornly, made a fist and opened it, causing her own wings to expand. “Damn it Nico not now!” Ash yelled. He turned to Darrin and simply nodded. The end of the train had already flown by. Darrin had to catch the same hole as Carter by flying at great speeds. “What the hell do you think you’re doing?!”

“Training!” Ash rolled his blue eyes at her but shot himself into the sky. He extended his hand once more to her. She looked from it to the moving train at least two hundred feet away.

“Let me help you then.” The tone of his voice made her smile. Nico took hold of his hand. Ash pulled her forcefully into the air.

Her wings kicked into life like her legs would walk. She was a two year old, learning to fly. Ash was in front of her, flying backwards, holding both her hands to help her balance herself. “I - I can’t do this!” she yelled at him, frightened. He laughed.

“Sure you can... I’m gonna let go now.” She looked at him as though he were crazy, before he let go off one hand to fly beside her, holding the other tightly in place. There was no higher feeling, the wing slashing her face. Her body lifting her like a power from above. Something magical was happening, something that, without Ash, she never would have had the courage to do on her own.

She pressed his hand softly and he pressed hers in return. Ash’s suddenly picked up speed, forcing Nico to do the same. She eased her hand away from his, laughed as she passed him with much ease. She’d never felt so comfortable in her entire life.

“Come on! Don’t be a baby!” she yelled at him as she neared the opened storage cell. Ash flew past her at an incredible speed and landed neatly in the

doorway of the cell. He stuck out his hand, a grin on his face.

She pushed herself to go faster, their fingertips almost touching. She was so close. A branch knocked her off her balance causing her to land on the floor with a loud thump. She felt familiar arms cradle her body off the ground and into a dark room.

-

Ash carefully landed on the doorway for the second time. Darrin closed it right behind him. The storage compartment was build like a studio apartment; perfectly set for their few days of traveling. Carter pulled down one of the three beds.

“What happened?” he questioned, worry eminent in his voice.

“She hit a branch and felt her wings give out on her for the first time, plus she hit the floor pretty hard.” Ash placed her softly on the bed, then made a move to leave to get her ice from the fridge on the other side of the storage compartment. Nico wouldn’t let him go, having a tight grip on his shirt.

“Stay,” she whispered. Ash obeyed her, lying beside her. Nico moved to use his chest as a pillow, causing Ash to roll his eyes at her. “Move and I’ll murder you,” he chuckled softly pulling up her shirt from behind to check for any permanent damage. He tried hard not to focus on its beautiful curve and how it led perfectly to her -

“We’re going to be stuck here for a while,” Carter sighed softly after he spoke. Ash nodded slightly, silently thanking Carter for pulling him out of his own thoughts. He placed Nico’s shirt back down.

“We’re in here till Miami; we should be arriving the same day the boat leaves. We can take on the Warlins on the boat since we have Nico,” nodded Ash, his hand on the small of her back rubbing very gently.

“Why Nico?” Her voice didn’t sound as though she were alarmed but full of pain instead. Ash hated to hear her voice that way.

“You have the gift of water which we will start training tomorrow, since clearly today you will be no use,” whispered Ash softly.

“Another gift?” groaned Nico loudly.

“Go to sleep.” He once again made a move to leave the bed, in order to give



her the entire space. The train wasn't meant for living creatures, but Ash had connections. He had gotten a compartment for three people before he knew Nico was coming along. By the time he knew about her, it was too late to add another bed.

"Leave, you die." Nico immediately made herself more comfortable around him. Ash forced himself to relax; there clearly seemed no way of moving without Nico making some sort of threat. Her threats weren't threatening but something about laying in bed with her made Ash grin like a child on the last day of school.

"Okay." He kissed the top of her head.

"Where's Ash?" questioned Nico groggily as she propped herself on her elbows. She ran a hand lazily over her eyes to wake them up. It was clearly nighttime; darkness peered through the two windows on the storage compartment.

"He went to get food." It was in that instant that Nico noticed two things. One, the small hole on the roof and two, the spot beside her bed was sunk which meant he had only just left her. Nico pushed herself off the bed and lifted it, not caring that it was wrinkly.

"Where are we?" she asked softly.

"Just entering Kansas, I believe." Darrin moved his arms to grab a drink. Nico hadn't really noticed him before, he was bigger than the initial stare suggested. Much bigger than Ash all together. His dark hair hung loosely now that he seemed to be relaxing and waiting for battle. Darrin flipped through the newspaper in his arms casually. "Hey Kitty, did you hear about the disaster in Missouri your pack caused?" Nico's eyes drifted towards Carter who stared at Darrin, giving him his 'I'm extremely annoyed with you' look. Nico had received it countless times.

"I don't have a pack and, no, what happened?" asked Carter but Nico could tell that he instantly regretted what he had said. She yawned as she prepared herself to listen.

"Three wild orange striped tigers attacked Jamie Harlington, a boy of fifteen who washed away with the wind," Darrin stopped to read the rest of the article silently to himself. He cursed loudly then flipped the table out of sheer anger. Nico backed herself into a corner quickly. Carter stood up from his chair obviously concerned or as interested as she was.

"Darrin, what's wrong?" asked Carter softly, he took a step towards the angel, his arms up, prepared for any attack.

"Those tigers killed an innocent child... an innocent angelic child," Nico gasped, her hand flying to her mouth while she took a step forward to try and comfort Darrin. Carter instantly held a hand up to stop her.

Nico screamed as Darrin pressed his arm against Carter's throat cutting off his breath. Carter moved his arms violently to get Darrin off of him. Suddenly, before Nico's eyes, Carter had pushed Darrin away and they were throwing things. Nico yelled at them to stop. They didn't listen to her as things continued to fly

across the small crowded room.

Before she could register what was going on, something was flying straight at her. She couldn't scream before her wings were around her, covering her, protecting her. Nico drew the line when she felt pressure on her wings. They better not ruin them, they were brand new! She was angry now but she didn't dare move from where she stood with her wings lightly hovering around her persona.

"What is going on here?!" Light burst into the room. Nico could hear the movement of the train as the door was thrown open. She no longer heard things being thrown around the room. She moved her wings slightly to cause a minimal hole, just enough to see the angry figure of Ash in the doorway. Carter and Darrin made no movement when he appeared. It was obvious that they were both frightened of Ash, especially with the force he had come in and how he had yelled at them.

Surprisingly, angry Ash was incredibly hot.

"What happened? Actually I don't care just fix everything," demanded Ash picking things off the floor. Darrin and Carter stood rooted to their spots, completely in shock. "MOVE!" he yelled; the two men began to frantically fix everything in sight as quickly and efficiently as possible. Nico straightened herself up and felt her wings retract into her body as she did so. "Are you okay?" His voice went soft as he ran a hand over her cheek. She nodded and smiled. "Good," he smiled at her then turned to the boys. He spotted the newspaper sprawled on the ground, picked it up and quickly scanned its contents. "Darrin." His voice was soft though he was still quite angry. "It's not Carter's fault, plus you know he's blue... not orange." Ash threw the newspaper into the lands before he closed the giant door; Nico followed it with her eyes.

"Ash - sorry," whispered Darrin. Nico barely picked it up.

"It's not me you have to apologize to." Their attention turned to the shifter who was in the mist of wiping his bloody nose. Nico's stomach made an uncomfortable twist, she was never too good with blood.

"Sorry," spat Darrin.

"Darrin," threatened Ash menacingly. Nico enjoyed how Ash was being a hard ass to stand up for someone he didn't really know.

"I'm sorry, Carter." Darrin stuck out a reluctant hand to Carter. Carter looked

from the hand to the owner of it; then shook it forcefully.

“Not a problem.” He pressed his lips together in a smile, causing a small smile to jump on Nico’s face. Carter had always been more of a pacifist, it was one of those things that Ryan said she adored. Nico’s heart sank to her empty stomach. The memory of her best friend pulled her away from any happy thought quickly and forcefully. Ryan was still missing, still gone. The redhead wasn’t beside her, laughing, or making a joke, or saying something quote worthy, or better yet complaining about being a redhead, because she wasn’t there. Nico felt so empty without her best friend, emptier than she had ever thought possible.

“Nico?” Ash approached her carefully. Nico swallowed back her tears. She didn’t like to cry, especially when the reason was possibly only understandable by Ryan and Ryan alone.

“I just – I just miss my best friend,” she blurted out. Carter sighed pressing his mouth together in a thin line, unlike the smile that had been there a few seconds before. Nico wiped the threatening tears completely away.

“Nico.” Ash’s voice was shades softer. “I miss my best friend too, but we’ll find them and bring them home soon, I promise.” he kissed her forehead. Nico smiled at his touch.

-

Ryan tried for the millionth time to break Selena’s cage. Currently in fetal position, the brunette looked anything but comfortable, cringing in pain every so often, sometimes even convulsing. “I’m trying, I really am,” said Ryan quickly. Selena muffled a scream into her pillow as she cringed once again.

“It’s... fine... keep... trying... please,” she spoke between gasps of pain. Ryan gave up on magic and quickly changed tactics. She banged loudly on her own glass. Jason exploded into the room within seconds, a look of pure rage upon his unappealing features. He was clearly the same age as Darrin, or close to. He wasn’t as strong built but he was ready for battle, sword by his side. His black eyes matched his greasy black hair. He was nothing but repulsing. He punched Ryan’s cage causing the sound to vibrate and hit Ryan multiple times like a knife.

“Little witch! I was sleeping!” he complained loudly, clearly not pleased with her behavior.

"Please she's just helping me," piped up Selena, gasping for air. Jason turned his attention to the cringing creature once known as Selena.

"And what's wrong with you?" he teased.

"My wings haven't been released in twenty four hours." She gasped out in once breath. Ryan pressed herself against her own glass. She wanted to be as close to Selena as she possibly could.

"Well? What are you waiting for, a parade? Release them," said Jason, mocking Selena's pain. He smirked slightly before turning to leave.

"It's too small in here." Selena's eyes were showing clear fear. Ryan couldn't look at her without fearing what would happen.

"Frankly, slut, I don't give a damn." Were his last words before he disappeared into the opened door. Ryan pressed herself as close as she possibly could to Selena.

"Selena, I am so sorry," she whispered. Selena didn't speak, only extended her wings. She cried out in pain before her wings cut her off. Ryan watched as Selena's wings kept extending and extending, suffocating her to death. As soon as they were completely released in the small cage, her wings retracted themselves in what seemed record time. Selena fell to her bed breathing heavily. Her wings had been holding her at least two feet above her bed.

"I can't wait... for Ash to... kill him," gasped out Selena angrily. Ryan swallowed, she'd never felt worse for a person in her life. This was plain torture. What could they possibly want with her? Ryan knew who Selena was, but why kidnap her? She was no use! Right?

“Oh no! No way!” Nico held on to something for dear life. “I am so not doing that!” she yelled. Ash rolled his eyes, easy as pie, picked her up, threw her over his shoulder and jumped out of the train in one swift motion. Nico didn’t even bother to yell. He landed softly on the roof of the train and placed her down. Her wings opened to balance her naturally, Ash had no need. He grabbed the bucket of water from Darrin and set it between them after he sat down. Nico refused to look side to side.

“Are you afraid of heights?” asked Ash almost laughing. Nico glared at him. She could sense what he could find funny. An angel afraid of heights? It would be a joke for the books.

“No, I fell last time and I still have the marks to prove it.” This wasn’t at all false. Nico’s body was still covered with healing bruises and tiny scratch marks.

“You’ll be fine with me,” whispered Ash smiling softly. Nico nodded and kneeled in front of the bucket. “Lift the water.” Nico made a move for the handle. “Without touching the bucket or the water with your hands.” He quickly added, his gaze never moving from her eyes. Nico pressed her eyebrows together.

“What?” she belted out.

“Your wings show the power of water. Your mother or father had that same power. You can move water with your mind, darling.” Ash’s words were spoken softly. Nico started to laugh, taking note of the ‘darling’.

“That only happens in movies.” Ash raised an eyebrow before lifting his hand. Dust raised around them, Nico’s laughter stopped immediately. She stared at Ash. “But your wings -,” she began.

“I’m different Nico. I’ve been training dust since I was eleven. I fought in wars when I was twelve. I had witches shove power into me at fourteen. I’m not a typical angel... I’m a weird angel if that makes sense.” Ash sighed softly and lowered his hand. The dust around them lowered itself to the ground. Nico stared in shock. “Water’s a powerful element, as is earth, fire and wind. Those four are the original elements. I have only mastered dust, however, I’m hoping to master a strong former form of earth when we return.”

“When?” She became giddy when he used that word. Ash smiled at the roof of the storage cell, causing Nico’s heart to flutter in ways she didn’t want it to.

“I’m gonna get her back or die. You are going to live even if I have to kill the

entire planet." Nico swallowed and stared at him, leaning over slowly. Ash cleared his throat loudly to stop her movements. "Water, move it," he ran a hand over his face. Nico huffed out a breath angrily and concentrated on the water in the bucket. "Use your hands, it helps," he whispered calmly, his voice sounded strained as it often did when he stopped any moment between them.

Nico moved her hands over the water softly trying to make it move, an inch maybe two. She concentrated as hard as she could but nothing happened. The water remained idle in the bucket. Nico closed her eyes and let the air she was holding out.

"Nico if you can't do it, it's fine." Nico opened her eyes simply to glare at him deeply. Ash was beginning to appear bored, lifting dust from the ground and playing with it.

"Shut it, angel boy," she snapped before she closed her eyes once more. Ash made no comment at her words.

She chose a different path, deciding to concentrate on waves and the way they moved. Their slow approach to the beach and their sudden crash, the way they came up from the water when the plates moved. She opened her eyes, feeling inspired, and softly, ever so lightly, lifted her hand. She saw, with disbelief in her own eyes, a tiny hill in the water begin to form. Ash moved closer to look. She moved her hand forward propelling the wave forward. It crashed at the wall of the bucket. Delighted, Nico smiled at her work, while Ash's face remained indifferent.

"See! I can do it!" she said almost clapping for herself.

"I never said you couldn't." Ash grabbed the bucket and moved to the side where the door was. "Darrin!" Darrin's hand appeared grabbing the bucket. He pulled it inside. "Do it again," commanded Ash with absolutely no emotion. Nico gave him a weird look, he must have been kidding.

"I need the bucket," said Nico speaking to Ash as if he were a little slow.

"You need water. It's down there, bring it up," he spoke as if this was the easiest thing in the world.

"You are so cruel, I want my Ash back," her voice almost broke as she crossed her arms. Ash's expression didn't change.

"Bring the water up," he repeated, his voice getting angrier.

Nico could feel the anger begin to build up inside of her. He didn't seem to

care that she was completely new at this! That she had found out she was an angel a day ago, that they were traveling to save their best friends, that she was scared! This Ash, the angel Ash, had no emotions. He was no longer the guy who looked at her as if tomorrow was in her eyes, not on her wings. She wanted that Ashton. The one that had offered her a tissue in the graveyard, the one that wanted to wipe all her tears away, not cause them. The one that made sure she felt beautiful. The one that didn't command her to do stupid things, like lift water.

"No!" Nico yelled standing up. "I am so tired of your 'the word sucks' attitude! Sick of it!" Nico's hands flew towards the sky in a fit of rage. "Why can't you say you're actually proud of me?" She threw her hands to the side, "I want to go home... away-." She placed her hands on her head. "From you." She pointed at him, his face showed no change of emotion. The second she sighed though his expressionless face was completely wiped away.

Water dripped on the boy, drenching him from head to toe.

Nico's eyes widen in shock. Ash licked his lips then shook his head to dry his soaking hair. "Good job." He nodded softly at her before disappearing into the storage cell. Nico ran a hand over her face feeling more stupid than she had ever felt in her entire life. She couldn't face him yet, especially not with Darrin and Carter in the room. Like moving a finger, her wings directed her to where she needed to be.

She placed herself in a floating like position, her wings fanning rhythmically above the storage cell. She knew somehow that she had really messed up by throwing water on Ash, but it hadn't been her fault, she hadn't even noticed that the water had moved in the first place. She was obviously sorry, but she'd been in so much shock, that she hadn't thought quickly enough to apologize.

She looked down at the moving train then at the setting sun before her. She knew it was time to go. As the sun was grazing the top of the ground, she landed on the roof of the storage cell with the hole, as quietly as she could. She retracted her wings and jumped in. Nico figured Ash had left it opened for her. She landed neatly inside.

"Nico?!" Nico turned sharply around at the sound of her best friend's voice. It couldn't be. It must have been inside her mind. This had to be a dream, a cruel dream where she got to hear her best friend's voice for soaking Ash.



“Ryan?”

To say Nico was in a state of shock was an understatement. Nico had her hands on the glass, Ryan's on the same position. They smiled at each other, their eyes gleaming with everlasting joy. Selena found it utterly sickening.

"Angelico, you guys look like you haven't seen each other in months," spat Selena her own voice bouncing inside the cell.

"You shouldn't be here, they're going to capture you and put you in one of these and you can't open your wings inside them," whispered Ryan at a great speed. She shot Selena a look to which Selena simply shrugged.

"But I have to rescue you," whispered Nico back smiling, not worrying about being stuck in a box. Selena started to worry for her instead. Nico wasn't thinking straight. She didn't know that if her wings weren't opened every 24 hours her body went into agonizing pain. The box was so small Selena was almost choked by her own wings. There was no alternative, it was either almost choke every single time or die when her wings exploded through her body.

"Please Nico, go back to where you came from, it's not safe," begged Ryan, her eyes starting to ooze out worry, so much Selena was beginning to find it revolting.

"I won't leave you here." Selena swallowed the sudden lump in her throat. The scene reminded her of her eighteenth birthday party.

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"Ash, stop! You're making me dizzy!" laughed the birthday girl as Ash twirled her again. It was four, possibly five, in the morning; Selena had lost count. Everyone had already drooled over the marks on Selena's wings, admiring them. Eventually, after much persuasion and threats from Ash, they let her be. She had been called the "It Child" at least four dozen times tonight. Ash placed her on the floor as they continued to dance to the music, two friends enjoying a party.

"As you wish, my queen," joked Ash bowing. Selena couldn't help rolling her eyes at him.

"Shut it, blondie." She pushed his shoulder lightly him to lose balance for a split second before he laughed lightly. People gazed at them; jealous of the supposed love they were in. However, the thought of kissing Ash

not only completely repulsed her, but turned her off from boys in general. She had been asked by her mother dozens of times, why she never liked Ash and in truth, Selena never had a reasonable response for that question. Ash had always been her protector and she had been his.

When the girl had been four years old and Ash five, Ash had gotten picked on for being that tough little boy who never had time for friends. She remembered it clearly, the way she punched a kid in the face for calling Ash a nerd. Then, Ash had punched the same kid for making Selena punch him. It was one of the earliest but greatest memories Selena had.

The memory brought a smile to the girl's face. "What are you thinking about?" asked Ash spinning her once more, almost as if he hadn't heard her to stop. Selena rolled her eyes at him, smiling nonetheless.

"About little Craig Archer," she said, half smirking at the name. Ash made a look of utter disgust.

"I still hate that kid!" yelled Ash loudly. Selena began to laugh but was cut short when someone flew in through a large window, shattering it. Ash's wings instantly flew open, a reaction copied by many of the surrounding angels. Selena was pushed to the ground, giant pairs of wings covering her petite body.

"Mirell, what an unpleasant surprise." Her father's voice dripped with venom. Selena's stomach turned, she never thought of her daddy as an aggressive person. Mirell laughed, causing Selena to shiver uncontrollably. Ash moved his hand urging her to leave; his stance remained the same. Selena began to crawl towards the nearest exit, under cover from one pair of wings to the next.

"I'm never wearing a dress to a party again," muttered the eighteen-year-old girl, as she crawled under the angels.

"Yes well, I was in the country, visiting my brother and, on the way to visit him I was given some lovely news," Selena couldn't see her but could hear the shrill in her voice, the snarky tone and the way it made Selena's body shiver was like no other. She couldn't physically believe Mirell was only second in command. She couldn't image what it would be to meet Andrea. With all her might, she wished she'd never have to meet the dark angel, though Selena preferred to call her "Satan's Wife".

"What were they?" asked an angel, hesitation in his voice. Selena couldn't pin point who it was for her life.

"That the child was spotted turning eighteen... at this very party." Selena stopped crawling. It was official; they were searching for. "Dear miss Selena Micheals. Where is she? I would love if she gave herself up; make this whole thing much easier. I want her blood spilled... slowly." Selena's body went numb as Mirell spoke her name and death sentence.

"You know an angel dies with the wind." This was a woman though not her mother. She was probably in just as much shock as the raven-haired beauty herself.

"Precisely, her blood will be spilled... until she dies." Mirell spoke of this as though the sky were blue and the grass green.

Torture.

Selena's body began to crawl for her, her mind not registering that she was moving.

"Not a chance." Ash's voice boomed loudly through the living room. This was her best friend... her protector. Mirell laughed as

Selena heard Ash's wings propel him into the air.

"And who are you to stop me?" Selena turned herself around to look up at her best friend, clearly much younger than the mid thirties woman floating before him. Her red hair hung softly on her shoulders barely touching them, her blue eyes piercing Ash with overflowing hate.

Ash made a quick, unexpected movement. One second his sword was in its place holder, the other it was straight through Mirell's heart. Her face was fully of shock, full of pain. She was still alive.

"I'm her protector," his voice dripped of venom as he turned the sword. Mirell's body became one with the breeze. Ash lifted the dust and threw it at the other Warlins, causing them to stumble backwards in hopes of avoiding it. He turned his sword in mid air. "I'm just nineteen... who wants a go?" he teased the angels. Selena smiled up at him before she was pushed through a door without realizing it. It closed as she saw other Ruems flying to fight... for her safety.

She turned to see where she had been pushed and stood slowly; it was her father's study. Not the safest place for her to be in but it would have to

do. She could hear the grunts and the yells of the battle outside. She didn't stand close to the door but messed with the hems of her short dress. The heels weren't a problem as she was used to them, caused by years of beauty pageants and galas. The dress, on the other hand, had made it impossible to crawl out of the party. Selena grabbed a picture frame of her mother and father. She didn't want to believe they were out there fighting, swords in hand for their daughter's safety.

"This wasn't very smart of them." Selena turned, placing the picture hastily back on the desk. In the threshold of a different entrance stood an angel, smirking. In this outfit she had no sword. She felt stupid; she should have anticipated an attack, like Ash. Why did she believe she could actually have one night to herself as the "It Child"? Ash barely had two weeks to himself as the protector of the "It Child".

"Do you need something, Jeremy?" snapped Selena, glaring at the man before her.

"Your death. Though that is a rather devastating thing. Such a pretty girl, dying, so young." He took a few steps towards her and Selena quickly ran herself into a wall, an attempt to get away from his touch. He placed the back of his hand on her cheek, a small smirk plastered on his ugly face. "So beautiful." Selena's heart sped up; she could feel death in front of her, taunting her.

"Don't... touch me," she spat at him. He slapped her quickly; her hand flew to her cheek, massaging the red skin softly.

"Tsk tsk, if I were you, I wouldn't speak to me like that. If you behave properly, you could remain alive under my... uh... custody." He smirked again and opened his mouth to kiss her. Selena felt the continents of the night in her stomach about to come up.

"I'd rather die happily instead." Her voice was serious. His smirk fell, and he extended his sword to her neck pressing it. No blood rushed out but a bruise would surely arise. She squirmed.

"Do you really want that?" He stepped away from her. He glanced at her thighs causing the pure angel to shiver. In a swift movement he cut her left thigh with his sword. She fell to the ground in pain, landing forcefully on her knees, air rushing into her lungs. Her body had never felt physical

pain before this; the wind was quickly knocked out of her. "I would-."

The door behind Jeremy slammed open. Light poured in and through the light walked in Ash with a bloody sword and murderous look.

"I would step away from my girl," Ash spoke through his teeth, mocking Jeremy. Jeremy took a step towards Ash.

"Your girl? Hm, killing the child and her protector, all in one night? I'll be a king." Swords began to clash. As the vigorous fight continued Selena began to see dots in front her eyes. She could no longer focus on the blonde hair before her, fighting for her. She glanced at her thigh; it was nothing more but a gash pulsing out red liquid. She placed her hands weakly on the cut to stop the oozing blood. Would she die tonight?

"Ash." Ash's attention switched as soon as Selena whispered his name and for that she was thankful. He quickly lifted her head and placed it on his thigh, his sword pointed directly at Jeremy. Selena could only see the outlines of their bodies. She tried desperately to keep her eyes open.

"What did you do to her?" yelled Ash angrily.

"She's poisoned. Poison made just for her... for the child." Jeremy began to chuckle. A horn of retreat pounded through the mansion. "Bye, bye Jones, have fun saving her." Selena no longer heard Jeremy's voice in the room and assumed he was gone. Her eyes were no longer guiding her, they were flickering to a shut.

"Selena don't you dare." She felt herself being lifted and carried her into another room. "Witch! I need a witch!" The last thing Selena heard was Ash telling her he'd murder her if she died on him.

She saw darkness first, then, as her eyes began to flicker, she saw Ash's blonde hair on her bed. "Ash?" Her voice was barely above a whisper. She groaned as she tried to sit up. Ash's head snapped up, relief washing over his face, mixed with other emotions: joy, distress, guilt and many more. His eyes watered slightly as he placed a hand on her cheek, she covered it with her own.

"I thought I lost you forever." His voice quivered slightly. Selena sighed, her own eyes watering at the sight of Ash in such a state.

"Your girl will always be around." Selena's voice was thick with

emotion as she spoke. Ash smiled. "Why don't you go home, get some rest?" she added softly, leaning her head into his hand.

"I won't leave you here."

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Selena stared at the best friends, Nico and Ryan, looking at each other the exact same way that Ash and Selena had looked at each other that one night. She smiled slightly. She knew what it was like almost losing someone she never wanted to lose. It sucked.

Nico frowned at the words Ryan spoke. She wasn't going to leave Ryan alone in that miniature thing of a cell. She couldn't possibly do that to her best friend. No way. "I just won't leave you," repeated Nico, more force in her voice that even the own brunette could have even imagined. Ryan remained silent for a few seconds before she sighed and opened her mouth to speak.

Nico never found out what her best friend had to say before she was hiding behind Ryan's crystal cell.

"I hear noises!" spat a big angel as he entered the room. Nico swallowed silently as she veered her head around trying to get a look at the monster that was keeping her friend locked up.

"Oh so we aren't allowed to speak to each other now?" snapped Ryan quickly. The angel hit Ryan's cell hard. Nico could see how the noises were bouncing in Ryan's cell over and over again. Ryan placed her hands over her ears to, what Nico could only guess, block out the sound.

"Shut it! If I hear one more noise come out of this room, someone's wings are coming off." He shot Selena a look that Nico never wanted to be on the receiving end of. The color left Selena's face. Selena crawled to the other side of her bed as far away from the angel as she physically and possibly could. Nico swallowed again, this time scared for Selena. She wondered, what happened when an angel's wings were cut off? Did they die? Were they human? Could the wings grow back? A million questions rang through her head and she knew the only person that could answer them, would have killed the angel torturing their friends.

"Do we really need to go that far?" asked Ryan quietly. The big guy smirked at them. Selena shot Ryan a look, a look Nico could only interpret as 'don't tempt him'.

"Unless Selena here is willing to do other things, wing cutting is our alternative. Got it?" He shot a smirk at Selena making her shiver completely. As he made his way towards the door Nico couldn't help but exhale happily, the worst was over. "What was that?"

"I can't breathe?" questioned Ryan, once more covering up for Nico. Nico became worried, she knew that Ryan was pushing it but there was no other way to cover Nico presence, at least for the moment.

"Witch! One more noise." He raised his index finger before he was out the



door. Nico took a few deep breaths before she stood pressing her hand on the glass once more. Ryan must have been in a lot of pain. Somehow, Nico, for the first time, knew that Ryan's strong fort was about ready to come down.

"Go, we need Ash," she said pointing to the opening on the roof. Nico nodded and silently grabbed a chair from the corner, using it to climb on to Selena's cage. She took one last look at her best friend before she jumped out, landing on the roof softly. She looked around; she had to find her own compartment. She opened her wings for balance and began to walk on the roof of the storage cells in search of her own. This was before her entire body was engulfed in arms.

Her air supply was cut off but it didn't send attack signals to her brain. The arms around her body were holding her tightly but it was in an embrace... in a hug. "Hi Ash," she spoke quietly, spotting a piece of dirty blonde hair.

"What the hell is it with you and scaring me like that? Come on!" Ash released her just to yell her. His hand, however, remained promptly attached to hers. Nico didn't move an inch. She knew what had to be done, tonight.

"Ash, they're on this train," she said firmly. Ash stopped mid step to turn and look at her. Nico had seen strange looks from the blue-eyed boy but none like the one he was giving her now.

"What?" he questioned slowly. Nico swallowed before speaking.

"Ryan and Selena are on this train. I just spoke to them." Without another word Ash brought two fingers to his mouth and whistled loudly. Tiger Carter and Darrin, wings expanded, were next to them. "That one." She pointed to the storage cell with the hole. Nico took a step aside.

"How many?" asked Ash his voice neutral, his eyes fixed on the hole.

"I only saw one," answered Nico honestly. "What'd he look like?" asked Darrin. Nico quickly described what the big guy that gave Ryan pain looked liked. "It's Jason. He has to have at least three with him," Ash nodded in agreement.

"You guys know what to do. Decapitate," spoke Ash quietly. Carter extended his claws, clearly excited for the battle to come. Nico stared at the three bloodthirsty boys before her and prayed to a god, she didn't believe existed that none of them would get hurt.

His vision was brighter; the sound more enhanced. The simple word 'attack' launched him into that hole like there was nothing else but the other side. He landed forcefully, making a big entrance. Carter always liked big entrance, as a tiger.

"Carter!" Ryan squealed from one corner.

"Woah." That's when he saw her, and it was most likely because he saw her for the first time in his tiger form but he was positive Selena was the most beautiful creature he had ever laid eyes on. He felt a strong pull towards her, a pull he also felt towards his girlfriend. It was as though he was being pulled by two strong forces, he couldn't explain it.

He stood in front of Ryan's glass, his teeth gritting in fury as Ash fell through the hole. "Ash! Thank Angelico! I thought you left the rescue mission to a cat!" Carter growled at Selena loudly causing her to 'hmp'. Ash simply rolled his eyes at the small brunette. The second Darrin jumped down however, the Jason guy Nico had described walked in.

"Shit." His face went instantly pale. He made a dash for a door but Carter was too quick grabbing Jason by the neck, pulling him away from the door. Ash held it open for Darrin to go through. Carter moved his head vigorously side to side causing the body in his mouth to become dust, he whined.

"It's what happens when they die Carter, get over it. There are the bedrooms," pointed out Ash, a revengeful smile taking over his features. The kidnappers had a better place than they did, Carter didn't see the right in this.

"They have a better place than we do," Darrin voiced Carter's thoughts, wrinkling his nose in distaste.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," grumbled Ash breaking down the doors with his foot.

Being in an actual fight was very different than what Carter had read in any book or seen in any movie. In a movie it seemed as though things slowed down to a minimum, and in a book everyone was a complete mess. But in real life, in this moment, everyone was running on instinct or at least Carter definitely was. Carter was the first to attack, aiming for a throat and taking down an angel quickly. Darrin killed one afterwards with a slash to the throat while Ash killed two, one with a stab through the heart, and the other with a slash to the throat.

Carter looked around and took a few sniffs, making sure there was no other

angel in the area. He nodded towards his partners; silently telling them everything was in the clear. He quickly walked over to Ryan's cage and nuzzled her cage with his nose as he began to change from tiger form to human form. Ryan's eyes brimmed with tears as she smiled brightly.

"I've missed you," she whispered softly against the glass wall that separated them. Carter laughed slightly, then stretched the tight fitting clothes to make them looser. When changing into animal form Carter was lucky enough that shape shifter's clothes became a part of him and didn't rip. However the only side effect was that the clothes became extremely tight, Carter didn't mind.

"I've missed you too," he said smiling at his favorite redhead.

"Don't get yucky on us," said Ash, making a face as he moved his hands all over Selena's cage, examining it. Selena kept her eyes on him, watching his face, waiting for a reaction. Ash pressed his ear on the glass. Carter immediately noticed they looked more like a couple than Nico and Ash did on a good day. "Darrin don't forget to-"

"-get Nico? Yeah, you know this chick can fight too," Nico landed in the storage cell. Darrin leaned against a wall far away. "Next time you forget me you won't have a girlfriend," she threatened lightly. Carter chuckled.

"Oh Ash I like her," piped in Selena tapping on the glass repeatedly. Ash cringed against the sound. "Sorry." The room went silent after that. All fixed on Ash as he worked on the glass cell. Ash was watching them, touching them, measuring their angles and almost making sure that he wasn't messing anything up. He did this for twenty minutes; no one uttered a single word while he worked. He sighed after he was done.

"They're those cages that we learned about in school. Right?" questioned Selena. Ash nodded softly before turning to face the rest of the group.

"We might have a problem none of us imagined," Ash whispered rubbing his hands together. Selena sighed and Darrin readjusted himself. Carter suddenly became interested. In the short time that he had known them all they had never seemed this worried about a little problem. "These glass cells are bound by very dark magic and are made by a powerful... powerful witch and can only be broken, unfortunately, by that very same witch." Carter thought that he'd see Ryan's face fall first but what caught his attention was Selena's arm, suddenly reaching backwards to touch her back, her eyes filling with worry, fear, and he

swore, tears.

"You're talking in circles. Whose plan are we finally using?" questioned Nico, tilting her head at the group of people before her, her friends. Ash leaned his arm against Selena's cell, eyeing her carefully. Ryan's hand remained attached to the ceiling of her cage where on the other side laid Carter, tapping ever so lightly at the location of her hand. Nico could feel the corners of her mouth rise as she looked at them. Ash sighed. She distantly heard Darrin's chair lean back; he was in the next room.

"Ash's plan will never work," he commented in a singsong way.

"I think it will," piped in the captive angel. Carter turned himself to lay on his elbow as he stared at Selena, before moving his gaze away from her and turning it to Ash. Nico sighed pressing her lips together then crossing her arms just under her chest.

"I agree with Selena, Darrin's seems more... out of wack," pronged Carter nodding his head in Selena's direction.

"'Out of wack?'" laughed Ryan. "Lord Ash, what have you done to my boyfriend?" Ryan's groan set for a rather good laugh, lightening the mood in the room by thousands of shades. Nico thought it was nice, to finally hear everyone take a load off. They had Selena and Ryan, for now, things were going great.

"Magic doesn't work in the box, we'd definitely need another witch, and a powerful one at that, or the one who created it," spoke Ash, after the laughter had died down. He moved his hands against his face.

"Wait! We haven't even decided on a plan yet!" said Nico, approaching Ash from the wall she leaned on. Ash rolled his eyes and placed an arm around her, she leaned into him comfortably.

"Ugh! I miss touching people!" yelled Selena before throwing herself onto the bed of her cell. Nico felt bad for her, however the only laughter that was heard was Darrin's. Ash moved away from Nico.

"What's so funny, Darrin?" asked Ash menacingly. Nico immediately didn't like his tone.

"She doesn't miss touching people... she misses having sex with people!" Darrin's chair landed hard on floor as he fell from laughter. Nico covered her mouth with her hand, but before she could even turn to look for Selena's reaction, there was a loud crash.

"Ash!" yelled Selena; so loud Nico was shocked to see the glass hadn't broken

in pieces. Ash's fist was the first thing to make direct contact with Darrin's nose. Nico stood a few feet away, in shock, at the scene unraveling before her.

"Say it again... I dare you to." Nico swallowed softly, she'd never seen Ash so vicious before. He had been half this angry the night he was her cover. This level of anger was completely new to her. This was past sexy-angry-Ash, this was straight to run-for-cover-angry-Ash. "Come on. Say it. You said it once! You can say it again! SAY IT!" It was strange watching Ash lift Darrin by the neckline from the floor. Darrin was twice as big. Nico shot Ryan a look, then turned to look at Selena. Her eyes spoke of nothingness, her expression was blank, the angel looked dead. The only significance that she was alive was the single tear rolling down her cheek.

"Ash!" Nico could feel herself regret what she had said, wanting to take it back instantly. The first thing she noticed were his bright blue eyes filled with hate fixed on hers, then their focus changed to something else, to the brunette behind her. Ash threw Darrin on the floor before he jumped through the small hole on the ceiling, leaving a bloody nosed Darrin and a frozen Carter and Ryan behind. Not to mention Selena, nearly in tears.

Nico didn't want to take another look around the silent room before she followed him out of the window silently. Ash was a few feet away from the hole, his wings beating with the rhythm of the passing wind. Nico would swear till her dying day that the troubled look upon his face made her, for a split second, mistake him for a perfect greek sculpture in a museum she had once visited at home. "Ash?" Her voice traveled with the wind towards the breathing statue. She inched herself closer to him.

"She's not my sister. I don't have any sisters, I'm an only child but she's my Selena and I know she's having sex," he spoke rapidly as if it were all one word. "Lots of it, because I know she's an attractive girl, I know that. I just... I don't like it when people talk about her like she's some sort of... prostitute." His words were coming out a million miles an hour, as if he had a time limit and it was almost up. Nico wasn't even close to the boy. He threw his head into his hands. She knew she was about to learn something she never wanted to know or would have never guessed.

"Nico - I was only twelve when I killed for the first time, a terrible man... but an actual man." Nico's mouth dropped slightly when Ash spoke of how old he

had been, she wouldn't have believed him if it wasn't for the serious look on his face. "He was thirty-one years old and - he tried to have his way with her... with my Selena." If Nico hadn't been speechless before, she definitely was the second the chosen angel's name was uttered. Her thoughts drifted to the tough girl who was completely heartless when it came to leaving a person behind, but in reality, was as broken as the best of them.

"I ripped his heart out. I was - so angry. He hadn't gotten to do anything but the intention; the touching of her body was there. She got away safely but when she told me about it, I had to find him... had to dispose the world of such a man. So I did. My father took care of his body." He hadn't been kidding when he had told her there were things he couldn't tell her. She wondered for a second what other things he could possibly be hiding.

"Ash." Nico sighed softly.

"I'm a monster, all my life I've been one. All I've done is kill. Since before I was a teenager I was already killing humans, angels, shifters, witches, vampires. You name it, I've killed it." He looked up to her, his eyes filled with hurt and regret. "Why would you want me?" Nico stared at Ash for a few seconds waiting for her brain to form the right words.

"Why would you ask such a stupid question?" snapped Nico quickly. Her mind was working on overtime, it was no longer processing what she was speaking, there was no brain to mouth filter. She kneeled in front of him, her hands on either side of his face. "I have never hated someone so quickly as much as I hated you the day I met you. You - you were so cocky, and such an ass! Not to mention you thought a freaking tissue could fix the entire world!" Ash laughed at the way Nico spoke of their first meeting, but it was the way Nico would always see it. "If it wasn't for you though, I would have never known what this feeling that I'm feeling feels like. I would have had no one by my side while I was becoming an angel. You've grown to become a part of my life, in such a quick span of time, you don't realize the effect you have on me. I really like you, Ashton," she mocked his full name. Ash snaked his arms around her waist to pull her closer. Before she knew it, Nico was straddling the sitting Ash. He pressed her sides causing her wings to explode from her back and a small whelp to escape her lips.

"A little trick I learned throughout the years." He smirked lightly pulling her

down. "I really like you too, Nicolette," he mocked her name as much.

"Are you two kissing yet? It's been like twenty minutes." Selena's voice rang through the air loudly.

Nico laughed lightly at Selena's words before their lips collided in a kiss.

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"You're awake," Nico whispered daintily, Selena sat up quickly at the sound.

"Yeah, I was going over the plan in my head. Making sure to go over anything that I thought I needed to correct, before we deploy in Miami tomorrow," she whispered, pressing her lips together in a smile.

"Are you nervous?" asked Nico, sitting in the chair Ash had been using the last couple of days to speak to Selena with. She couldn't help but notice the tiger sleeping on top of Ryan's cage, Ryan sound asleep under it. Ash was in one of the bedrooms in the next rooms, where Nico had left him sound asleep. That had been a difficult but, clearly, not impossible task. Darrin was in another room, door shut.

"I'm about to be handed over like a toy to the most powerful dark angel of all time, if the plan that my best friend thought up doesn't work out of course... am I nervous? Surprisingly, not really." Selena shrugged her shoulders slightly. She looked down at her own bed sheets and then looked up at Nico. "You know Ash isn't lying to you." She suddenly changed the subject so fast Nico barely had time to register her words.

"Hmm?" Nico looked up, her mind not even on Ash. "What are you talking about?"

"Didn't he tell you that we've never slept together? It's true. You can sleep with him if that's what's stopping you. I promise I haven't touched him." Nico's cheeks turned a color that she couldn't possibly describe, but she knew they were a definition of bright red. She looked down awkwardly when Selena brought up a subject that Nico hadn't considered so calmly. "Virgin huh?" asked Selena tilting her head. Is it obvious? thought Nico.

"Is that such a bad thing?" asked Nico, almost menacingly. Selena shook her softly at those words.

"Not at all. To be honest sometimes I wish I was still one." Nico looked down



at Selena's words, ashamed for attacking the girl verbally. "Sex complicates things, plus it changes the opinion people have of you." Nico nodded. There were so many questions pounding through her mind. She wanted to know what it felt like, not just sex but what it felt like to be wanted. That wasn't exactly what came out of her mouth.

"How many guys have you slept with?" asked Nico quickly, curiosity creeping over her. Her voice was shades softer. Selena looked down this time and something deep inside Nico told her Selena was going to tell her something horribly wrong. This was the same feeling she'd gotten before Ash began to speak, a couple of days before, about his first kill.

"All my life, I've been attractive to the opposite sex." Her face was serious when she looked up at Nico and Nico's stomach fell. Selena's voice indicated how she didn't mean to be cocky or anything of the kind, she was simply acknowledging a fact, as if she'd said Ash's eyes were blue. "I just have been. Did Ash tell you about the first guy he ever killed?" Nico nodded softly.

"The thirty one year old human who tried to have his way with you." Nico felt sick for bringing up such a horrible memory but it didn't seem to change how fresh it was on Selena's mind.

"Yeah, him." Selena swallowed a lump in her throat. Nico wanted to hide, she didn't want to learn anymore, and she didn't want to listen. She wanted to run into the protective arms of the boy she'd left alone in the other room. "Sadly, most of what people think about my sex life is based solely on my looks. I never really minded that people just assumed I was sexually active. I never really wanted to have sex. But after my eighteenth birthday, when I was offered sex as an escape from a life of running and hiding, I - I started to believe that maybe I could use sex to my advantage. That maybe it wasn't such a bad thing after all.

"That's when I met Henry, he was a human. He was also a rebel who never listened to anyone and never learned to the word 'no'." Inside her mind, Nico cursed so loudly it could have stung her own ears. She could already sense what was coming. "One night it got to too much, Henry didn't understand no, though after it had begun I - I almost didn't want to stop him." Selena's eyes started to follow the pattern of the bed, a single tear falling on it. Nico remained silent, unable to speak. "I never knew I could be in so much physical and mental pain at once, I wasn't ready for that. I wasn't ready for my life to slowly slip away after

that moment. I didn't want that... but I only realized it after it was over." She looked up at Nico, who was trying to swallow the hardship of the story. "The answer's one."

She was going to be handed over later that same day, yet no fear dared to surface on the redhead's face. When she opened her eyes there was Carter, smiling so brightly that his breathe caused a slight fog on the glass cage. "What are you thinking about?" he peered, his voice barely breaking a whisper. Ryan smiled unaware that they had been silent for a long time.

"Just you, really," she whispered in return, not wanting to wake the sleeping angel in the cage beside her. Carter smiled back at her. He scratched his hair quickly causing it to ruffle up, making Ryan giggle. It was obvious that Carter was a feline shifter, little actions like those were the ones that both gave him away, and Ryan found adorable.

"Silly old me?" Ryan shook her head softly, smiling. She could very clearly remember the first day they met, the course of their relationship to this, to how they were. She hadn't liked him at first, if she were to be truthful, but she guessed that he knew that, after all, he'd been a rotten little boy.

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"Excuse me! Sorry! One Second! MOVE IT OR LOSE IT!" The crowded hallway cleared before the aggravated redhead who let out a gust of air from her lungs, fixed her bag, and kept walking towards her class. She rubbed her temples to try and remove her headache; whilst ignoring the stares, almost as if she hadn't parted a crowd of teenagers like the red sea.

"You need to teach me how to do that!" fluttered her best friend Nico to her side. The fourteen year olds hair was short, barely scrapping her shoulders. Her eyes held a sad, dark look, but one of her smiles was never out of place. They looked nothing alike. Ryan's hair reached to her waist easily. She placed it all on one side to stop it from getting tangled with her back bag. Often the red mess would be in a bun to bring out her dark eyes.

"What? Have the entire school be afraid of you? No way." Ryan shook her head a bunch of times. Ryan wasn't about to put her friend into the role that she would have to play for the rest of her high school life. Ryan was the mean one, at least according to everyone in high school, she was. She bumped into someone, she could feel her temper rising. "Ugh." The contents of her bags unraveled on the filthy school floor. Nico quickly knelt

to help her. "Go to class, you'll be late," Nico nodded and left her friend with a drifting goodbye. Ryan only barely noticed that her half chipped black nails weren't the only ones picking things up. The owner of the other hands gave Ryan her phone though she could have cared less for it.

"Sorry." He smiled kindly, and Ryan raised an eyebrow. This was public school, she knew finding a random stranger who was decent was a needle in a haystack. She narrowed her eyes at his face before quickly snatching her phone back. "I wasn't going to steal it," said the stranger quickly, once again smiling. The smile suited his face; he was quite handsome with it.

"Whatever." Ryan stood up and begun to walk towards her next class as the bell rang.

"Wait! You wouldn't happen to know where classroom 304B is by any chance?" asked the stranger. Ryan rolled her eyes before turning back to face him.

"Why would I help you? You've made me late to class." Ryan glared at him playfully. She liked it when people, in general, were afraid of her and this one wasn't going to be an exception. The hallway was soon empty due to the punishment if students were late... detention. She'd been in there four times in the last two weeks. Her mother would have her head on a plate if she got it again.

"Cause you're a witch, and aren't witches supposed to be nice?" Ryan eyes widen slightly. She hated him already, him and that stupid beanie he was wearing that made him look older than what he was. He was headed to a freshman class; he had to be fourteen or fifteen.

"Not until I'm eighteen, you should know that." She crossed her arms and raised an eyebrow at him. Her tone had lightened, only by an inch however. She was starting to grow an almost attraction to the boy before her, his brown eyes looked over her face. He smiled, his face changing, the curls under the beanie moving.

"Does that mean I can't go to class until I'm eighteen?" He smirked at her, fixing the bag on his shoulder. Ryan glared at him; he was witty, something that she enjoyed but, what would be the fun in letting him know that? Ryan shook her head.

"Are you flirting with me, shifter?" she asked raising an eyebrow higher

than her eyebrow had already been raised. His laugh made her stomach turn in ways that she didn't think her stomach could physically turn. She made a slightly disgusted face.

"How'd you know?" He smiled playfully at her, obviously joking. She resisted the urge to roll her eyes.

"I'm a witch, remember?" This time she smiled, clearly fake, though he didn't seem noticed for his smile only got bigger, brighter. Ryan chose to change the subject. "Who told you?" she snapped.

"Your mom." Ryan's glare deepened. "No, really, she said you'd be able to help me. My family just moved here from Canada. Said you were... uh... un-miss able, with an attitude to match your hair," the more he smirked the deeper Ryan glared. Did he enjoy getting under her skin more and more?

"What's your name again?" She searched her brain for any conversations she'd had with her mother about any shifting families moving in from Canada and their son who she apparently needed to begin to babysit like a lost kitty. She wasn't going to enjoy this.

"For me to know and you to not know." He smirked once again and Ryan made another disgusted face. She didn't like it when boys played that mysterious card, that was her card to play.

"That's not gonna get you in my pants." He laughed, a genuine laugh. It made Ryan smile... a little.

"You're late to class." His voice rang in a matter of fact way.

"And so are you Shifter. Third building second door on the right," Ryan turned around and started the haunt for her class.

"I know." She stopped mid step.

"But, then why'd you-," he shrugged slightly.

"I needed an excuse to talk to you," he smiled again. "It's Carter by the way." he said softly. Ryan wanted to hit him.

"Bye Shifter."

"Bye Witch."

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"Have you decided on your animal yet?" Ryan sipped from the drink in

front of her after she spoke. She was a senior now and she had grown closer to Carter since their first meeting. Their relationship had been quite rocky at first. More teasing and flirting than anything but now it was plain flirting, if they ever talked it was a miracle.

“What’s your favorite animal?” He smiled at her before he ate some of his food. Ryan shook her head.

“No, no, you can’t do that, cause if we ever tell Nico she’ll get pissed that you didn’t pick her favorite animal because, after all, we’re just -.” Ryan couldn’t say it, not when it came to describing her and Carter. The words ‘just friends’ didn’t seem right when it came to describe her relationship with Carter but for the sake of Nico, Carter and her had made a treaty long ago to never date, to not even consider it. They were the three friends, the three amigos, the three musketeers, nothing more.

“Friends.” He finished for her smiling. Ryan nodded slightly before she engulfed herself in the drink she was served. For Ryan the worst part hadn’t been being just friends with Carter, she had gotten used to that as the years went by. The thing that bothered her the most was that Carter wanted to take the form of a big animal, meaning he had put on a couple of pounds of muscle to make the shifting process easier. It drove Ryan insane and he must have known it. She sighed softly.

“Are you sure you want me to do it? It’s going to be painful waiting three whole months till I turn eighteen.” Ryan’s tone spoke for her. She didn’t want to cause Carter any pain; the thought of him in pain gave her goose bumps. He smiled lightly at her as if to know what she was thinking.

“Yes, I’m sure. I want to share this bond with you. I don’t want some random witch to do it and I don’t want your mother to do it. I want you to perform the ceremony, no matter how long I have to wait.” He made a movement to reach for her hand but Ryan quickly reached for a fry instead.

“It’ll be my first,” she said after eating. She looked down as she spoke.

“I know this and I know you’ll do great,” Carter pressed on. His encouragement didn’t make her feel any better; it actually made her feel worse. She didn’t want to mess up.

“What if you end up as a peacock or something small! You would have built all that muscle for nothing! We really should have someone with

more-." Carter was able to get a hold of both her hands this time and looked her straight into her eyes. Ryan couldn't help but stop talking whenever his hands made contact with hers.

"I am confident that you will turn me into the greatest animal you chose. I am confident in you." Ryan felt the blood rush to her cheeks; she cleared her throat.

"Thanks, I needed that," she whispered softly. Ryan looked around before she leaned over and quickly kissed Carter on the cheek.

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Ryan's backpack swung around her shoulder the same moment her mother knocked on the door. She looked up as the familiar redhead popped her head in the doorway. "You nervous?" she asked softly. Ryan shrugged. Her mother's green eyes stared at Ryan's directly.

"A little, I suppose," she replied honestly. Her mother sat on her bed, patting the spot beside her gently.

"He's waited three months, he can wait two more minutes, sit down." She smiled at Ryan and Ryan took the spot on the bed without further instructions. "Did he chose an animal?" Ryan nodded slowly. "Good, good and you practiced the spell correctly and everything? Of course you did, you *are* my child and you have everything packed and you're ready to go and-."

"Mom," Ryan interrupted smiling, "breathe, everything's gonna be fine." Ryan smiled, patted her mom on the thigh to try and reassure her. Ryan then stood, fixing her backpack once again.

"I made you a sandwich, it's downstairs." Her mom sighed once again. Ryan couldn't help but sigh with her; she kissed her mother's forehead.

"Thanks, I'll be back before you can say Al Capone marathon." Ryan grinned at her mother before she made her way down the stairs. She grabbed the sandwich and was out of the front door in a matter of seconds. Carter was waiting outside in a coat and jeans, just as cold as she was. She smiled, zipping up her jacket. He placed an arm around her silently, to greet her, and smiled down to her. She couldn't read if his eyes showed any sign

of being nervous at all.

“Ready?” he said softly.

“Shouldn’t I be asking you that question?” asked Ryan softly, looking up at the boy she almost considered her own. Carter laughed, entwining their fingers together. Ryan adored that. She didn’t move his hand away or made a look of disgust, she only smiled. She couldn’t help but notice how perfect their fingers felt together. It would have been a perfect picture according to Ryan, if it hadn’t been for the cold and the March snow.

“Not really, all I do is change.” He shrugged his shoulders as they continued their way to Rodway Park. Ryan knew of spots in Rodway Park that were located so dangerously away from civilization that if one didn’t know how to get there, they would get hurt trying.

“First time is painful,” she whispered softly, her gaze lowering to the floor. Carter shrugged again like it was no big deal.

“I’ll live.”

“I’m worried you won’t,” she said, voicing a concern that appeared when Carter spoke those words. Silence took over the friends. Death wasn’t a big part of Ryan’s daily routine. To face it now, especially with someone like Carter, would hurt Ryan in ways she didn’t want to imagine. Ryan would flip and flop about her feelings, but she couldn’t change the fact that she still liked the brunette quite a lot, more than she would admit to herself.

“I will,” he said reassuringly after a few minutes of silence. Ryan almost didn’t know what he had meant.

The moment they reached Rodway Park, Ryan took the lead. Climbing and walking around the park, for a good twenty minutes, in order to get to the most secluded spot. Ryan wasn’t taking any chances on having a mortal walking by and seeing Carter shift. She turned to look at Carter.

“Stand anywhere you want.” He looked at her before he stood in the middle of the secluded spot, which Ryan thought couldn’t be more perfect. She grabbed a stick from the floor and used it to draw a square around Carter. It was much easier with the snow than with dirt, like they had practiced.

“Why not a circle again? I thought they were more witchy?” he asked raising an eyebrow softly, clearly trying to ease the tension.



“Circles are overrated.” She smiled back at him, grabbing the small sculpture of the white tiger from her bag. She turned to him. “Are you sure about the tiger?” He nodded softly at her. “Alright, no turning back now.”

Ryan threw the sculpture in the sky, and held out her hands perfectly still. The tiger floated in her hands for a few seconds. She pushed her hands forward, in concentration, and the sculpture, on the way to Carter, dissolved to dust. The dust dug itself into his skin, opening his skin like a million stab wounds. Carter closed his eyes in pain, causing Ryan to look away. It looked utterly disgusting. She didn’t need to be watching to make sense of that. She heard him yell once, then didn’t hear anything. She could feel her heart rising in her throat. What if he died? What if she killed him? What if he was gone forever?

She felt a rough tongue lick her cheek.

She grinned at Tiger Carter. “For a second there I thought I turned you into a penguin or something.” She breathed a sigh of relief, then shook both of Carter’s ears before he began to change back, without warning, leaving Ryan’s arms around his neck. He leaned down not giving Ryan the chance to move away and captured her lips with his own.

“Thanks for turning me.” He winked at her. Ryan pushed him away playfully.

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“Yeah, everything from our first meeting to our first kiss. You were such a pain my butt freshman year! How did I end up caring for you?” said Ryan smiling at Carter through the glass. She touched the glass where his hand was. Her eyes met his.

“I love you too.”

"Have you expanded your wings today?" Ash asked, as he grabbed his things and stuffed them in a bag.

"Oh my Angelico, yes Ash, I did. Will you go already? You're gonna mess up the plan!" Selena shook her head at the stubborn boy in front of her. Ash chuckled softly as Nico rolled her eyes. He turned to Nico, placing a loose strand of hair behind her ear.

"Are you positive you don't want to come with me?" His voice was filled with worry as he spoke. Nico nodded before she leaned up to kiss him, a peck at most.

"See you soon," she whispered as she watched him climb out the hole on the ceiling. Nico stared at it, her last hope leaving. "Darrin you'll be Jason if questioned."

"Why?" He wrinkled his nose. Nico couldn't have agreed more, Jason was a pretty nasty creature; even to pretend to be him must be difficult thing. She shrugged.

"You look like a bad guy is all." Carter laughed as the caged girls nodded in agreement. "Plus you are the oldest!" she added quickly, not wanting to offend the angel. Darrin shrugged, clearly not caring. "Selena, Ryan, remember you guys have to act like we've been torturing you for the last few days and not been feeding you properly and all." They nodded in unison. Nico took a deep breath to relax her entire body. "We should be in Miami in an hour or so." Nico looked up at the clock, another breath escaping her lips nervously. She'd never done anything like this before but had felt the need to step into command as soon as Ash left. She didn't want another Carter and Darrin fight.

"The first thing I'm doing when I get out of this thing is taking a shower," said Selena, taking a whiff of herself and shivering. She succeeded in what Nico could only guess she was trying to do, get everyone to laugh.

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Nico could feel her nerves exploding as the storage door opened before them. Light peered in like never before, as though the sun was only a few inches away. Four big men came in pushing Selena and Ryan's cage out, as if they weighed nothing. Standing right beside the exit of the storage cell stood a woman. She looked nothing like any witch Nico had ever pictured. She was short, and thin,

but wore heels the size of Manhattan to try and cover up her height. She had dark eyes that had the clear impression of wanting to kill something... anything. Her hair fell to her shoulder blades, in a beautiful blonde color. Nico guessed that she couldn't be passed her mid twenties.

Nico felt her stomach turn at the sight of the horrid woman before her. The woman's simple stare, and being the only woman surrounded by men, gave her off as the leader. Selena kneeled on her bed to be the same height as men around her,

Ryan quickly did the same. Nico was more nervous than she had been her entire life. She could feel her heart at the edge of her throat begging to be thrown up. It was life or death in these few seconds, one wrong move and her life was over. As long as they weren't asked to show their wings, they would be fine. She had to believe that.

"Hello there." Her shrill voice sent shivers up Nico's spin but she forced herself to stay still. "I'm Gabitha Mitchell, you must be Jason and that must your crew... they didn't inform me you were bringing such little crew," Gabitha sneered. Darrin stood his ground, taking a step out of the storage cell from the door onto a boat. It hit Nico suddenly. They were a few feet away from port, surrounded by water. She wondered if Ash had been able to get on the ship, but then remembered he had said not to worry about him.

"The others were killed in a fight. Ashton Jones was nearby. He attacked us, killed Jeremy, and the others before we left the station in Denver. He shouldn't be far behind." Gabitha nodded, appreciating the fake information. Nico's stomach turned uneasily. "I'm glad to know we've left port though, he shouldn't have been able to get on the ship." Darrin's voice was hard as rock. For a split second, Nico thought Darrin should be an actor instead of a warrior angel.

Gabitha moved her nose, the wind shifted patterns. Ryan must have felt the change through her tiny breathing hole for the color on her face left her. Nico could only assume that Gabitha was more powerful than they had all imagined her to be. Nico's stomach made what seemed like the fifteenth unexpected flip. She was beginning to see that this hadn't been such a good idea in the slightest.

"I could always sent some of my soldiers on a search in case he is on my ship. Very unlikely, however, that he would be indeed aboard," said Gabitha, shaking her head. Nico's head began to spin like no tomorrow. She was starting to feel

faint about this news.

"Let us out!" Ryan banged on the glass loudly. Gabitha tsked loudly, distracted she now clearly was, and Nico was grateful. She approached Ryan's cell. Nico eyed Carter carefully but he was eyeing her the exact same way, making sure that neither of them made a move to attack Gabitha. That would only ensure trouble, at least more trouble they didn't need it. Those cells were indestructible, if Gabitha died, Ryan would be trapped there forever.

"Where's the hole for food?" Darrin approached the cage and pointed to a tiny hole where a tube lay, "Ah, I see you decided pumping food would be best. They're less powerful with powder food in their stomachs." Gabitha smirked and took a turn around the girl's cage she had created. "I'm guessing you are the prophecy witch child?" Ryan made a questioning face at the woman in front of her, the same face that Nico wanted to plant on her face but refused to.

"You don't know? Let's see, how to explain this. You know of the prophecy concerning her." Gabitha pointed at Selena as if she were nothing more than a thing. "Well, dear, that prophecy failed to mention some clear points that were lost in history, due to some fights... mostly on our end." She laughed, enjoying this fact. "We, uh, made sure they were gone, but since you are about to die, I guess you could know." Gabitha mocked Ryan's death bed, it made Nico's stomach turn even more than it already was. She was going to throw up her lunch soon.

"See to end the war between the Ruems and the Warlins you need not only an angelic child but also a shape shifter, a vampire, a witch, and a merchild, and you my darling, would happen to be said witch child." Nico tried to keep her face from losing the composure it had on. This was a task a lot harder than she ever thought possible. "You are just as important to me as she is. Apart you're strong, together you're invincible." Ryan swallowed as Gabitha continued to examine her. Nico took those few seconds to shot Carter a look. It suddenly made sense why Ryan had been kidnapped. "Jason?"

"Yes?" Darrin responded as though that had been his name his entire life.

"You and your boy are in charge of taking the girls to their room. You will make sure that they don't leave unless escorted. Your girl will sleep in their room to make sure that they don't escape." Gabitha turned to Selena. She tilted her head at the caged angel. "Miss Selena, I'm going to lift the box now," she teased

smiling. Nico could feel her heart banging her chest. She expected some big spell to be performed. All Gabitha did was lift her hand. The box shattered to dust; the only thing it left behind was the bed.

Selena's wings exploded as soon as the box disintegrated. Her hands landed on her bed, her breath was raspy.

Every Warlin made a move towards her, except for Gabitha, who simply raised her hand to stop them all. "Sorry, they couldn't open the box," mocked Gabitha, however she didn't sound sorry at all. Selena retracted her wings in slowly, her breathing beginning to relax. Gabitha lifted her right hand, causing Ryan's box to fade. Ryan closed her eyes and took a deep breath. Nico had to suppress the giant urge to smile. Ryan loved the feel of fresh air. "Jason and - I'm sorry I didn't catch your names?" she asked Carter, raising her eyebrow slowly. Nico quickly tried to think of some elaborate evil name to tell Gabitha.

"Carter," he said softly, pressing his lips together.

"Carter," Gabitha repeated, she then turned her attention to Nico. For the first time since Nico had stepped out of the storage cell Gabitha had finally noticed her. "And you darling - oh Miguel! You look ghostly pale." Gabitha sounded concerned for her well being.

"Sea sick," whispered Nico, softly putting a hand on her stomach. Gabitha nodded reassuringly, which only made Nico feel worse.

"Your name?" Gabitha asked tilting her head.

"Nico." She give up on any evil name that she could have told Gabitha to pass as.

"Brilliant! Well, you know what to do, get to it now! I want to eat supper with my girls. Their room is downstairs, last room just straight head. Your room, Carter and Jason, is right in there, and Nico, you'll be sleep with my girls. I could have sworn there were all boys in that storage cell." Gabitha made a face at Nico, taking a step towards her. Gabitha was suspicious, Nico could tell. She could feel her breath catch in her throat from the nerves.

"I always thought I could lend a hand. Wouldn't want the war to end." Nico's voice was firm. Gabitha smiled once more, like a proud mother staring at her child.

"That's a true Warlin soldier. Off you go."

Selena did just as she had promised. Upon entering the room, she began to strip down her clothes, her shirt becoming a small pile on the ground. She rushed into the bathroom as Nico shut the door on the boys. Nico then turned to Ryan.

The redhead looked at her for a moment before throwing herself onto Nico. Ryan's arms had a tight grip around Nico's neck, causing Nico to lose her balance. She had to hold back her tears. She held her best friend around the waist, not caring about anything but those few seconds of reunion. She finally got to hold her sister as Ryan was the sister Nico never got. She was better than a sister. They were way closer than siblings, closer than twins. They finished each other's sentences, and when apart for too long, Nico felt pangs in her stomach, much like the withdrawal symptoms of ameth addict. She heard Ryan sniff softly.

"I missed you," whispered the redhead softly into Nico's neck. Nico had to press her lips together to stop herself from crying.

"I've been right here," she whispered right back, smiling a slightly. Ryan removed her arms from around her best friend.

"I know but like... oh you get what I mean," groaned Ryan as she walked to the other side of the room. She proceeded to sigh; Nico did indeed get her. Ryan had meant 'I miss you' in the touching sense. Ryan and Nico were so close, they walked around the mall holding hands. They changed in the same dressing room when trying on clothes. Hell, they didn't care if people thought they were together. They were almost one and the same. Nico smiled at her before finally taking a look around the room before her.

It wasn't at all like the storage cell; it was much bigger. The two twin beds were spread out while the boy's room was clearly marked, GUARDS. The two guard rooms were located beside the exit door to what Nico could only assume was to prevent the prisoners from escaping in the middle of the night. Nico approached the exit door and finally tore it open.

"Sorry, Selena literally couldn't wait to hop in the shower," whispered Nico smiling. Darrin and Carter walked in without uttering a word. Darrin headed straight for one of the guard's rooms and Carter for Ryan. He placed his forehead against hers in the most adorable scene that Nico had ever laid eyes on.

"Hi," he whispered against her lips.

“Hi,” she whispered back, smiling as she leaned up to capture his lips with her own. Nico turned her back just in time to give them some privacy. She made a split second decision to walk around the ship.

“I’ll be back,” she whispered softly, though she knew they weren’t listening. Nico exited the room, closing the door quietly behind her.

However, a certain piece of blonde hair began to crawl its way into her mind. Ash. Where was he? Was he hurt? Did he make it on the ship? Where was that boy? These thoughts continued to corrupt her mind as she walked down the long hallway towards the deck of the boat. The fresh air hit her as soon as she walked out. She found herself wishing to be in the storage cell, happy to avoid facing the reality of Gabitha Mitchell.

“Maison! Get those boxes! No! Those, you idiot! They were supposed to be sent out Friday!” A soldier yelled from one side of the deck. Nico turned her head towards him. He was big, like most of the soldiers on board were.

“It is Friday! We left in such a rush they didn’t get sent out!” The other guy, Maison, yelled back at the first soldier.

A realization hit Nico like a ton of bricks. Only two weeks prior the girl was mourning for her parents’ anniversary at their gravesite and now, she was here, with wings, on a boat, headed straight into France. She’d never been outside Denver before this. Hell, she didn’t even have a passport. She ran over to the end of the boat, her stomach turning once more. No one was there, thankfully. It was deserted, but she could barely hear her own head with the motor running. Nico shook her head and looked over the edge making sure to hold her balance in order not to fall.

She wondered about everything that had recently happened to her. Her boyfriend, if she could even call him that anymore. Ryan, being the witch child to save humanity from another thousand years of war, she couldn’t fully believe it. Then finally Selena, growing close to her, actually understanding her as a human being even though Nico herself was no longer that. Herself... she wasn’t human. She was an angel. Her parents had been angels with wings as big and bright as hers. She looked up at the sky and wondered for the first time in almost eighteen years of living what they thought of her and her progress in life.

Were they proud that she had found herself in the situation that she had? She hadn’t fought only because Ash refused to put her in danger, especially with

little to no training. So it was his fault, not hers. The wind made her hair splash the front of her face, slamming her cheeks like the water was doing to the boat underneath. Nico turned herself on the railing to have her back hold the bars. It was uncomfortable, but it was better than having her hair in her face every three seconds, hitting it like a knife cutting through skin.

She looked up at the name of the boat, *Gabitha*, and made a disgruntled face. Was this woman everywhere on this freaking boat? It sure seemed that way! Nico could help but yell in her own thoughts. Gabitha had been the first thing that Nico had seen when she stepped out of the storage cell, apart from the four soldiers that had walked in to push the two cells out. Nico was sure she was either seeing things or this woman was truly everywhere. She wrinkled her nose and sighed when air picked up from behind her, splashing her hair on her face again. Seriously? She had just turned herself around but did it again to prevent a mouthful of hair.

The brunette turned her body around to a mouth full of dust. "What the-." She quickly spit some of it over the edge, and wiped her tongue. She made a look of pure disgust.

"Hey! Watch it!" yelled a voice from underneath the boat.

"Sorry, Ash!" Nico yelled back to voice. Feeling dirty at the feeling of the dust in her mouth, Nico began to walk back towards her room when she realized exactly what she had said. "Ash?" she whispered in alarm, she turned herself around quickly and looked over the edge again. Just before the waves reached the boat there was a cabin, more like hole, where blonde hair was sticking out, and a familiar grin. "Ash!" whispered Nico, she quickly looked around. Upon spotting no one she jumped from rails towards his open arms.



Nico should have thought twice before jumping over the edge of the giant boat. The freeing feeling she thought would come with it was more of a downward spiral to hell. She'd forgotten she was an angel, and if it weren't for the open arms of a certain boy, Nico would have surely been head fist into the water.

"Pull me up! Pull me up!" she yelled at Ash as her feet dangled loosely underneath her. She frantically tried to release her wings but found it useless. She was too scared and weak, with nothing but fear in her system. She had yet to use that emotion to her benefit. Ash opened his wings and with a simple beat from them he was able to lift her.

"There, you got your romantic moment! Happy?" he said breathing heavily. He shook the back of his head as he walked towards the center of his cabin. Nico looked at him strangely for a second before she focused on catching her breath.

It had a single blow up mattress and a cabinet for clothes, something he could have carried in his hands or thrown it in the ocean if he needed to. Nico looked at Ash's back, she guessed that was what he had done.

"I do not weigh so much that you need your wings, mister! And what?!" bellowed the brunette.

"You're a feather and you got your Titanic romantic moment, princess." He smiled at her but it wasn't an Ash smile. He sat on his mattress and placed his head in his hands. Nico stood up from the ground, shocked with the behavior she was receiving. He never treated her like this. Not even when she had thrown water on top on him. Nico raised an eyebrow at the blonde boy before her, worried.

"Ash, what's wrong? Selena and the others are all right..." Nico approached him cautiously, she figured her words would make him feel better. Ash looked up at Nico, his broken eyes met hers.

The few hours they had been apart had been torture for her, not knowing if he was on the boat or not, safe or not. She knew in that second that it had been the exact same for him. His words only reassured her thoughts.

"I was worried about you... worried that they might have killed you." His eyes glistened with tears, and Nico's mouth gapped slightly. To hear those words from his mouth was shocking. Ash only ever worried about Selena and her safety. Except for the time when he'd had a lapse in judgment when he'd

been her cover. Nico had not even thought of herself once in all of this mess. She placed one of Ash's hand on her cheek softly.

"I'm fine," she said smiling. "See? Totally fine." She smiled again to try and comfort him. "Besides, aren't you supposed to be comforting me? I'm the one who is new at all of this," she said trying to joke him into feeling better. Ash may have been sadistic and sarcastic but it was all in a good mood and taste. It was one of the things that Nico enjoyed so much about him, the joking nature that he had and how easily he'd turn it off to be serious.

"Yeah, yeah, you can go back to being the emotional one now." Ash kissed her cheek, good, they were joking again. Nico liked it best when they were joking. It was rather fun and she felt at ease that way.

"Great because I stepped out into the air and boy, I broke a nail doing that!" Ash laughed and Nico couldn't help but laugh with him. It was nice being alone with him. They hadn't had much time to themselves, ever since Selena and Ryan got captured. It wasn't like Nico was begging for some alone time, but it was nice to have it when it came around. She was enjoying the few minutes that she had with her boyfriend... if he was even that anymore. Her heart kept telling her he was, but her mind kept pulling her the other way, speculating his every move.

"If you broke a nail doing that, how am I supposed to let you fight?" asked Ash smiling, the smile faded off of Nico's face almost instantly. Fighting... she hadn't thought about fighting since Ash made her stay outside of the train in the first fight. She knew that his motives were right, after all, she hadn't been prepared and she was barely trained. She hadn't even known how to pick up a sword properly. She still didn't. This wasn't like the train; she couldn't hide in a corner and pray for the best. They would need everyone out there fighting in order to make sure that every single Warlin got defeated, Nico would make sure of it. Every single one of them was going down, even if she had to go down with them. That was one promise to herself she wasn't going to break, she wanted to watch Ash walk away from this... unhurt.

"Because you have no choice," spoke Nico, her voice stripped from all joking manner. Ash's hand fell from her cheek. He shook his head violently at her words. He wasn't agreeing with her. Nico wasn't going to give him a choice.

"No, I will not let you get hurt," he ordered her. Nico could feel the anger inside her beginning to boil. She didn't like the course of this conversation at all.

It was leading to a fight but she knew at some point they would have. That point was unfortunately now.

"You let Selena fight!" Nico felt as though she was arguing with her father to go out on a date rather than to go fight for her and her friend's protection, like she wanted to.

"That's different! Selena is ready for battle and I don't have feelings for her!" Ash was just as fuming as she was. They both had short tempers. Nico knew this but she didn't care, she was just as angry, if not more, than the tall boy in front of her.

"It's just cause you have feelings for me? You can't treat me like a baby, Ashton!" Nico yelled, glaring angrily at his blue eyes, trying to produce hate in her own.

"I can if you act like one, Nicolette!" he retaliated back. The pounding of the waves against the boat drowning out their yells. Any louder and Nico was sure that someone would hear them.

"I am not acting like a baby! If anyone's the baby it's you!" Nico didn't care if her words stung him, it didn't look like they had in the slightest bit. She wanted her words to hurt him the way his were hurting her.

"Oh really?!" His voice seemed sarcastic yet threatening at the same time. Nico didn't know which one she hated more.

"Yes, in not letting me fight! You can't always protect me!" Ash flinched noticeably. Her words had stung him to a level that she hadn't known was physically possible but it was clear that Nico had stepped too far.

"I can try." His voice grew soft. "I've lost too many people. I can't lose you too," Nico relaxed her stance. He'd lost his father at fourteen, when he'd gone out to fight and never returned, and then his mother to depressive suicide two years later.

"Ash, if I can't protect myself, you will lose me." Ash looked to the floor and closed his eyes. Nico could only figure that he was trying to find a way out. She hadn't given him an alternative.

"I know, but you aren't ready for battle." Nico could tell he knew he had lost the verbal battle completely. Nico had won this one but the war was still at hand. "Then, prepare me for the battle that's to come," Nico touched his arm softly. "Selena and Ryan still need a few days to rest and get actual food in their

stomachs before they can fight. You can train me... down here," Nico proposed. Ash looked up at her, his eyes meeting hers once again. He sighed, she knew he didn't like the idea of her fighting at all but protection was necessary, if Nico wanted to stay alive.

"Since I've got no other choice."

Selena's conscience was always pushed to the corner of her brain. The corner where it could be ignored, after all her conscience, was no fun. Selena was currently relaxing, something she hadn't done in a year and a half, flipping through the magazine that was on her lap. She was laying down on her bed, her legs propped up. "Ugh! Some celebrities cannot keep their clothes on!" she groaned out rolling her eyes. Ryan chuckled beside her. The two girls had grown used to being beside each other on beds.

"And you can?" she asked raising an eyebrow. Selena smiled and shook her head playfully, before returning to her magazine.

"Most of the day." She shrugged. The girls laughed for a second before Nico burst out of the bathroom, her hair in a ponytail. She was sporting shorts and a t-shirt, and by the look on Nico's face, Selena would say that she looked ready to run a marathon. "Woah girly, where ya headed?" she asked, poking fun at the other brunette.

"Training! Version dos," said Nico lifting two fingers. "See you two at dinner." She waved to the girls as she walked out the door. Selena could only guess Nico was headed to Ash's little cabin underneath the boat.

"This whole building up energy plan is something I am really loving," said Ryan placing both her hands behind her head. She sighed softly and smiled.

"Wait until the entire world finds out who you are and you're not an ordinary girl anymore," spoke Selena continuing to flip through the magazine. Ryan propped herself on her elbow, her gaze direct on Selena.

"What do you mean?" she peered.

"It's not all being protected and fighting for your life... it's more like running away and making sure that you're safe. If you're dead, we have to wait another thousand years before peace can come." Selena shrugged making it seem as if it were no big deal.

"Great, no pressure, totally not important or anything." Ryan sighed slightly before laying herself back down.

"That's precisely how you gotta think of it, Ryan. No pressure," Selena sat up and looked at her new friend directly in the eyes. "As soon as you start caring what others think of you, and what they want from you, you'll become exactly what you don't want to become." Selena raised a picture of a teen actress in the magazine. "You'll become her," she said making a disgusted face at the

magazine.

“Pretty, fake and thin?” questioned Ryan, raising an eyebrow. Selena grinned.

“Yes! Okay... well you are pretty and thin... but I mean, you’ll become lost in a sea of things that you can’t lift yourself from. Take it from someone who’s been dealing with overnight fame for about a year and a half now. It’s not all it’s cracked up to be.” Selena laid back on the bed and looked at the girl in the magazine.

“Do you still wish you had your old life?” Ryan asked softly, tilting her head. Selena turned to look at the redhead. She wasn’t sure how to answer that question. Sometimes, it was nice to know that she was needed for someone else’s safety but, other times, it would be incredible if she could have her own life, without being watched at all times. They made a big event about her arrival to every city.

“Yes,” she whispered picking up her magazine and flipping through it once more. The girls stayed silent as they turned over the word Selena had just spoken. Selena was no longer paying attention to the words or pictures on the magazine but to her own thoughts instead.

It wasn’t something she’d exactly thought about, wanting to go back to when she was seventeen years old. When she didn’t know if she was the angel to save the earth in the year 2015. It was a huge deal, yes. A deal that she wasn’t sure that she could handle, even to this day. Of course, it wasn’t like anyone was really giving her a choice. She’d been blessed with this gift. She was the symbol of hope to the people of Ruem for a reason, a reason she knew not; yet, Selena would give anything to have another year without wings.

Darrin came out of his room, his hand on the back of his head. “Hey guys,” he said, sitting down on one of the sofa couches. He sunk himself in.

“Look who decided not to be a hermit!” Ryan smiled brightly. Darrin laughed softly at her comment, before yawning.

“Yeah, I got bored of *not* looking at your faces.” He rubbed his own arm. Selena wasn’t expecting an apology for his comment on the train, though she wanted one more than anything. She knew that for her own safety and the comfort of others it would be better if she acted as though nothing had happened between them. Selena didn’t really mind doing that though; she’d done it a million times for other angels.

"Nice," whispered Ryan smiling. "Do you know if lunch will be served soon?" Darrin made a face as he thought about the question.

"It's served at 2 today, I think. I overheard some soldiers talking about it in the hall," said Selena before she moved her lips to one side. She tried to remember. There were only two things bad about this boat. The obvious reason was that it was headed straight to France and to her doom. The second one was that breakfast, lunch, and dinner were served on a first come first serve basis. This meant that she needed to run towards the Café to get food. Selena wasn't about to skip a meal, like Soldier Nico had. She may be tiny but she ate more than Darrin.

"Perfect, we'll leave the cabin ten minutes before," said Darrin, nodding his head at his own words. Selena nodded, silently agreeing with him. Ryan stood up.

"I wonder why Carter hasn't left his room." She walked into Carter's room without even knocking and Selena couldn't help but a soft smile. She was really starting to like Ryan, after spending so much time with her it was extremely hard not to. Little things Ryan did, Selena found hilarious. They found that speaking to each was quite nice and pleasurable, though Selena never wanted to be alone in a cage again.

The silence that followed the two angels in the room was plain awkward; it strained on and on. It made Selena look down at her magazine in attempts to look busy and occupied. She didn't know what to talk about with this boy. She'd lost any sense of respect for him and it seemed that even if she convinced herself that he wasn't going to apologize, she still couldn't help but hope. Hope that something deep inside him might actually have the decency to want to apologize to her without her having to initiate him to apologize.

"Selena?"

"Hmm?" She looked up from the magazine on her lap when Darrin spoke. She hadn't really been looking at it.

"I - I wanted to say that I was - I was um - I was- uh -." His words came out a jumble mess; Selena couldn't understand what he was trying to say.

"I still can't believe it takes you twenty minutes to get dressed!" laughed Ryan getting back in the room, Carter fully dressed right behind her. Selena looked down at her magazine and continued to flip it as if Darrin hadn't spoken at all.

"It was not twenty minutes!" battled Carter shaking his head. He sat on Ryan's bed and smiled at the redhead.

"Selena, was it not twenty minutes?" asked Ryan smiling. She looked over to Selena.

"I - I don't know... probably though," she stumbled over her words, caught off guard. Ryan continued to talk though choosing not to fall into an awkward silence, for which Selena was rather grateful.

"Enough about my boyfriend's girlish problems, I think we should leave for lunch!" she announced smiling, her hands on her hip. She walked towards the exit door. Selena nodded.

"Me too, I'm starved," she agreed, getting up from her bed and walking to the door. Darrin held it open for her. Selena stopped and smiled at him. "Thank you." Darrin nodded.



Nico held the sword to Ash's nose. The exact spot, not an inch more. This was where he told her to place it, she was sure of it. She disliked it when her hair was up in a ponytail, or when she skipped lunch, but at Ash's request she was doing both. He eyed the way she held the sword with curiosity.

"Shoulders back," he barked out. Nico obliged his order, feeling more like a prisoner than ever. It didn't matter how sexy commander Ash was, she didn't like being barked orders. Still, out of everything, she couldn't stop the smile on her face from appearing. "Why are you smiling?" he asked, commander Ash disappearing. He smiled.

"You're hot when you're commanding," admitted Nico, relaxing her shoulders a bit. Ash looked to the floor and snickered for a short moment. Nico could have sworn that she saw him blush.

"Shoulders!" he barked out again. Nico did as told, this time she tried as hard as she could not to smile. Ash placed his sword next to Nico's. "Bring your sword down then bring it back up, slowly," he said calmly. Nico did this, and as she did, Ash copied her. When their swords reached the top, they collided with a soft clash. Nico gasped at the noise. "Again, a little faster," he said, placing his sword lower. Nico did the same with hers. They brought up their swords again, this time faster. The noise when the swords collided increased. "Again." They repeated the action a few times at that speed, until Nico was beginning to get a bored look upon her face. "You're looking bored," he commented, repeating the action.

"Well, I am," she said, sighing softly. Ash smirked softly before swinging his sword full force at Nico. She placed her own in defense, but pain flared up her arm at a speed she didn't think was possible. She groaned holding her right arm. "What was that for?!" she yelled, anger filling her voice.

"Never underestimate your opponent. Come on Nico, have you never seen a fighting movie? That's, like, the first rule," he questioned raising an eyebrow. He shook his head at her. "Sword up," he said, holding his own, ready for battle. Nico swallowed, scared. "Use your instincts, they'll keep you alive." Nico nodded before the swords clashed again in an epic noise.

It would be difficult for Nico to explain how many times the swords had clashed and how many times she had fallen to the floor. How many times Ash had yelled at her for stepping wrong, moving her arm wrong, moving her sword

wrong or something of that kind. As long as it was wrong, Ash was yelling at her for it. It was beginning to get on Nico's nerves... and faster than she would like to admit.

"Jerk," she mumbled under her breath. Ash laughed, not missing a beat in kicking her ass, the swords colliding louder and harder.

"You can't just insult the people you fight with and expect them to crumble at your feet," he said, taking a step forward. Nico took a step back quickly to avoid having the sword slash her face.

"I can at least try!" she said angrily. She glared at him before he made two movements, one movement was a step and the other one was to disarm her. The sword landed neatly on the other side of the cabin. Nico made a move towards it. Ash raised his sword towards her neck to stop her.

"Good luck with that," he said smirking. Ash was in over his head. She knew him and she knew that he thought he had won. She looked from the distance between the point of the sword and her neck. If she calculated right, she would end up without a hole in her neck. She ran straight towards the point of the neck, then dropped herself to the floor sliding right beside Ash. He turned around as Nico hit the opposite wall. She grabbed her sword from the floor, a smirk planted on her face.

"What was that about underestimating?" she said quickly. She stood the same second that Ash threw his sword. Ash's sword landed on her shirt, not touching her skin but pinning her to the wall for enough seconds for him to grab her sword out of her hand and point it at her neck once more. He sure had one strange liking to necks. He smirked at her, winning. "I hate you," she muttered angrily, glaring at the angel in front of her.

Their breaths had picked up and Nico had been so focused on being angry, she hadn't noticed how heavily hers had gotten. His smirk deepened as he approached her. She was pinned under him, and oddly enough she liked it, even in the strange moment that they had been caught in.

With their bodies so close, their lips only inches apart, Nico's anger evaporated into need, want, and pure lust. Why was he so attractive? Ash moved down, their lips coming closer together. Ash's hand came closer to her cheek, barely touching, so close. Nico was dying for a touch. Something, anything, a simple kiss on the cheek, just from him. Nico moved herself up in order to be

closer to him. She knew as soon as she had done that Ash was thrown completely out of his trance.

“You should go,” he whispered softly, practically against her lips. Nico almost groaned like child wanting to stay for five more minutes. “You’ve been here a really long time, we don’t want them to think anything strange is going on.” He backed away from her, removing the sword from the wall with ease. He placed both swords next to his mattress.

“Right... right... bye.”

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Ash looked towards the opening where the only thing he could see was the dark ocean clashing loudly against the boat. He sat with his back against the threshold opening; one wrong move and he would be sideways into the water. This wasn’t the concern that occupied his mind, however. A petite figure landed beside him. He had no need to look up. He knew who it was; her essence was too familiar for him.

“Hey,” she whispered sitting down, dangling her feet over the edge. Ash turned his attention to her and smiled softly.

“Hi,” he said quietly, before looking back out into the ocean.

“I have a question for you,” asked Selena, her eyes looking up at the sky then down to the waves crashing below, only a few feet under her.

“Hmm?” Ash was barely paying attention to the words that Selena was speaking, however, he knew this conversation would lead to his feelings, something he wasn’t always so keen to speak about. Selena knew everything about him, including how he was feeling, he could try and deny it but she would dig it up eventually.

“It’s stronger than what you felt for Ella, isn’t?” the words rang clear in his mind. Ash, at an earlier point in his life, had believed to be in love with Ella Virgin, a girlfriend he had from sixteen to almost eighteen years of age. Now as Selena spoke those words, and he thought about the feelings he had for Ella, they weren’t close to the ones he had grown for Nico in the past few weeks.

“I don’t know,” he lied to her.

“You’re lying to me,” she sang to him. Her voice was clear as she turned to

look at him, not angry but compassionate. "It's fine, if you don't want to talk about it. But you know, and I know... fate to hell." Ash smiled, opening his arms to Selena. She sat in between his legs, her back leaning into his chest. They looked up at the stars.

"Thanks, I needed that," he whispered, he could feel her smile.

"It's what I'm here for... I am your best friend." She laid her head back on his shoulder and sighed. Moments like this were the ones that most would call romantic between the friends, however Ash would call it a regular Tuesday or a Monday or whatever day of the week it was. They were simply extremely comfortable with each other; always had, always would be. Ash kissed the top of her head.

"I love you, Selly."

"I love you too, Ashy."

Selena brushed her hair casually in the mirror. Currently in a grey t-shirt, that should have covered her stomach, but if the girl lifted her arms it did none of that, and shorts. She'd been given a few outfits upon arriving on the ship, but honestly, she was happy to change out of the clothes that she had arrived in. She was in closed toed shoes, red ones, her feet resting from wearing heels for a good six days. Selena was surprised that she hadn't gotten anything disgusting for clothes. They were very stylish and she liked the outfit she had picked out for herself. From the mirror, Selena could still see her heels. This wasn't what had most of her attention at the moment, however. She was looking at Ryan and Carter, who were staring at each other.

Selena had never seen them kiss, not once. Though Selena knew they were dating, as they slept in the same bed, sometimes in his room, sometimes in the outer room, Carter spooning Ryan, but other than that they hadn't shown signs they were a real couple, not in front of her. They did little things, little stares that showed they were in love; it made her stomach turn. Not in disgust or anything of the kind, but in remorse. She wanted something like that, who wouldn't? She placed her brush down, lowering her gaze to the sink before she turned.

"I - I think I want some fresh air," she muttered quickly, looking more to the floor than to the couple in front of her. Without a response from them, she started to head towards Darrin's door. Carter stood before she reached it.

"I'll escort you," he said grinning. Selena was taken aback by his words but nodded and waited by the exit door. "I'll be right back," whispered Carter to Ryan before appearing behind Selena. He didn't kiss his girlfriend goodbye. Selena found that oddly strange, most couples kissed goodbye even if they weren't going to see each other for a minute.

Silently, the prisoner and her guard made their way through the hallway towards the fresh air. Nico was having yet another training session with Ash, one of the many in the past few days. They were far away from the States now, too far for Selena's liking, but it was up to Ash when they would attack. Her guard leaned over a spot on the rail that seemed almost empty. He sighed softly as the wind ran through both of their hairs.

"You really love her," acknowledged Selena, also leaning over the railing. Carter kept his face still, but it seemed a flash of emotion had run through it. It was a few seconds before he smiled softly. Selena could assume he did this to

warn away any unwanted Warlins.

"Yeah, I do," he whispered back, looking up at the sky. Selena kept her gaze at the water below her.

"How long have you been together?" she asked Carter, her gaze not lifting for even a moment.

"A little over four months." He swallowed after that, "but I've been in love with her for a lot longer than that," he said, the smile returning to his face. Selena couldn't help but smile with him. She could only hope one day to feel that way about someone and have someone feel the same about her in return. "I have a question for you now. The whole soulmates thing, how does that work?" Selena sighed, she wasn't really in the mood to explain the entire process of soulmates and what came with it but Carter had asked. He had answered her question truthfully she could only do the same for his.

"Every angel, Warlin or Ruem is given a soulmate when they turn eighteen. This soulmate is someone that makes them feel complete, no matter what. We've evolved over the years, and our wings hold some significance to our soulmate. An angel, though, can fall in love with someone else and never meet their soulmate, or they can die before meeting them. Some meet their soulmate but find out that they are in love with someone else. That's the most painful thing ever. I've heard it's worse than being stabbed by needles, one by one." Selena stopped to look down. This was a fate she hoped to dear Angelico she would never have to experience. Carter swallowed.

"Some wings, like mine, are inconclusive until I get them read by a prophecy reader. I have vampire teeth and they could mean two things, that I am either going to be killed by a vampire or that my soulmate is a vampire. I haven't found my soulmate though." She looked up at Carter through the corner of her eyes. He nodded softly. "You could be someone's soulmate and not know it," teased Selena.

"Me?" Carter almost laughed at the idea. Selena nodded.

"Yup, anyone can be a soulmate, live a perfectly normal life, fall in love, get married and not know that their other half was waiting for them... or you could not have a soulmate. It's really something you shouldn't dwell on," she continued to tease him. It could drive someone to insanity, like it was slowly driving her.

"I always thought everyone had a soulmate, it was all a matter of finding them," Carter looked down at Selena before raising an eyebrow, she shrugged lightly. She'd never really thought of it that way.

"The only one that has proof are the angels. So according to me and my facts, only angels have soulmates," she said speaking as though she was more of scientist rather than a girl wishing for love.

"Yes, but angels can have soulmates that aren't angels. Which means that creatures that aren't angels can have soulmates," battled Carter smirking, Selena pushed him lightly.

"Shut up," she said playfully, smiling at Carter, who smiled down at her. Someone cleared her throat behind them sharply. The duo turned around rather quickly, like a couple of kids caught in the middle of trying to put up a prank in the principal's office.

"You seem very friendly with the prisoner, Carter," spoke Gabitha, her voice cutting through them. Whether or not they were ready for battle, it seemed that it would have to be tonight, thought Selena. There didn't seem to be another option. The only thing Selena was thankful for was the fact that she was in comfortable clothing. She moved her hip slightly and felt her sword, currently camouflaged, against her thigh. Selena relaxed a little. She was ready for any surprise attack that Gabitha wanted to pull on them. Gabitha's face lit up with realization. "Oh I see, you two are a couple, hmm I should have known!" She approached Selena and grabbed her face, Selena held back the need to spit in Gabitha's. "Someone with such a pretty face must put out rather quickly." Gabitha smirked lightly and Selena couldn't help but glare at her deeply. "Grab him."

Two guards moved quickly, standing next to Carter to hold him by the arm. He was forced to kneel down; he looked ready to be executed. Selena's heart started to race out of her chest. She made a move towards Carter. "No no, you won't be moving," said Gabitha, she didn't place a spell on Selena, however. Her eyes said enough, as if one move and Carter's life would be over. Selena stayed put waiting for the right moment to attack. Gabitha would be the hardest one to take down; the Warlin soldiers were easy to destroy, she knew that from experience. Selena had taken down dozens of them by herself before. She began to form eight different plans in her mind, her breathing increasing at every

second that passed, why was she so nervous? It was only Carter. She'd just met him... but she had to save him, for Ryan's sake... for Ryan. Gabitha moved her fingers forward causing Carter to squirm. She curled her fingers into a tight fist, and began to pull her hand back, before her eyebrows furrowed together. Something had gone wrong. "You have a strong heart, angel," she mused out loud. Selena realized then what she was trying to do.

Gabitha was trying to pull Carter's heart out.

"Stop! Don't hurt him!" Carter was screaming in agony as Selena yelled. Gabitha released her hand and turned to Selena while Carter fell to the ground, weak and in pain. Selena couldn't take her eyes away from him. Gabitha squinted hers at Selena, who was trying as hard as she could to hold her head high. Gabitha stood only a few inches over Selena, the difference being Gabitha was wearing her Manhattan heels and Selena wasn't.

"Open your wings, child," Gabitha spoke softly this time, giving Selena a small smile. Selena obeyed the witch, scared that she would hurt her friend again. Gabitha was clearly a lot more powerful than any of them had imagined. Gabitha looked closely at the vampire teeth on Selena's wings, examining them. She turned to Carter's body on the floor after she finished. "I'm presuming you are a tiger or a lion shifter?" she asked calmly. Carter looked up, breathing heavily, but managed a nod, agreeing with the witch. Selena followed Gabitha with her eyes as she made her way back to Selena's wings. "Do you know what these are?"

"Vampire teeth?" questioned Selena angrily. Gabitha let out a laugh. It sounded completely forced to Selena. Gabitha placed her hand close to Selena's wings, barely touching them.

"Oh no, child, these are tiger, or lion teeth. These animals have very strong hearts, not easy to pull out... well not as easy as an angelic heart," Selena continued to follow Gabitha with her eyes as she walked from one edge of her wings to the other. "Your soulmate is a tiger or a lion shifter, and in front of you is..." Gabitha let the rest of the sentence float away, her finger pointing to the crumbled figure of a person on the floor. Selena's eyes connected to Carter's. She swallowed, feeling her stomach flip into six different acrobatic tricks at the same time. "Too bad both of you will die now and just after finding out, how sad," she sighed, faking like she felt bad for them, something Selena knew was not



possible.

Selena had never felt worse in her entire life. She found the person who was supposed to make her happy for the rest of her life. Yet, there was one catch, he was in love with someone else. Selena suddenly felt like she had been sucker punched in the stomach for the first time, as though she had never felt pain before. She knew she was going to feel this over and over again.

Plan 6 came to mind and she put it into action without another second to spare. Her wings threw her into the air. It was easier since they were already expanded. While the soldiers were expanding theirs, Selena had already stabbed one through the heart and was halfway through stabbing the other. After she was finished, she looked straight at Gabitha's back. She'd done all of this in less than ten seconds.

"Come on." She grabbed Carter's hand and flew away from the witch towards Ash's cabin. It was time to attack; there was no holding back.

"We're -," spoke Carter, his head where Selena's hipbone was. She could feel the confusion in his voice. Shouldn't it make her feel better watching him be happy with Ryan? She was going to regret this when actual feelings for him kicked in later on.

"No we aren't. Just because my wings say shifter doesn't mean anything. She was trying to trick us. Confuse us. Destroy us from within. It could be any shifter. Honestly Carter. I have to kiss you to find out and I don't think Ryan would be too happy about that." Her name seemed to jog back his memory and for that Selena was semi grateful.

"Ryan," he whispered softly.

"Yeah, you know? Your girlfriend. We're not soulmates, she was trying to trick us," she repeated, once out loud, but over and over again in her mind. This did nothing to stop the shivers she felt from holding his hand as they flew towards Ash's cabin.

“Ryan! And Darrin? What are you guys doing here?” asked Selena as she flew through the hole. Nico turned around at the sound of the voice. Nico didn’t exactly think having the entire gang down in Ash’s cabin was a good idea but Ash hadn’t said anything about it yet. Wouldn’t this look a bit suspicious?

“They came in to say hello real quick,” explained Nico. Selena snatched her hand away from Carter’s as Nico spoke. She made a mental note of this, but then threw it aside, deciding it wasn’t a big deal. She didn’t want to make a big fuss out of nothing. Selena probably didn’t want Ryan to think it was a big deal either. Nico turned to glance at her best friend but Ryan was too busy staring at the waves to take notice of the world around her.

“Gabitha knows Carter is a shifter and that he’s on our side. Attack is now.” The four heads turned to look at Selena as she spoke. Nico knew what her own face looked like. Selena had gone completely and utterly insane. Nico swore she’d heard Selena wrong.

“What?” asked Ash, Nico could already tell his temper was rising and quickly. She took Ash’s third sword before he had a chance to hide it from her.

“Let’s go then! We can’t wait to have them regroup or anything, right?” Nico swallowed the jitters away. Truthfully, she was more nervous than ever, but she wouldn’t dare let anyone else see that. She was going to be brave and fight. It’s what her parents would have wanted her to do. She wasn’t going to be a Warlin Soldier; she was going to be a Ruem Savior. She had to be.

The color drained from Ash’s face at a rapid speed. She could tell he was going to burst at any moment. He didn’t want her to fight, but Nico needed to. It’s what he had trained her for, what she had worked so hard for. She needed to prove this to herself more than to anyone else. Nico backed herself to the entrance of the cabin, the same second Selena turned to look at her.

“We shouldn’t move yet,” she said softly, raising her hand in a clear attempt to stop Nico. Nico shook her head, her stubborn nature kicking in, something she had thought to have acquired from her father. Nico looked directly at the only person she knew would go with her when no one else would.

“Coming with me?” she asked her best friend. Without hesitation in her step, Ryan grabbed Nico’s hand tightly.

“Better not get me killed,” she snapped. Nico smiled as she opened her wings and took off. She landed on an empty section in the back of the boat, sword out,

wings retracted, ears prepared for anything that may come. Ryan positioned her hands towards her chest, ready to send out blows. The girls stood back to back. "Nico?" Nico could hear the fear in Ryan's voice.

"Yeah?" whispered Nico, after a few seconds of silence.

"If we die-," began Ryan.

"Don't talk like that," snapped Nico quickly, her heart beating strongly at the word die. She didn't like the sound of it coming from Ryan's lips.

"Well, if anything happens, I just want to tell you I'm really glad we're best friends." The redhead's voice broke slightly and Nico's eyes began to tear up. She tried to hold her position.

"Do you really have to make me tear up right before a fight?" Selena's sarcastic tone broke the moment the best friends were trying to have. Selena walked towards them, swinging her sword. Ash, Carter and Darrin right behind her.

"You guys look like a sitting ducks," grumbled out Darrin, chuckling towards the end.

"Seriously, you need cover," added in Selena, crossing her arms, her sword dangling freely. "You don't stand in the middle of an open field and wait for a freaking attack, you know?" She rolled her eyes. Nico flushed with embarrassment.

Ash walked towards cover, silently, in spy nature. The group followed him, until they were led to the front of the ship. As they approached it, Nico was sure she was hearing loud chatter. They found Gabitha giving a speech to all her Warlin soldiers on the ship. The group hid behind a short wall, behind the last straggling pair of Warlin soldiers. With all the soldiers now together for the first time, there seemed to be thousands.

"We are too far from the main land for them to fly all the way there. This means they need the ship. All guards need to be all red alert-." Gabitha's voice was loud and clear. Ash moved his nose and instantly Nico could tell he didn't like the sound of Gabitha's words. He didn't have much of a choice. Ash moved his hand over his mouth. Some sort of plan was forming in his mind.

"I have a plan," whispered Ash, a light smirk appearing on his lips. "Ryan, Sel, I'll need you two ladies. Darrin attack from the back at my signal." Suddenly the blonde, the brunette and the redhead were gone from Nico's sight. She tried

to relocate them but it was extremely difficult. She sighed as she gave up and ended up sitting on the floor behind the wall.

“Attack from the back?” she whispered looking up at Darrin. He nodded slightly, his eyes fixed on the figure that Nico could only assume was Gabitha. The witch continued to give her speech in her annoying high-pitched voice.

“The three of us are going to take as many Warlin soldiers from here as we can while Ash takes some from the front, meeting each other in the middle, if we survive.” Nico stared at Darrin in shock.

“How in the world do you know that?” she asked softly looking up at him.

“I’ve known the kid since he was born, I know the way he thinks, very wisely.” Carter nodded agreeing with Darrin.

“Wise indeed,” Carter agreed, his eyes looking to what seemed past Gabitha’s body. Nico stood up quickly and tried to see what Carter was seeing. She saw what looked like Ryan’s hair color and Ash’s hair color, very dimly in the background; right behind the stage were Gabitha stood.

“Could it be?” the boys didn’t have time to answer her question.

Rolled up in balls came Ash and Selena from the behind Gabitha, at the same time. When they exploded, swords in hands, they didn’t go for Gabitha, they went directly for the Warlin soldiers. For every soldier’s life Selena took, Ash took four. Then again, Ash had two swords while Selena only had one.

“That’s the signal.” Carter shifted in mid jump from the short wall. Darrin jumped it as well, right beside him. Nico heard the brutality of the battle but her feet were rooted to the floor, right behind the safety of the wall. She couldn’t do it. She couldn’t fight. She couldn’t kill someone, even if they were trying to kill her.

She backed herself into a further wall as a Warlin soldier came straight for her. She distantly heard Ryan speak.

“Hello Gabitha.”

“Ah Ryan, good morning.” Nico held up her sword, shaking. She couldn’t do this, fighting wasn’t in her blood. She wasn’t a fighter. That was Ash’s job. Ash. There was no Ash to save her. She was going to die.

“Not such a good one now, is it?” rang Ryan’s voice. Nico’s body started to shake as the Warlin stepped closer. This was it. This would be the moment she would die. Should she close her eyes?

"Why is that?" questioned Gabitha.

"I'm gonna kill you." Nico could sense the hesitation in Ryan's voice. She wasn't a killer either. But she would do it. Because she had to and Nico had to. She looked up at the Warlin, bit her lip and swung her sword the way Ash had taught her. Only because of the way she had looked seconds before the Warlin had not seen the attack coming and was dust in front of her eyes.

Her first kill. Nico breathed out heavily as she stood. She tried not to hyperventilate. She wished she was back home when she walked out into the scene. There were a million Warlin soldiers compared to the four that were fighting, five if Nico counted herself... though she wouldn't.

"You, kill me?" Gabitha gave a shrill laugh that made Nico's stomach turn as she successfully killed her second victim, fear still brimming her eyes. "And how do you plan on doing that?" Ryan remained silent. Nico made a move for her third kill when she dropped her sword, making a loud clash. She screamed. Her insides were a thousand degrees. She dropped to her knees, holding her stomach to seize the burning. Darrin, the nearest Ruem, ran towards her and began to fight around to protect her. The amount of Warlin soldiers never ended as Nico doubled over in pain. She was burning from the inside out.

"Stop it! Stop it!" yelled Ryan, she moved her hands to help her friend but nothing happened.

"Do you see that? It's so easy for me to cause pain. It's even easier to kill someone." Ryan's eyes widen, Nico closed her eyes ready for death. She felt Ash's breath catch in his throat. Gabitha snapped her fingers taking someone's life painfully. A body dropped beside Nico. Her eyes tore open to see.

"Darrin," she choked out. The burning feeling in her stomach was gone, but it was quickly replaced by a choking feeling in her throat.

"Blondie - goodbye," he whispered in between gasps of pain before becoming dust in Nico's arms. She stared at the dust in her hands, not truly believing it. Nico's body filled with rage so quickly she didn't think it was physically possible.

"MONSTER!" she yelled out angrily. Nico grabbed her sword and in her rage fit, killed every Warlin she had to, making a clear pathway to Gabitha. She didn't care if she had just met Darrin. She didn't care if he was violent, sexist, strange or older than she was. He had grown to be her friend; he was Ash's friend. She

knew him. She wanted to bring him home to his family. Yet, she couldn't do that because of that stupid ugly monster.

No one deserved to die a more painful death than that ugly bitch. Nico reached the little stage that Gabitha was on, as the battle went on, now only three Ruems fighting. Nico was in such a heated rage it was impossible that words would bring her down. "Monster," she repeated, with as much anger as the first time. She moved quickly, so quickly that Gabitha hadn't seen it coming. The sword was suddenly to her neck so tightly some blood trickled down.

"Nico." Ryan's voice was filled with fear but Nico was unable to listen. She didn't care. Ryan hadn't seen Darrin die in her arms. She hadn't seen someone they knew die in her arms.

"I can't even give him a proper funeral," spoke Nico, holding the sword firmly in place. "I saw on TV once that if a witch kills another witch she absorbs her power. Is that true Ryan?" Nico's eyes connected to Ryan's for the first time. Nico could see for a second Ryan's fear and knew that it was not because of Gabitha but because of Nico. "Do it then. Take her life as easily as she took Darrin's." Nico wanted sweet and merciless revenge on the monstrous creature that was Gabitha Mitchell.

"This will be my first kill," spoke Ryan her voice quivering slightly.

"I have faith in you." Nico's grip on the monster under her never eased.

Ryan sighed slightly before she closed her eyes in concentration. Ryan's snap, unlike Gabitha's, was not quick and sudden, it was soft and smooth. Gabitha's body went limp under Nico's grip. Nico threw her body onto the floor then handed Ryan the sword.

"Double tap," she said, her tone completely serious. Ryan didn't wait another second before stabbing the sword through Gabitha's heart, though the girls knew she had none.

Nico jumped from the small stage to the floor. She spotted blonde hair and went directly towards it. She left a direct trail of dust and bodies behind her. As soon as she reached him, she placed her back against his, fighting soldiers that were trying to sneak in attacks from behind.

"I saw that," she spoke, moving almost in sync with him.

"Saw what?" he asked innocently. Ash entwined their arms and lowered himself. Nico had a clear view of the Warlins before she was kicking their chins with her feet.

"The way your breath caught when you thought it was going to be me and that was a really cheesy move," she said, going under his arm, stabbing a Warlin as she moved to be against his back once more. Ash laughed before his serious tone kicked in.

"People die every day, Nico." He didn't miss a beat in the way his sword moved, however Nico did. A Warlin was able to slash her on her forearm. She grabbed her arm quickly, feeling pain as Ash slit the Warlin's throat.

"You don't mean that," she snapped angrily.

"Mean what? That people die every day." Nico hated how he had a response for everything. He knew her as much as she knew him.

"No, not that! Ugh. Admit it, you feel something between us." She ignored the pulsing pain in her left forearm then continued to fight. Never would she had thought she would speak about feelings with her boyfriend while killing soldiers that were trying to claw her face out. One of them nearly succeeded.

"Of course I feel something, Nico. You *are* my girlfriend." Nico could feel Ash rolling his eyes. He'd said it as though Nico needed to apologize for ever doubting otherwise. Like hell she was going to do that though. If anything, Nico knew he needed to apologize.

"I hate you," she muttered, glaring at the soldiers in front of her. Ash laughed a second time. Nico made another move to attack when the Warlin soldier in front of her looked shocked. The Warlin soldier before her couldn't move an inch towards her. "What in the world?" she asked softly looking at the soldiers as if they had all gone insane. Ash's nose did it's little twitchy thing that Nico was starting to adore completely.

"It's a force field keeping them out," commented Ash, touching what would be the soldier's face but instead was an invisible wall. From above them Selena

landed in their bubble, gracefully and carefully. Nico hugged her tightly the second she could.

“Ouf! Angelico! Nico, I’m fine.” Though her tone was clearly sarcastic, Nico felt Selena’s arm wrap around her body in return.

“Look.” Ash pointed to the dust and bodies that were scaling up around the bubble. Nico knew that meant only one thing; Warlin soldiers were dying, and by the looks of it, tons of them. She walked to where most of the dust and bodies seemed to be gathering.

Out of the dust she began to see two paws and a tiger’s face come into shape. Ash was on top of her the next second, pinning her to the floor. Above them, Tiger Carter landed on the other side of the bubble. If Nico had been standing, her face would have been tiger claw soup. The bubble had grown to give the tiger space to land. Ryan hopped off Carter with ease.

“You know, the first time I pictured a guy being on top of me, I never thought I’d be on a boat, and that he’d be saving me from a flying tiger,” groaned Nico before pushing a laughing Ash from on top of her. Ryan smiled at Selena before pulling Nico into a tight hug.

“Don’t you ever look that angry again, okay?” Nico could easily tell that Ryan was trying to be angry at Nico but instead only smiled at her.

“Okay,” promised Nico, putting her forehead against her best friend’s. Ryan took a quick look at the gash on Nico’s forearm and healed it, running her thumb over the wound. Ash’s attention turned to all the Warlin soldiers desperately trying to break the barrier, in order to destroy the people within

“There’s got to be at least two hundred more Warlin soldiers,” muttered Ash, running a hand through his hair. Nico sighed before turning to Ryan.

“Can’t you like teleport us or something?” she asked quickly. Ryan snorted.

“I’ve got power but not that much power,” Ryan spoke before she sighed. “The only thing that can save us now is to grab a train out of France-.”

“That’s not possible,” snapped Ash quickly, shutting Ryan up. Selena’s eyes averted downward.

“Why?” questioned Carter.

“Once Selena - I mean - once Selena and Ryan take one step into France they’re dead... actually we’re all dead. France is ruled completely by the



Warlins. Recently taken over control too, only cause Andrea decided that France was pretty with the tower and history," Ash didn't stop pacing as he spoke. Nico followed him with attentive eyes. Selena sighed causally, as if she lived every day in a life or death situation.

"She can do that?" asked Nico, her head spinning from following Ash with only her gaze. An entire country taken over because the ruler thought the Eiffel Tower was pretty. Nico couldn't believe it.

"Do you want to try and stop her? Didn't think so..." Ash suddenly stopped pacing and looked at something far away. Nico turned and followed his gaze. The color left her face faster than Ash's realization.

"No." she spoke sharply. Selena followed their gaze. "Are you insane?!" she added quickly her voice rising to a yell. Carter and Ryan turned to look, following the gaze of the couple. The five friends were looking at the lifeboats; a few tiny boats that could survive in water a good day or possibly two. Nico gave them a few hours.

"We'll never make it!" Ryan threw her hands in the air as she spoke, turning around, and jumping as she came face to face with an angry looking Warlin.

"We've been out here for days," battled Carter, staring directly at Ash, his eyes pleading. Ash smirked.

"We have her." He pointed to Nico. At first all the faces held confusion however one by one their faces started to click with realization of what would happen, except for Nico's. Selena's clicked first.

"She'll change the current," she whispered softly.

"I'll do what now?!" yelled Nico pressing her eyebrows together. She looked at everyone as though they had officially lost all their senses in the battle. "Have you all gone insane?! I can barely move a bucket full of water let alone the Atlantic ocean!" Ash rolled his eyes, ignoring her statement. He grabbed her arm softly and began to pull her toward the lifeboats. Ryan raised her hands and moved the bubble that surrounded them as they moved. They were a bowling ball, the Warlin soldiers the pins. Nico would have enjoyed this if she weren't thinking about changing the currents of an entire ocean to save four lives.

Too soon for Nico's liking the last Warlin soldier was out of their way. The three girls were positioned perfectly on the lifeboat. As soon as the Warlin soldiers noticed what they were doing they tried to get on the boat, but couldn't,

because of the bubble shield that Ryan was still holding. Warlins slid off, landing directly into the water. Ash and Carter lowered the ropes, placing the lifeboat in the water. Then they sat, and the four faces that she was supposed to save turned to her. Four lives in her hand. It was all down to her and all she wanted to do was cry.

"It's simple," tried to encourage Ash, softly running his hands up and down her arms. She glared at him deeply, daggers emanating from her eyes.

"If it's so simple, you do it," Nico snapped quickly not being able to help herself. She disliked having so much pressure on herself. She had barely gotten used to the fighting. She had acted on impulse during the entire fight. Though those had been the instructions by Ash. It was to save her own skin. She didn't want to die. Who wanted to die? Darrin didn't want to die. If he hadn't approached her, he'd probably be in the lifeboat making comments about Nico being slow, or the Warlins approaching. She couldn't do this. "I can't do this," she said, voicing her thoughts. Selena groaned loudly. More Warlin soldiers were throwing themselves overboard towards the lifeboat. Some hit the shield and slid off, some landed in their own lifeboats.

"Nico look. I know what it feels like to have the pressure of the world on your shoulders but you need to pull through, you've got no choice. I know it doesn't seem like the best speech in the world but it's the only one I've got because I'm honestly scared for my life right now." The bravest girl she had ever met was scared for her life. Nico couldn't believe that. But, the look of terror that had taken over Selena's face was obvious. Nico nodded, Selena was counting on her. She couldn't let that crappy speech go to waste.

Nico tried to think back to her life, growing up in the orphanage, the love of water she always had. It wasn't easy, especially with all the noise that everyone was making.

"Come on, Nico," encouraged Carter. She closed her eyes to try and picture being at home, relaxing. She inched her hand out.

The boat moved forward, not at a speed that they needed, not even close to that. It moved them only a foot or two away from the ship.

"I can't conjure enough emotion." Nico looked down at her hands. She'd failed. She only half noticed from the corner of her eyes Ash and Selena exchanged a quick look.

Ash moved to capture his hands between Nico's face, their lips locking securely. Nico felt the color rise to her cheeks. He'd never kissed her like *this* before. This was the sort of kiss that she would jump around her room for, screaming and yelling about its perfection. The kiss she wouldn't tell her father. The kiss that would make all her friends jealous. It was too much for Nico to

handle. She could feel every single muscle in her body wanting more, every cell tingling. This was bliss. She didn't care that there were other people around her, watching her.

Nico felt someone grab her wrists and yank them forward. Her entire body was thrown down by the force of the currents. She held onto the lifeboat for dear life.

"Is everyone still here?" Nico yelled not lifting her head.

"Yup!" yelled Ryan, whose voice sounded as though it came from Nico's feet. Nico looked forward at Ash, their eyes connecting. He smiled at her.

"Am I a good kisser or what?" he joked lightly. Nico rolled her eyes, she would have playfully pushed him if her life hadn't been in potential threat.

When Nico did lift her head a few seconds later, the cargo ship was nowhere in sight. She grinned in happiness. She was proud of herself, she'd done something right. She didn't usually do things right. She placed her head softly against the wood of the boat.

"How long till we get to the states?" asked Selena. Her voice booming from the other side of Nico. Ash made a small face as he did the math.

"About two hours, maybe less," he said, shrugging his shoulders softly. The grip of his fingers on the lifeboat loosened slightly.

"Some kiss," commented Selena nudging Nico playfully. Nico felt the color rise to her cheeks once more.

"What can I say? He brings the emotion out of me." Nico shrugged, turning her head to look at Ash and smiling at him. He smirked back at her.

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"I feel like we're out of the conversation," complained Ryan, crossing an arm over her chest. The other one was holding the lifeboat in order to keep her from flying away. Carter sighed, his arm falling asleep.

"Does it really matter, we're probably gonna be home in a few hours..." Carter paused. "We can make do for a few hours." He tried to find a comfortable position on the boat. It wasn't an easy task. He had changed positions at least seven times.

"You're right." Ryan smiled. "I actually have a question for you," she said

tilting her head to the side. Carter stomach sank, that little tilt from Ryan was never a good thing. This meant she was going to be an actual girl and go girly on him.

“What’s up, sweetie?” he asked her softly.

“What did you and Selena talk about? You guys seemed weirded out after you came back from your walk,” commented Ryan, tilting her head even further.

Carter took the next two seconds to decide whether the complete truth or half-truth would be best as his answer. He loved his beautiful redhead more than anything in the entire world but, on the other hand, he didn’t want her to worry that Selena could be getting in the way by Gabitha’s words. After all, Selena had assured him that it was all a trick. Right? So half-truth it was.

“We talked about our relationship and I asked her about the deal with soulmates.” Carter shrugged his shoulders. Ryan didn’t look pleased with the answer.

“Soulmates? Why did you want to know about soulmates?” she questioned. Her tone wasn’t angry, simply curious. Carter liked that best about Ryan, she didn’t get mad about stupid things. He smiled at her, his heart jumping.

“Because I think you’re mine,” he whispered, kissing her lightly on the lips. Ryan looked at the others to see if they had seen. She was never a big fan of PDA and Carter was okay with that any other day. That little peck he couldn’t hold inside.

“That was cute,” she whispered, her cheeks becoming the color of her hair. Carter grinned. He considered himself the luckiest guy in the world. It didn’t matter what anyone else said, he was in love with Ryan and nothing would change that. Nothing.

Two hours of looking into Ash's eyes wasn't exactly what Nico thought it would be like. If there was ever a point when the lifeboat would slow down, Ash would touch her waist, or place a strand of hair behind her ear. Little things that made Nico feel giddy on the inside, anything to make her filled with emotion.

"Great," groaned Selena sarcastically as she looked behind the lifeboat. Nico turned to look. They had been so excited about going back to the States that they hadn't noticed the current bring a lifeboat with five or six Warlin soldiers. Ash cursed under his breath.

"That's not good," said Nico, turning a ghostly pale. She inched her hands forward moving the lifeboat even faster. Fear worked just as great as passion. She tried to swallow her nerves away.

"There's land!" yelled Ryan from the foot of the lifeboat. Nico turned her head again and watched as a patch of sand grew bigger and bigger. She thanked the angels that it was deserted. As the others prepared themselves for the crash against the sand, Nico tried something new. She slowed the currents as the waves crashed onto shore.

Ash was the first to step out of the lifeboat onto the sand, helping Nico out, then Selena, and finally Ryan. Carter was the last one out. Nico looked at the Warlin soldiers, the way she had stopped the current the Warlin soldiers were stranded around fifty feet away from the shore. That didn't stop them though. They were all quickly expanding their wings, ready to chase them. Ash grabbed her arm and started to pull her towards a forest right behind the beach. Nico couldn't help but turn around, as the beach became a blur of blue and peach.

The five kids stumbled upon a parking lot behind the thick trees. Nico tried to contain her breathing, looking back as Ash continued to pull her. His hand never left hers. Ash began to look for someone who was walking towards their car. He found a man around forty.

"Come on," he said, pulling Nico. He let go of her hand only to pull out his sword. Nico could only guess what he was going to do and shook her head disapprovingly. As the man opened his car door and turned on his car to air it out Ash pressed his sword to the man's neck. "I need your car." The man raised his hands in defense before quickly running away. Nico ran around the back of the car towards the passenger seat. She spotted a clear problem with the car Ash had chosen.

“Ash! I don’t think we should use this car!” she yelled from the back as Selena, Ryan and Carter piled into the back seat. Ash groaned loudly.

“GET IN THE CAR,” he yelled, not really caring.

“Ash, really, I don’t think we should use this car,” she spoke calmly pointing to the clear problem on the car. It was stamped clearly on the back. Ash rolled his eyes and got in the car. Nico huffed and got in the car. If he didn’t want to pay attention to the obvious problem then screw him. Nico eyebrows were both raised as Ash backed out of the parking lot and got onto the main highway. Ash began to press the gas pedal like a mad man but it took a while before the car actually lunged forward at a minimum speed. Nico tried not to laugh. After all, her life was now in jeopardy because her boyfriend was a dumbass. “It’s a Hybrid,” she said turning her head to look at him. Selena was the first to break out in a fit of giggles.

“A what?!” yelled Ash angrily, clearly the car wasn’t going as fast as he wanted it go. An electric car could never amount to the energy of a gasoline car. Nico had been taught to drive in an electric car.

“A car that runs on electricity not on gasoline.” Ash’s face turned a bright red of embarrassment as Nico’s body moved from laughing when she spoke.

“Are you laughing at me?!” he demanded, turning his head to look at her. Nico shook her head quickly, holding a fit of giggles in. It was hard not to laugh; she had clearly warned him about the car and he had chosen not to listen.

“No, of course not! Why would I laugh at you, sweetheart?” she spoke; clearly holding back laughter.

“You drive, then!” he yelled pulling over to the side of the road quickly. Nico’s face fell. She didn’t like to drive, especially like this, when people’s lives depended on her. Why did they always like to put other lives in her hands? The three lives in the back remained quiet as Nico and Ash switched car positions as quickly as they possibly could. Unlike Ash, Nico knew how to press down on the Hybrid. They didn’t go killer speed but a lot faster than how they were going with Ash. Ash muttered a line of curse words to show his support. Selena patted him on the back, as she was seated behind him after the switch.

“It’s okay, just admit it, girls are better drivers than boys,” she spoke smiling. Ash shot her a dagger glare. Nico couldn’t help but laugh at Selena’s comment,

as she looked into her rearview mirror. Almost immediately Nico spotted three classic bad guy black SUVs, placed perfectly behind them and ready to attack.

"Company." Nico's voice remained dangerously calm. Ryan instantly turned around and moved one of her hands blowing a tire. The car kept coming at them as if nothing had happened.

"They're angel cars they won't stop for a simple flat tire," spoke Ash running a hand across his face. Nico didn't like the sound of his voice.

"This is why I wished we evolved to guns," snapped Selena, crossing her arms angrily. Ash rolled his eyes at her comment.

"So they could shoot us?!" panicked Carter, the color leaving the face that was pressed against the window. Nico was suddenly glad that Ryan was in-between them as Selena looked ready to jump Carter.

"No, wiseass, so we can shoot *them*." She rolled her eyes and sighed angrily. Nico tried not to think about guns when she saw something she wished she never had. This wasn't like the movies where in a high-speed chase she would get the fastest car with no traffic and endless gasoline. Of course not, because this was her life, and in her life there would be complete stop traffic right in front of her. It didn't help her when the empty light of electricity flashed. Nico felt her stomach sink. This would be the end of her life, she knew it.

"Ash!" yelled Nico, trying to not shake violently; it wasn't a very easy task though. If the Hybrid were at a standstill, the angels would come out of their cars and they would be dead. They must have been twice as many as the five of them. She didn't want to think about that. Ash looked from the traffic in front of them to the roof of the car. Nico could already tell he was coming up with a plan in those few seconds.

"Selena!" Ash punched the passenger window a second before Selena kicked her own. Selena grabbed the handle above her window for balance and waited for the next command. Nico realized they were going to jump out of the car, her stomach flipped again. She began to slow down due to the traffic; she wasn't into this plan at all.

"Ash! No!" yelled Nico worried for their safety. Ash had clearly ignored her shouting. As they neared a dangerous halt, Ash shouted a 'now' and feet first both angels were out the window, Selena using the handle for an extra push. Their feet kicked off a white truck beside them and they landed with a vibrant



thump on top of the Hybrid. Ash inserted his sword very carefully and very softly to not kill anyone in the car. Through the holes he made, Selena and himself placed their hands and lifted the Hybrid off the ground. "People will see us!" shouted Nico, letting go of the steering wheel and unbuckling herself. Neither were needed anymore.

"Ryan?!" shouted back Ash. His voice didn't give away that he was in pain, simply in action. Nico heard the steady pounding of their wings and felt more at ease. Ryan closed her eyes and moved her hands in circle. Nico watched her from the driver's seat.

"Done," she yelled back, as though she had done something as easy as lifting a pencil.

“Why can’t we drive to Colorado?” asked Carter leaning against the Hybrid as Ash paced back and forth, completely worried. Nico rolled her eyes at Ash. Sometimes the pacing was adorable, other times, like in this moment, it was getting on her nerves. Ryan could notice that much. They were parked in the middle of an empty parking lot, each in their own little zone of relaxing. Ryan was on top of the car. Nico had opened a car door and was seated promptly inside. Selena was leaning on the car, while Carter and Ash were standing a few feet away from it.

“We can’t drive to Colorado, that trip would take two, three days, we need to get there now,” battled Selena, crossing her arms. “Though I don’t need to be there.” She smiled at her own thought.

“Sel,” threatened Ash, raising a finger in her direction, Selena raised her hands in defense. “You have business to handle. How bout the fact that you didn’t die in the explosion of your house? Don’t you want your money? Or other things?” asked Ash, raising an eyebrow. Selena’s eyes widen with realization.

“Oh! We need to get there now,” she agreed, nodding her head quickly. “Like right now,” she pressed.

“My mom is going to be so worried,” mumbled Ryan softly, her head sinking into her hands. Ryan hadn’t thought about her mom this entire time, she had only thought about her own safety. Sure, her safety had been important but still, her mom must have been so worried that she hadn’t seen her daughter in a while. Three weeks she hadn’t seen her mother, three whole weeks. Ryan couldn’t wait another day.

“Flying is out of the question, too many miles,” said Ash, running a hand over his mouth. Nico sighed.

“Plus you’d have to carry me and Ryan all the way,” added Carter, rubbing the back of his neck.

“Yeah, that’s another problem,” responded Ash. Ryan watched them feed off each other and couldn’t help but smile.

“Unless,” thought Carter, his eyes widening slightly in thought, Ash turned to look at him raising an eyebrow.

“Unless what?” he asked, his voice full of curiosity. Ash edged himself closer to Carter. Carter smiled at his own plan.

“Unless the angels aren’t the ones doing the flying.” Carter pointed a finger at

Ash almost as if he expected Ash to pick up where he was leaving off. Ash's eyes narrowed softly seconds before his face changed with shock.

"Of course! Of course! Why didn't I think of that?" he asked himself before slapping Carter's checks happily. Ryan's expression held nothing but confusion. When she looked over to the girls she saw them with the exact same expression.

"Yo! Are ya done with your bro moment? Care to explain?" asked Selena raising an eyebrow, Nico smiled at Selena.

"What if we were on a plane?" said Ash, crossing his arms and smiling. Selena made a face and raised an eyebrow. Ryan thought about Ash's words for a moment then shook her head, a clear fault in the plan.

"None of us have our IDs, we can't do that," said Ryan from the top of the car, her feet dangling over an edge, her belly pressed against the roof.

"You didn't listen correctly, love, he said on not in," smiled Carter walking to stand under Ryan. She placed her hands around his neck. She wasn't very comfortable with this idea but it seemed as though it would be the only one.

"It's too dangerous," Nico piped in. "Being on top of a plane? Are you serious?" Ash nodded slightly, smiling.

"Oh, come on, darling, you've already done a lot of crazy stuff! Might as well do one more." He moved his eyebrows up and down to try and convince her. Nico only huffed out a breath.

"Fine," she said crossing her arms.

"And I know the perfect way of finding out which plane is the one to Colorado." Ryan smirked as she spoke an idea forming in the back of her mind.

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Sneaking into the airport would have been a lot harder if she hadn't been invisible. It wasn't as if she was invisible woman either. This was much more complicated. There was a bubble around her. She had to get past airport security; once past them, she could pop the bubble in the bathroom and find the fastest flight out of New York to Colorado without stops.

Ryan crossed next to the metal detectors making sure she didn't set off any alarms. She held her breathe just in case. She was glad when she was in the terminal. It was a beautiful terminal but Ryan didn't have time to admire it

before she walked into the nearest bathroom. She closed a stall and walked out without the shield. She didn't even bother to look at a mirror; there was no time to lose. She felt different now, with all this power she felt powerful, yet powerless.

Ryan walked out of the restroom in search of a big screen holding all the departures. Upon a lot of walking she finally found one. She ran her fingers down it until she read the words she needed. With her luck, a plane was leaving for Colorado in ten minutes; however it had already boarded most of its passengers. Ryan ran towards the gate. She needed to make that plane. As she neared the gate and got into a big crowd she went invisible, climbing on the walkway to the plane with ease. Where she knew there would be was a door to the grounds. She quickly opened the door and closed it in record time. She climbed to the top of the walkway and as she was about to climb onto the plane the walk began to move backward. The plane was departing.

Ryan jumped with as much force as she could.

There was nothing to hold onto when she landed on top of the plane, it was truly only pure luck that she landed as safely as she did. She crawled all the way to the tail, a trip much longer than she remembered when she would walk it. While she crawled she sent a message to a wide-awake Nico to come and find her, describing the tail and the end of the gate. Ryan had already forgotten the gate number.

The plane began to move towards the runway. Ryan shut her eyes; she was powerful enough to send messages to people who were awake but not powerful enough to do this without the help of her friends. After everything that she had survived, could she die now? By falling off in the middle of the air? Would that really be her ending?

"Ry!" Nico yelled and before Ryan could do anything else she extended the invisibility bubble that was still placed around herself. Ash placed his back against the tail, his wings extended, and made a small face of discomfort but other than that said nothing.

"Use them, I can handle the force of the plane don't worry," yelled Ash as the plane prepared itself for takeoff. Ryan and Carter sat on one side of Ash's wings while Selena and Nico sat on the other. Selena and Nico were holding hands in

plain fright, while Ryan was almost on top of Carter before the plane took off.

"I'm going to kill whoever's idea this was!" yelled Selena from the far corner, Ryan couldn't help but nod, agreeing with the frightened angel.

"It was him!" yelled Ash and Carter simultaneously, both pointing at each other with guilty looks on their faces. Nico and Ryan swallowed down their fear, preparing themselves for takeoff.

"I've never even been in a plane before!" yelled Nico, clutching both Selena's and Ash's hand like the end was near.

"There's a first time for everything!" Ash smiled at her, clearly trying to comfort her.

"You won't say?!" She glared at him.

The plane shot off the runway at immense speed.

Nico held her head, stumbling as though she were drunk. "Can we never fly on a plane again?" she asked before dropping on the familiar grass of Rodway Park. She would have kissed the dirt if she wasn't completely repulsed by it. Ryan fell only a second later beside her.

"Can you believe it's been a month since we came here, recently graduated, not a care in the world?" asked Ryan sighing. Carter dropped beside Ryan. Nico couldn't feel her arms as they moved to be her pillow.

"Can you believe we almost travelled across an entire ocean *just* to save you?" he said softly. Selena stared at the three friends on the floor, popping her hip out. She rolled her eyes.

"I can't believe how lazy you guys are being, jesh," she said crossing her arms. Ash smiled, placing an arm around Selena.

"Gee, Selena, remember the first night that you had to run away from the Warlins?" he asked raising an eyebrow. Selena's eyes widen a length so huge Nico was sure they were the size of Europe, if not bigger.

"No," she huffed angrily escaping from touch. She averted his eyes. He smiled and hugged her from behind; Selena rolled her eyes once more.

"Come on Sel, don't be like that. We have a lot of things to do. First, we have to get your money. Then get you new IDs since they were burned in the fire... hmm I wonder what I'm forgetting?" Nico looked up at Ash. He winked at her. He was clearly faking as though he didn't know.

"Can... I ... go shopping?" asked Selena, her voice cautious. Ash smiled brightly.

"Of course! Let's go show them you didn't die." Ash turned to the rest of the group. "Selena and I have to do this, for her sake and all. We could meet back here tonight? In two hours? After everyone has sorted their things out?" Ryan and Carter nodded, Nico pressed her lips together. Ash placed his arm around Selena again before both their wings expanded. They disappeared into the air.

It wasn't as though anyone would have missed Nico at the orphanage. She had no one to see, no things to sort out. They were probably planning to kick her out when she turned eighteen anyway. Ryan stood up softly.

"I need to go see my mom. What - what did you tell her?" she looked to both Carter and Nico, raising an eyebrow.

"Oh! I told your mom that Carter took you on a surprise vacation to Europe,

spur of the moment, not one clue when you'd be back," piped up Nico smiling. Ryan turned to Carter smiling at him.

"You are so romantic." He laughed at her comment.

"I know." He kissed her softly on the lips.

"Oh wow!" yelled Nico, throwing a hand over her eyes. "I thought you hated PDA," she added, peaking through her fingers to see if they had stopped kissing, all in the name of a good joke. Ryan laughed.

"When I realized that every kiss might be the last, I stopped caring who looked." Ryan shrugged at her words. "I'm off to see my mother." Nico stood too.

"I better go talk to the orphanage. Though, technically but I still want all my clothes," she said, running a hand through her hair. Carter also stood, at a much slower pace.

"Yeah and I need to go make sure my place wasn't broken into, oh the perks of living on my own!" Both girls shoved him. "Ouch, that hurt!" he said rubbing his chest. Ryan and Nico walked towards the town, arms linked, while Carter walked the opposite direction towards his small house located in the forest of Rodway Park.

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Nico expected to be less afraid of the darkness after everything she had been through. In reality, she was only more afraid of it. The recent events proved that someone could be out there to hurt her. Hiding, waiting. In any case, she hated the darkness, it gave her a disadvantage. She would rather fight in the light than in the dark any day. She walked rather quickly to where she could make out the figures of Ash and Selena. Until Nico got really close she couldn't see what they were doing.

She watched as Ash put his arm around Selena and rubbed her arms softly. Ryan and Carter hadn't arrived yet and though Nico felt like an intruder for watching on the scene, she couldn't peer her eyes away nor step any closer. Nico, for the first time, didn't feel jealous of their relationship but rather happy that Ash was there to comfort Selena. It appeared from where Nico stood as though, Selena was crying silently. The redness in Selena's eyes was the dead giveaway.

"I'll never be an ordinary girl." Ash looked down as Selena swallowed what seemed like a lump in her throat to be able to continue to speak. "Everyone expects something from me, either to be perfect or to be out there; sexually, mentally. I can't do all those things, Ash... I'm just me. Why can't I be just me?" Selena tried and miserably failed to blink the few tears away. Ash rubbed her arm again trying to reassure her or that's what it looked like from where Nico stood.

"You're perfect to me Selly, that's all that matters," he spoke kissing the top of her head. Nico smiled. As much as she would have loved to continue to look on she turned around and stepped loudly on a branch so they knew she was coming. Classic movie moment, she thought, as she arrived at the scene. When she did, Ash was alone.

"Hey!" Nico chirped brightly, almost bouncing into the scene.

"Hey." Ash kissed her lightly on the lips, not standing from where he sat.

"Where's Selena?" asked Nico tilting her head.

"She's dropping off her clothes in our hotel room." Ash smiled, sliding a hand around Nico's waist. He pulled her down with ease. "You know, we can finally spend some alone time," he said grinning at her. Nico smiled too, liking those words.

"I'd like that," she whispered in return.

"I knew you would." He kissed her once more, cupping her face with his hand.

"And you ew at my kisses? Jesh!" said Ryan walking into the scene hand in hand with Carter. They sat on the floor. "What was that, two in thirty seconds?"

"Shut up." Nico smiled at her best friend. Ryan stuck her tongue out in a form of response. When Selena came back, her eyes back to their normal color. They shinned their 'I'm so much better than you' look right at Nico, though she knew Selena's eyes always had that look. Ash clapped his hands together.

"Here's the thing I want to talk about right now, right here, with the four of you." He pressed his lips together, before running his hand over his mouth. "As Gabitha told you and you told me there are more children needed for peace. I believe we should find them and bring them together. If we don't, Gabitha herself said that peace would not be achieved." Ash nodded at his own words. Nico sighed.



"It's gonna be a needle in a hay stack," said Selena softly, looking at the grass below her feet.

"Pretty much." Ash nodded. Ryan looked at Carter, and Carter looked at her in return.

"I'm in." Ryan's voice was firm as she turned to look at Ash. "I don't want the shifter, the vampire or the merchild kidnapped like Selena and I were. If it's to protect them and keep them safe, I'm in."

"Me too." Nico nodded her head. "I don't want them kidnapped either," she spoke, agreeing with Ryan.

"I'm in too," said Carter. The group turned to Selena.

"Well if you're all gonna turn against me, I might as well," she said rolling her eyes. "I'm in too." She crossed her arms, shaking her head before she smiled.

"Awesome, pack your bags gang, we leave in a week tops." Ash smiled. Nico entwined her fingers in Ash's before looking into his eyes. Something new shined in them. Something that made Nico's stomach turn uncontrollably, in a good way.

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Ryan hummed quietly as she brushed her teeth for the first time since leaving the boat, a rhythm picking up. She started to move her hips, swaying to the rhythm that she had created. "Mmm! Brushy brush," she said with the toothbrush in her mouth. She finally finished brushing and spit out everything that was in her mouth, feeling clean. She rinsed out her mouth then looked up at the mirror. The image reflecting back at her was not her own.

"Gabitha?"

The image jumped at her.