

Why I Sing:

Nails digging into the rough scratchy bark, I climb higher and higher until I finally reach the very tip of the tree. My weight is virtually nothing, so I'm not worried about it breaking or tipping, and I stand up-balancing on my left foot.

Wind whips around me, strands of my bright blue hair flickering against my cheeks and neck. I allow my eyes to close, taking in a deep breath, and cup my hands.

Holding my cupped hands high above my head, I begin to hum. The sound vibrates at the base of my throat, the core of my power, and grows louder. My lips part, forming unknown velvet words, and I can feel the cool sizzling energy wash through my veins. It's like being injected with liquid; I can feel it spread down from the tips of my fingers, through my throat, and into the rest of my body.

"Ana."

The energy vanishes, along with the melody, like someone blowing out a flickering candle.

I lower my hands. My fingers tremble with silent rage. Why couldn't they wait until I was done?

"Ana." My name is repeated, louder.

I peer down. My mother glares up at me, ruby red eyes narrowed. Her long brown hair is pulled back into a low bun decorated with jewels and a crown. Wisps of curls dangle around her hairline and she angrily pushes one back behind one of her long narrow ears. Her long flowing dress circles around her, and from an aerial view it looks like she's standing in a large royal blue dot.

"Come down here." She folds her arms across her chest, long sleeves brushing.

My own ruby eyes narrow. "Why?"

Even from all the way up here, I can see the unspoken anger building up within her. But I'm angry too. She interrupted my meditation, the one thing I am required to do as a fairy in training and actually enjoy.

My mother's foot begins to tap. Even beneath all the dress, I can hear it crunching against the dead leaves that litter the forest floor. Sighing slightly, I take one long last look around. The castle sits fairly close to my left, large stone towers looming over the small villages and towns surrounding it like an unforgettable shadow. Small ant people bustle around through the streets of Lithium. Vendors' shouts echo off the dark billowing gray sky-despite the unnatural color.

Am I seriously the only one who's noticed the change?

Lithium's sky is no longer crystalline blue. The forests are dying. It's rare now, to see a tree with leaves still attached to its branches and an even more rare sight to see a green leaf. The water that rushes through the rivers has started to die out. Animals have become extinct.

“Ana.” My mother’s sharp, clipped voice shrills through the air. “Get down here.”

My head tilts back.

“Please,” I whisper softly, “set me free.”

I jump down. Unlike my mother, I’m smart enough to know not to wear a big poofy dress in the middle of the forest. My outfit is simple—short black training shorts and a matching black turtleneck.

The dead leaves crunch and crack loudly as I land, sharp pain flaring up from the balls of my feet. I ignore it, used to the pain, and take several slow steps forward towards my mother. Hands slipping into the large leather brown gloves that dangle from my belt loops, I wrench them free and stop in front of the woman. My knuckles crack and pop as my hands clench and unclench into tight fists.

My mother allows her red eyes to skewer me for a few moments. “What do you think you’re doing out here?” She growls. “There are things to be done. The whole kingdom is coming to the ball tonight and it is your duty as Princess to help prepare for it.”

“You don’t need my help.” I say coldly. “I will only get in your way.”

My mother is a perfectionist, to the extreme. Once she has her mind set on something there’s no turning back. Everything has to be done a certain way, otherwise it’s simply wrong. And my mother doesn’t like wasting time during the infamous Countdown Hours.

“That doesn’t matter.” My mother barks and snaps her fingers as she twirls around, the telltale sign that she wants me to follow and I don’t exactly have a choice in the matter. “Your preparations are in other areas. Come.”

“Oh,” I fall into step behind her, glaring at the crunchy leaves. “That’s right. You’re selling me off tonight.”

My head jerks to the side, pain stinging through the skin of my now bright red cheek. The cracking sound echoes through the forest, cutting through the air like a gunshot. Painful tears swell up around the rims of my eyes, threatening to bubble over, but I blink them back—hands curled into tight knuckle shattering fists at my sides. Emotionless ruby eyes meet my mother’s.

“I am not selling you.” My mother hisses through her bared white teeth. “All of them have asked for your hand in marriage. It is up to your soul to decide which one you will be with.”

I don’t answer. If I do, I cannot guarantee it will be nice or appropriate.

Taking my silence as defeat, my mother turns back around and continues forward towards the castle. I follow silently, eyes zeroed in on the trees around me. Soon the number of trees begins to dwindle and I find myself stepping onto the familiar carved path that my parents installed when I was

younger, thinking if they threatened me enough I wouldn't stray from it. Magic wards are located on the edges of the solid stone path, protecting all those beneath its invisible field of energy.

Soon we are beneath the large Jade Gate—the main entrance into the castle. Personally, I prefer the Sapphire Gate because the large pillars are colored a pretty blue. Here the pillars are jade green and rimmed with gold.

We are rushed at from all sides. Servants ask my mother and me if we need anything, respectfully keeping their gazes downcast and chins almost touching their chest. My mother waves most of them off, only keeping Pricilla, her stylist, and Candice, her personal servant. I ignore the sly glances they cast back my way and keep my eyes glued to the bumpy brick pathway that we walk on. Pretty red flowers line the edges of the walk, but it takes a fool not to notice the dark brown curling at the tips of the soft petals.

“Alright then, your majesty. She will be ready by then.” Candice curtseys.

I glance up as she approaches, eyes casting her a wary look. Candice is nice, for the most part, but not one of my favorites.

“I am to escort you to the fitting room, m'lady.” She says, still standing a few feet away, and curtseys again.

“Why?” I ask dully, afraid of the answer.

Candice avoids my gaze. “To make sure your ball gown fits correctly, m'lady.”

A small sigh brushes past my lips. Candice turns towards the West Wing of the castle, or the Housing Wing, and then stops, waiting impatiently for me to walk past her. Unless my mother or father is before me, none of the servants are permitted to walk in front of me. I continue forward, once again ignoring her presence. I don't need her to get to the fitting room.

The fitting room is a large room set aside for my mother. It's where all the royal seamstresses and tailors work, making clothes for my mother or making dresses for me when I run out of new ones. It's my mother's favorite room of the castle, mainly because it's within those walls that she is allowed to dress me up and make me spin like a Barbie Doll.

It's my least favorite room of the castle.

Della, the head seamstress and my personal designer, glances up as the door swings open and flashes me a knowing, apologetic smile.

I ignore her as well.

Stepping up onto the small platform, I feel as if I am peeling back a layer of skin so that the world can peer at my insides and laugh. Immediately, hands dart out and grab at my clothing, wrenching it off my body. I involuntarily shudder at the bitter cold breeze and close my eyes.

Ignore them, I tell myself.

Soft silky cloth brushes against my skin. Something winds around my torso and then squeezes tight, forcing all the air in my lungs to gush out in an audible wheeze. More cloth clings to my shoulders and I finally allow my eyes to flutter open.

The dress is pure white and blood red. The white bodice clings to my skin tightly and then flares out for the skirt at my hips. It's strapless, but there are sleeves. They are long billowing things; the edges decorated with blood red lace, and connect to the dress by a blood red collar. One of the servants twists my blue hair back into a messy bun, pinning it into place with a small matching blue clip. Another lowers a small gold crown on top of my head, small jewel encrusted thin chains dangling around my forehead.

"There." Della shoos the hands away, soft brown eyes examining her work.

I send her a tortured look.

She laughs lightly. "Luckily, you have one of those beautiful faces that don't need make up. Just wait for your mother's approval and then we'll be all done, alright?"

"I don't want to go." I say softly.

"I know, sweetheart." Della's lips tug down into a small frown, her old wrinkled hand brushing against my cheekbone. "You're probably terrified."

That's part of it.

I cast my eyes downwards. Della shakes her head and takes a few respectful steps back, just in time for the door to slam open and my mother to rush in. Her long brown hair spills out around her like a curtain, falling straight to her waist. Angrily, she pushes one of the straightened locks back behind her ear and her ruby eyes find me.

I can feel her gaze travel down, taking in my dress, and the thick tension in the air.

Della holds her breath.

My mother's sharp ruby red eyes flicker to Pricilla and she barks, "Where's my dress? I need my crown!"

Della lets out that breath and lightly touches my forearm, pulling me off the stand so my mother can step on. We move back until we brush up against the walls of the large bustling room and she turns to give me an amused look.

"Your mother is incredibly vain." She whispers.

My lips flicker into a ghost of a smile and I nod in agreement.

"I'm not sure which is worse," I whisper back, "being related or having to work for her."

Della presses her lips into a tight line to keep her loud laughter stifled. I don't bother, snorting loudly at my own joke, and gain the glowering attention of my mother. Smiling crookedly, I tilt my hand in a tiny wave and turn towards the door.

"Good luck." I whisper back to Della. "I'll see you later."

"Good bye, Princess." Della swoops down into the low bow of the gods, the one a filthy peasant would use when in the presence of a very sacred item.

I pause for a few moments, deeply touched.

Then dip into a small friendship bow, lips twisting back into a warm smile. The door softly clicks shut behind me, my skirts swaying and swishing with each step as I make my way through the halls. Glancing out one of the long open windows, I can see the dull yellow sun slowly setting behind the large rolling hills.

I have exactly one hour of freedom left.

And how do I plan to do that?

Sleep.

The loud bone rattling pounding against the door abruptly wakes me from my sleep and I instantly know that some sort of man eating beast is at the door. Unfortunately, I can safely assume that it is my mother, which means I'm forced to go unlock it for her and face her wrath.

Snapping my fingers, the door unlocks with a small click.

I turn away from the door and start towards the large balcony, long pale fingers winding around the long gold handle.

"There you are!" My mother snarls, barging into the room fiercely. "I've been looking all over for you!"

Correction: The maids have been looking all over for me. And they know not to disturb me when the door is locked.

I ignore her and step out into the shimmering moonlight. One thing that I'm completely and utterly thankful for is that the moon is still completely intact. It's still a large white ball of mystery.

Gently flickering torches illuminate the outside of the castle. I'm still debating about the location of my room. I'm not sure if it's a good spot or bad. My room is located directly over the large entrance way, all the noise and commotion downstairs is supposed to wake me up in the mornings, and if I peer directly down I can see the arriving guests. I suppose it's good, especially during times like this.

No one really thinks to look up when a blob of something wet lands on your shoulder.

A sly grin curls my lips back.

My mother appears behind me, foot angrily tapping against the cool marble flooring. I simply look over the railing, trying to pick out my future husband's carriage from the others.

The tapping increases speed.

I glance back.

"Well?" She finally huffs. "Aren't you going to say anything?"

Shrugging, I merely turn my attention back to down below. "Anything I say can, and will be used against me. It's not worth the trouble."

Incredulously, the tapping increases speed once more. I glance back, ruby eyes narrowed. My mother glares at me, large pale bags hanging beneath her eyes. She looks strange. Her skin has a grayish hue to it, despite the layers of powder and makeup, and I can clearly see several gray streaks running through her brown hair.

I frown slightly. My mother doesn't do gray. If there's one thing she takes pride in, it's her chestnut colored hair.

"It's almost time." She is saying, "I came up here to make sure you knew and you weren't going to run off again."

"I didn't run off earlier." I turn away from her. "I was meditating."

"That doesn't matter." My mother waves her hand, bright red nails clicking together.

I flash her a strange look. What's wrong with her? "Mother, you have to meditate. Otherwise the magic doesn't have a clear channel through your body and you begin the aging process again."

"You age anyways." My mother snaps, eyes narrowing at the word.

With a swish of her gold skirts, my mother disappears back into my room. I roll my eyes and lean against the railing, allowing one arm to dangle slightly. The sleeve is long, blood red hem running to the tops of my fingernails, but I like it.

"You have five minutes." My mother calls, "Before they announce you."

Which means I only have one more minute to be in this room. It takes a good three to get to the gate in which I am to enter and my mother likes promptness. The door to my room clicks shut behind her and I let out a long, low sigh. Something swells up within my gut, a strong sense of forlorn sadness and dread churning and twisting my stomach into tight knots.

I am unable to escape the idea that this is the last time I will see this place.

Fingertips trailing along the large dark wood bed board, I give my room one long, last look. The large bed sits with its head pushed up against the left wall, if you come in from the main door, and the large alcove of a closet and separate bathroom are directly across. A small miniature castle and several dolls sit in the far left corner, playthings too dear to me to let go, and a large rocking chair sits next to the alcove. The theme to the room is frilly pink, thanks to my mother. All the furniture is dark washed wood, smooth to the touch and virtually unbreakable.

I let out another soft sigh. "Bye room. You've served me well, these eighteen years."

The door clicks shut behind me. The castle is strangely silent, waiting for the announcements to be made, and I hurriedly rush through the gold painted halls towards my gate. It's not a gate really, just a large thick double door that opens out into the Grand Ballroom. I will be entering into view from the left staircase, which meets the right staircase and leads down into the room. Guests enter from the even larger double doors that stand at the platform at which the two staircases meet.

Della rushes forward, pressing a cool damp cloth to my forehead. "Goodness girl, I hope you weren't just running! Your mother will have a cow."

"No," I snort sarcastically, "She'll have the whole farm."

She stifles a giggle and pulls the cloth away. "Alright. You're ready. Be good, honey, and remember, you get to choose who you want."

I nod, stifling a sigh, and the double doors open.

Two loud thumps of a royal staff and the hushed whispers fall silent. The announcer, Todd, glances over and meets my gaze-flashing me an apologetic smile. All of the royal staff knows just how much I want to be here. Todd opens his mouth, loud voice booming through the silent room.

"Announcing her royal highness, Anastasia Wolfe Princess of Lithium."

I step out, carefully keeping my eyes glued to the wall in front of me. If I could, I'd probably be staring intently at the floor-but rule number one in my mother's 'How to be a Princess' book is keep your gaze up, chin up, and you'll dazzle. In other words, if I don't keep my chin up then my mother will explode.

Automatically, the room bustles with hushed whispers. I don't bother straining my ears to catch them. I could care less about their comments on my dress, hair, or face even.

My mother and father sit on their thrones. My mother's back is ramrod straight, little beads of sweat forming around the top of her brow, but her lips are pulled back into a strained happy smile. I can tell that she's not well, but I'm not sure why she hasn't retired for the night like she normally would. My father's smile is real however, brown eyes shining.

I am the splitting image of both of them, if you mixed them together in a blender.

I have my father's curly blue hair and my mother's ruby red eyes. My father's warm, bubbly personality has blended with my mother's cold, proper one to make me the dry, sarcastic demon that I am. My mother is a fairy like me, though I'm proud to say that I don't have her unnaturally long thin elf ears, and my father's blood has been infused with that of an Angel.

So in summary, I'm half Angel, half fairy. Either way, I have wings and can fly.

My eyes drift. I don't look too close at the guests. I don't want to see who's come to witness my mother selling me away to my 'mate'. I'm not even sure I want to look for the three candidates yet; my nerves are already shot for some odd reason. The heel of my shoe clicks lightly as I step down from the last step. I keep going forward, path aimed towards the smaller throne that sits in between my parents. On my face is my most prized poker face. I refuse to smile, to frown even.

Father's warm eyes meet mine, a small throaty laugh bubbling up.

My poker face begins to crack, lips pressing together into a tight line to keep from breaking into a smile, and I start up the small marble staircase.

My mother stands, barely swaying on her high heeled feet, and claps her hands together, instantly gaining everyone's attention.

I sit in my throne, trying hard not to slump back against the plush velvety cushion.

"Rough day?" Dad whispers.

"Maybe if you actually spent a day with her, you'd understand." I hiss back, my words not nearly as venomous as they are when directed towards the brunette in front of me.

"Welcome!" My mother's overly energetic voice washes over the crowd, stained with strain and a small shakiness. "As you all are well aware of, my daughter, Princess Anastasia, has finally reached the rightful age of eighteen and thus is able to marry. The ball is being held, not only to celebrate her coming of age, but to help her decide on her future husband and your future king. Please welcome our three Princes."

She gestures to three men who stand slightly off to the side and they move forward.

"Prince Eli of Dukeworth." My mother gingerly squeezes the first male's shoulder as she introduces him, not only to the crowd but to me. He has rustic red hair that falls around his face in small wisps and large emerald green orbs, a strange playfulness swimming within their depths. Eli has a cute smile, but other than that nothing really stands out.

"Prince Kale of Valenden." The second male has long straight ebony black locks, pulled back into a low ponytail, and piercing blue eyes. He casts me a long look, face expressionless, and I can feel something in my chest tugging towards him.

“And last, but not least, Prince Duke of Gabriel.” Gabriel, the city of Angels. Yeah, Duke fits the stereotype. He has short curly blonde hair and honey gold eyes, large muscles rolling beneath tight sun kissed skin. Automatically, I inwardly recoil against the bright light that seems to radiate off him in large heaping waves.

He turns back and sends me a sweet smile. I don’t react. Mother always told me that if I didn’t have anything nice to say, I mustn’t show it.

My mother turns back to me and flashes me an irritated look, beckoning me forward. I send my father a look a wounded animal might give to the butcher, a silent plea to be put out of its misery, and slowly climb to my feet. Stepping forward, my eyes once again find my mother’s pale form and I can see the small ring of murky clear that encircles her pupils-making the red around it a darker bloody color. I frown, trying to decipher the meaning, and she turns her eyes away from me.

“Say hello dear.” She all but breathes as I draw near, eyes glued appreciatively to the blonde.

“Hello dear.” I say, allowing sarcasm to drip heavily within my words. I bat my eyelashes dramatically and twist my ankle.

I can almost hear my mother’s teeth grinding together.

Something tugs lightly at my chest, neck automatically turning and eyes flickering up. Amused blue eyes lock with my ruby ones, and I feel my heart begin to flutter wildly in my chest.

“Hello Princess.” A childish voice pierces through the moment. I can practically see it shatter into a million pieces and clatter noisily to the marble floor. My hand lifts, clammy fingers winding around mine as Eli dips and presses his wet lips to the skin on the back of my hand.

I allow my lips to pull back, into what I can only hope is a smile, and nod.

Blue eyes takes my hand next, the corner of his lips pulling back into a ghost of a smile, and dips down into a low bow-pressing his lips to my hand as well. My heart beats wildly, like a trapped bird trying to fly, and I sharply bite down into my tongue to keep from saying anything. His lips are rough, but soft and inviting.

I hastily pull my hand back, teeth drawing blood.

Blue eyes presses his lips together to suppress a smile and I know that he feels whatever I feel too.

Blondie takes my hand next and allows the pad of his roughly calloused thumb to rub into the skin there. He presses his buttery soft lips to my hand and then draws back. His name is Duke, my minds voice whispers to me, and the one you really like is Kale.

Eli snags me first, much to my disappointment, and drags me over to the large buffet style table that seems to be overflowing with food. He grabs a plate and starts to pile grub on; turning back to me only to make sure I don't want any. I grab a cup and ladle myself some water, standing a couple of feet back as Eli digs in and sipping my drink-one eyebrow lifted. My eyes drift through the crowd again, immediately locking with Kale's piercing blue hues.

His lips twist into a small smirk, gaze breaking away from mine long enough to look meaningfully towards Eli and then dart back up, teasingly.

I scowl at him and tear my gaze away from him to stare down into my cup, face flushing furiously.

Once I'm sure my face is no longer the color of a radish, I look up and search for Duke. I find him standing next to my parents, no doubt trying to win their favor. My mother stares at him adoringly and my father shoots me a tortured look.

I snicker and mouth one word, "Payback."

"Well, are you ready to dance now?" Eli pops up in front of me, green eyes overpowering my ruby ones. I stagger back, eyes wide, and my back hits something hard.

"I do believe it's my turn now, Eli." A smooth husky voice floats through the air. My knees go weak.

I manage to turn, eyes wide, and stare up at Kale questioningly. "When did you come over here? You're like a ninja!"

His lip curls back into half a smile.

Eli rolls his eyes and waves us away, green eyes smiling. "I know when I've been beaten, Kale. Unlike, Duke over there." The redhead flashes a dirty look towards the blonde that's mooching my parents. "I'll retrieve him later."

Kale lets out a breathy laugh. "I think several of the ladies have been checking you out." He says, nodding towards a group of frilly dressed girls in pastel colors.

Eli glances over, emerald eyes washing over them appreciatively, and then shoots me a sly grin. "Sorry toots, but I can't keep the ladies waiting."

I nod, dumbfounded, and tense when I feel something press against my lower back.

"Come on." Kale says, eyes amused. "Let's dance."

So we twirl, err he twirls. When I warned him of my horrible dancing habits, he simply ordered me to take my shoes off. Now I stand, on top of his shoes, and pressed close to his body. His strong arms

wind around my waist, my small pale ones curling around his neck, and I can't help but grin widely as we dance. I'm not sure I've had this much fun in a while.

He doesn't laugh, or smile really. But I can tell he's entertained by his eyes.

Underneath, I feel like he's like me in that he hides his true emotions from the world with a carefully crafted poker face. His eyes, however, give him away like my poker face has the tendency of breaking when I'm around my father or Della.

I don't think we're dancing to the beat of the music. We're moving at a much slower pace than the rest of the elegant couples that twist and twirl around us, but I don't mind. We're moving to our own song, our own melodic lull that pulls me forward until I find my cheek resting on his shoulder and his arms tightening around my small body.

I hardly know him, and yet I feel as if I've known him all my life.

At first, I can't believe I didn't recognize the signs. It was obvious, obviously, if Eli noticed it. That must have been why he decided to pig out of me instead of dance or talk really, because he knew the butterfly twisting cord had already slowly been piecing together-drawing Kale and I closer. I sigh softly, closing my eyes in pure bliss. I would've never guessed I would've actually found my mate at this stupid ball.

It is then, while my eyes are closed and we dance along to our slow song, that the change begins and the screams shatter that feeling of bliss.

Loud ear piercing screams ring through the air, echoing off the marble walls until the volume reaches a level that could wake the dead. I wrench away from Kale, eyes darting around to find the source of the commotion.

My mother's claws rake across the first row of guests that crowd around the thrones, sending a spray of bright red blood up into the air. A drop catches her cheek, sliding back into a small false gash, and her clear eyes lock with mine.

A deafening snarl rips past her teeth, all of which have sharpened into razor sharp fangs.

"Kale!" The words tear past my lips, sounding broken. "Get out of here. Get everyone out of here."

My father's dull, lifeless eyes stare blankly my way. My hands tremble, breaths coming in broken hitches, and I squeeze my eyes tightly-fighting back against the tears.

The guests in front drop to the ground, guts spilling through the bloody puckered skin that stretches across their stomach and smushing against the marble as the corpses fall onto them. The

horrid stench of urine, blood, and innards wafts through the air, making my lips curl back into a disgusted snarl.

Kale unsheathes a long katana and rushes forward.

“THAT’S NOT WHAT I ASKED YOU TO DO!” I roar after him, lifting my skirts over the dead as my mother tears through the crowd-killing as many as she can along the way.

“Get back.” Kale doesn’t look back, his voice icy cold. “This is no place for a woman.”

My teeth grind together. With a snap of my fingers, my dress lies in tatters around my ankles-my usual training outfit replacing it-and Kale’s body is paralyzed. I step forward and turn, ruby eyes blazing.

“Don’t you dare get all sexist with me.” I snap up at him. “I can kick your ass any day.”

His eyes narrow, piercing blue frosting over.

“Now, stay here and do as I asked, please.” My voice breaks again. “I have to go avenge my father.”

“Ana!”

I run. Ignoring his calls and the loud screams, I close my eyes and allow my senses to magnify. My hearing, my favorite sense, works the best. I can hear the sound of her claws scraping against the walls, the frothy spit snarling out of her mouth, and I know she’s heading towards the Sacred Room. I’ve never been allowed in there before, so this will be the first time I get to see why they put up ten wards and it’s always surrounded by guards.

My bare feet slap against the cold stone floor, announcing my arrival as I turn into the large hallway. I can’t help but gasp at the mess. Guards lay scattered around, heads decapitated or hearts spilling out through broken ribs, and the wards are no longer invisible. Jagged pieces of swirling black matter litter the ground. It’s going to be hell to step over.

I dance. Jumping to one side of the room to avoid the mess, I pivot on the ball of my foot and jump to the other side. As I reach the broken door, I bend down and scoop up a fairly large piece. It’s like shattered glass in my hands, cutting everything.

Pushing through the door, I find my mother instantly.

She stands directly in the center, arms outstretched towards large black marble pillars surrounding her. A strange blood red substance floats along the tops of the pillars, winding in and out around them.

“What are you doing?!” I say, voice hard and loud against the soft buzzing of the red stuff.

My mother lowers her arms, letting out a nasally hyena laugh. She turns towards me and I bite back the startled gasp. Her eyes are no longer red. They are pure white, laced with a clear cloudy

substance. Her mouth is stretching and straining, as if the skin isn't quite sure how to settle, and if watched long enough looks almost like she's growing a snout. Long trails of frothy white spit trail down her chin and stain her dress, along with the dying blood of those she's killed. Her nails have lengthened into long, terrifying claws.

I jump back, barely dodging her long swipe at my face, and leap into the air. I'll need more than this piece of matter in my hands.

'Sing.'

I blink. Everything seems to rush by me in fast forward, but my decent is slow, like pushing through mud that's up to your neck. My feet slap against the cold marble and I lift off again.

"Jumping like a frog won't help." My mother hisses, her voice throaty and guttural.

"You're right." I say, gathering energy in my hands, "But it is giving me time to think."

I clap them together. A large tidal wave of swirling black energy rears back, climbing higher and higher until it is brushing the ceiling of the room and disturbing the red substance. My mother lets out a loud snarl, ruby hands rising to take control of the black, and I will it forward.

While the wave distracts her, my hands cup in front of my chest and my head tilts back toward the ceiling. My lips part. My song bursts through the air, an artificial wind wildly whipping my blue hair out of its restraints and lifting it high around me. I can feel it, the cold shadowy energy rush through my veins, and the wave smacks down against my mother's pathetic shield. The wave breaks and rears back again, determined to take out the shield.

I think of my father.

Pain swells up inside me, ballooning up and clogging my throat. Muscles constricting tightly, my mere hum twists into something dark and depressing. Tears brim up around the corners of my eyes and I don't bother to push them back. I don't have the time or energy to.

My mother lets out a demonic roar, one that rips through the black wave and causes the walls to crumble.

My song grows louder, lips forming strange words.

The shield of red dissipates and she turns to face me, lips curled back into something fierce. I can no longer escape the fact that that demon is not my mother. She leaps up into the air, claws raking through the blistering winds towards me.

Music isn't a part of my magic. I learned that at a young age, despite my unique ability to sing songs that Lithium hasn't heard in centuries. I use it to focus my magic. It relaxes me.

Somewhere at the base of my spinal cord, I can feel a small tug. I lift my palm, aiming at her face, and sharp cell-splitting pain sears through it. She goes to reach past my hand but I blast her back

and her head cracks against the hard flooring. I shake my wounded hand, sending a spray of blood up, and blast her again. The thin vortex of cloudy black slams against her midsection and the marble cracks around her silhouette, making me grimace.

I lift my hands above me, palms facing the heavens, and sing louder. Small black wisps of energy slowly collect, drawing from everything around me, and spin into a small sphere in my hands.

Down below, the demon climbs out of the large hole and shakes herself off. I simply stare at her and lower my hands.

The blast rings through the room and sends me flying. It explodes with a blindly bright white, turning the back of my closed eyelids pure white despite the shields of my arms, and my back cracks against the marble wall. At first, I think it's finished, but then I realize that the light is still blinding me and I'm still being roughly shoved against the now crumbling wall.

A loud scream pierces my ears.

Another explosion rings through the room. I drop to the floor and scramble around to get up, fearing that she's still alive. At first, I can't see anything and I lift my arms to shield my face just in case.

Sharp pain flares up, slashing through my arms. I scream and leap back, blood splattering against my face. She lets out a bark of a laugh, hunched over. Half her face is melted off, dripping to the marble below in festering bubbles, but half of her lips are still intact and twisted into a harsh, grim smile. Her hair is gone, only the gold crown still there. Peering closer, I can see that the metal has melted into her skin.

"It's going to take a lot more than that to kill me." She says, words whistling past the large hole in her cheek.

My eyes widen. I bring my arms up once more to shield my face as she lunges forward again.

The wet sound of tearing flesh and an all too familiar grunt fills my ears.

"NO!" I scream, jumping to my feet and rushing forward. Kale staggers back, his sword buried up to the hilt in the demon's stomach, and I catch him before he cracks his head open on the floor. His chest shudders, visible heart thudding and pumping rapidly. The muscle twitches and convulses; a sickening sight. I tear my eyes away from the wound to meet his, shaky tears blurring my vision.

The demon flounders around behind me, clawing at the sword that pierces through her heart like a stake.

"Hey," I say shakily, palm cupping his cheek. His lips twitch back into a smile, his own hand lifting. I grab it and press it to my cheek, tears dripping freely. "I don't know what to do." I admit, brokenly, "How do I fix you?"

He lets out a raspy laugh, eyes closing. "It's...alright."

My throat constricts tightly, choking me. My breath hitches in my chest, coming out as a broken sob, and his thumb gently strokes the skin of my cheek-trying to comfort me. I shake my head, leaning back away from him, and gather what little energy I have left into the palms of my hands. I'm no medical fairy, but if I could just stop the bleeding until-

"No." He says softly, grabbing my hands and wrenching them away from his body. "D...Don't waste it."

"I'm not wasting it." I snap, voice cracking. "I'm trying to help you."

"I know." He breathes, shuddering slightly.

I never thought it was possible, to fall in love with someone in less than two hours.

His eyes reopen, instantly locking with mine. His cerulean hues are almost laughing, smiling, shining. He pulls my hands towards him, grinning childishly as he hoarsely whispers a small, "Come here."

I do as he says.

Our lips brush. Something electric sizzles at the base of my spine, shooting up to engulf my entire body in a wave of warmth, and my eyes flutter shut at the rush of pure bliss.

Then his chest begins to convulse violently. I wrench back and let out a broken sob, shaking my head wildly. Kale grunts, eyes closed with pain, and his hands tightly wind around mine. I try to stop it, pressing my hands over the wound with energy, but the convulsions only magnify. It escalates, his heart twitching violently beneath my hands, and then his back arches.

With one long, last shuddering breath, Kale slumps against the marble flooring.

A long, tortured wail fills the air, breaking my already shattered heart.

It takes me a moment to realize that I'm the one making the heart wrenching sound.

"Oh," A soft voice whispers from behind me, "Ana."

I turn, gasping loudly, and cower back. My mother lifts her hands into an I-mean-no-harm gesture and takes a small hesitant step forward.

"Go away." The words are thick and watery, despite the painful hatred that swells up deep inside.

She drops to her knees, gold skirts clouding around her. Tears stream heavily down her cheeks, leaving a thin clear trail behind as they drip down-making small circular wet marks in the fabric of her dress. A bloody hand raises, claws retracting and then growing back into long blood stained mini-knives. My eyes narrow and move to her eyes. Her pupils are laced with clear magic, and grow until they

consume the whites of her eyes and then quickly retract. No longer is her face melted, and her hair is back.

My breath catches in my throat. She's fighting it.

"My girl," My mother sobs, "Oh my god. What have I done?"

"Go away!" I shriek, protectively shielding Kale with my body. My mother flinches, falling back. Her hands catch her, heels painfully digging into the cracked marble floor.

Her ruby eyes close, body trembling. "What have I done?"

I snarl at her, trying to gather enough energy to kill her.

Tears splash down even harder, staining her dress. Her breath hitches, chest heaving, and she shakes her head. "I didn't mean for this to happen! This wasn't what we agreed to!" She screams.

"What did you do?!" I hiss at her.

"I..." Her voice cracks up a few octaves, "I signed a deal with a demon. I wanted to be young...forever. But he double crossed me...changed me...I turned into...oh god. I killed so many."

My blood runs cold.

Unspoken rage blisters through my veins, burning through my blood completely. Somehow, Kale's sword appears in my hand and I lunge forward.

It swings up in a high arc, singing through the air, and slices down.

My muscles strain against the resisting muscle and sinew, but the sword slices through her torso completely. Her eyes widen and I watch as the life slowly drains from them, like someone pulling the plug in slow motion.

I fall to my knees, the painful impact jarring up my thighs and pushing the blistering rage out of my system.

The sword clatters against the floor.

Ears ringing painfully, I hug my knees to my chest and burry my face into my bony kneecaps. A broken sob rips at my throat, cracking through the silent air like a whip. The silence settles over the room, suffocating me. I clamp my hands over my ears and open my mouth, allowing the heartbreaking words that tug on at the base of my throat to fly free.

The song fills the room, a twisted depressing song that nips at my core.

Strong arms wind around me, pulling me into something hard. The song breaks off, surprise jolting through my body, and I struggle to twist around and see my attacker.

“Don’t stop.” He whispers softly. “Not yet.”

My eyes widen. The song starts up again, this time merely a strangled hum, and then begins to escalate until the liquid filled words dance along the walls in melodious harmony. Something nips at the core of my soul, pulling it out along with the words.

Kale takes my hands in his. My eyes widen as he lifts them up to his lips, blinking at the translucent look to them. He steps back, pulling me with him, and my song grows softer.

I go to turn, but his hands cup my face.

“Don’t look back.” He says softly, piercing blue eyes sad.

Taking in a deep breath, I nod. Staring into his eyes, I listen as my voice starts to break and flicker out until finally, it stops all together.

Music erupts around us, twisting and churning through the air like a tangible substance. Kale pulls me into him and I step up onto his shoes, just like I had earlier. Winding my arms around his translucent neck, I send him a shaky smile-happily noting that his face is starting to take on a more permanent form.

“Sing for me, Ana.” He says softly, pressing his lips to the skin of my forehead.

I melt. My eyes flutter shut, warm bliss flowing through my body, and my lips open-mouthing the words I’ve sang all my life. Only this time, I can understand them-the strangely sweet words no longer sound foreign to my ears.

*“Dear my love, haven't you wanted to be with me
And dear my love, haven't you longed to be free
I can't keep pretending that I don't even know you
And at sweet night, you are my own
Take my hand,”*

The walls melt around us, like a rain drop trailing down the folded petal of an exotic flower. The cracked marble flooring shudders, soft crunching green blades of grass shooting up between the marble and swallowing it hole.

*“We're leaving here tonight
There's no need to tell anyone
They'd only hold us down
So by the morning light
We'll be half way to anywhere
Where love is more than just your name.”*

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