

LONGING

Adora was lost, again.

She had been wandering the castle for a week with nothing to do and still wasn't able to find her way back to her chambers.

On the night of her arrival, Catra had led her through the maze of corridors and stairs to the guest wing, but amid the darkness and dizziness caused by the blood loss, she hadn't paid attention to the path she was following. Her focus had been elsewhere. She gazed at the vampire as she followed her through the castle. She walked with a supernatural grace, it was as if each step she took was part of a choreography that she unconsciously interpreted, a dance to a melody that only she could hear. It made Adora think about the music of the harvest day; the jovial atmosphere of the festivals, and how the whole town came together in the collective dances. How couples in love always tried to meet between dances to share a caress or a knowing look. She imagined her there, with the rest of the villagers, a queen among her commoners. Adora wondered if she would dance with her if she asked, but shook her head to get rid of the absurd idea. She smiled sadly, things had changed too much too quickly and it had been a long time since they had any reason to celebrate. She hoped that would be fixed soon with the help Catra had promised. She looked up to watch her. Her small frame hid more secrets than it appeared. The movement of her tail as she walked was hypnotic, as was the delicate skirt of her dress, which floated gracefully behind her, adapting to the curve of her hips with every stride she took. Adora had unconsciously reached out to touch the fabric, but Catra had turned suddenly to indicate that they had arrived. When she noticed her outstretched hand, she gave her a sly, fanged smile.

Adora couldn't help but blush at being discovered. She had hastily bid her good night and locked herself in the room, dying of embarrassment. Luckily, there was no sarcastic comment the next morning. In fact, she hadn't seen anyone from the service in all the time she'd been there, not even Catra herself. She had simply left the inventory of the royal coffers on her bedroom door, along with a note indicating that she was free to move around the castle, except for the dungeons and the west wing. Adora had not wasted the opportunity, she had busied herself preparing everything and calling the wagon to send the first packages of food and medicine to the village along with a letter to Glimmer explaining her absence. She had left her in charge of everything, she knew she could trust her.

Her footsteps led her back to the library door. She hadn't had time to explore the castle beyond her erratic wanderings when trying to find her way back to her chambers, so she didn't hesitate to open the door decisively and enter. The room took on a new meaning in daylight. The heavy curtains were pulled back, allowing sunlight to stream in through the large windows, reflecting off the glass of the chandeliers and creating iridescent shadows on the volume-laden bookshelves. Her pulse quickened with anticipation, though she knew she wouldn't be able to understand much — just being able to hold a book in her hands was already a privilege. She paced the shelves slowly, running her fingers along the spines of the volumes. They were classified according to a kind of code, the legend on each of the shelves contained a letter and three numbers, but Adora couldn't make sense of it. She continued browsing the room; the bookcases ascended almost out of sight, and narrow walkways connected the highest parts for easy access. Adora looked up and noticed the frescoes that decorated the ceiling of the room, paintings of exquisite detail that showed images of forests and creepers among which supernatural creatures hid. She paused in front of one of the windows to look out over the castle's exterior, the hedges



that stretched out into the front grounds and that had once been an enormous labyrinth were now completely abandoned, the paths that delimited could not be distinguished anymore. They were entangled with rose bushes without any kind of order. They must have presented a magnificent sight in the past, but now they were yet another sign of the decay of the place.

Rounding the corner of one of the bookcases, Adora came across a small study area with several desks with large armchairs. There was Catra, immersed in a thick volume. She had changed the dress from the first night for a combination of tight pants with high boots and a wide-sleeved blouse that made her look less imposing. Beside her laid small notebook and pen, and she was taking notes from time to time. The window that illuminated the area was ajar, letting in the gentle morning breeze, slightly ruffling her hair, and the light streaming through the panes framed her in a halo. Adora stared at the picture in captivated silence. Beautiful.

She knew it was unwise to feel like that, it was crazy; she could kill her at any moment, the threat was constant. But she couldn't help noticing the graceful curve of her neck as she leaned down to take a closer look at one of the pages; how her delicate eyebrows furrowed slightly in concentration; how her hair blew in the wind and carried her scent to her. Adora closed her eyes and took a deep breath: she smelled of leather and sunlight.

"I don't think you're going to keep your end of the bargain by just standing there, don't you think, human?" Catra murmured without looking at her.

Adora winced surprised that she had spotted her, but moved slowly to her side. She looked over her shoulder curiously, trying to discern what she had written in the notebook. Her handwriting was tight and small, as if she were writing in a hurry, difficult to decipher even for an expert reader. She gave up. The book she was consulting, however, caught her attention. It was the same volume that Adora had browsed the night they had met.

"Vampires?" she asked confused "Taking into account that you are one of them I thought you would already know everything about your species."

Adora pulled out the nearest chair and sat next to her. Catra looked at her annoyed.

"I'm not exactly one of them. My case is ... special" she said doubtful.

"Special? What do you mean?"

"It's none of your business," Catra replied curtly.

Adora narrowed her eyes in annoyance. She would have to teach her manners.

"Look, if you really want me to fulfill my part of the deal and help you, you're going to have to tell me what's going on." Adora said bluntly "Although if you prefer I leave after I finish with the affairs of the village, that's fine by me." she got up resolutely determined to leave.

"W ... wait," Catra's hand held her by the wrist.

Adora slowly sat back down, and the vampire withdrew her hand quickly, as if her skin burned her. Adora sneakily touched her wrist to erase the traces of her touch. She cleared her throat uncomfortably. Catra let out a resigned sigh and turned to face her. Adora waited expectantly. After a few seconds that seemed eternal, she finally began to speak.

"What do you know about the Waste's curse?"



