

OUT OF CARDS SAMPLER

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Acelynn

It was just past four in the morning, and I was getting behind the bar restocked for the next day. All day my stomach had been in knots from the knowledge of the sting that had gone down at the Excalibur. Kaius and the boys had left hours ago without saying where they were going, and Astoria was clueless to the fact that it was probably the last time she would see them for a long time. When they had returned, the bar's crowd had parted for the Knights, power dripping off Kaius as he passed through the space.

My breath caught in my throat as his angered eyes met my own and for a moment, I thought he could see right through my facade, but then he leaned down to Nolan, whispering something in his ear. The Knights in the crowd shifted to make their way into the room for a meeting at the roundtable. A cold chill had washed over my entire body as I watched those wooden doors slam shut, the base of the bar's music covering up any screaming that was occurring behind them. Astoria had paused for a moment, eyes watching the same spot as me, before releasing a shaky breath and going back to slicing a batch of limes.

I always wished I had a conscious like my brothers, because right now the guilt of what I had told both of the detectives yesterday was making me physically ill. I had replaced my spade necklace with the one Watson had handed me yesterday. It felt heavy around my neck, almost like my own personal noose for the crimes I was committing against the Knights. Even though I knew Watson had good intentions there was a gut feeling that told me this little button would do me more harm than good. I had promised myself I would never use unless it was the only card left to play.

It was hours before Nolan emerged by himself, eyes intense as he lasered in on where Astoria was flipping the barstool chairs on to the tops of their tables. His hand traced her lower back, fingers lightly drawing shapes where her skin was exposed between her pants and cropped shirt. She leaned back into his touch unintentionally, taking solace in the quiet of the bar and Nolan. I couldn't understand why neither of them took the leap of being with one another when they were both so clearly made for

each other. A ting of jealousy shot through me because I knew in my heart, I would never have that. Never be looked at by someone as though I had hung the moon in the sky to shine down on just them. I was hard to love fully. I could give someone my everything and even then, would it ever be enough?

Shaking my head, I returned to the bar, letting the two of them have their moment, but it was shattered as the double doors of the roundtable flew open and struck the wall behind them. My hand tightened on the knife I had just finished drying before looking up at the man in the doorway. Kaius Mordred, the King of Lovelen, was staring me down with a lethal smirk that had my blood running cold.

The knife clattered to the floor as I sprinted from behind the bar, my sneakers catching against the worn flooring. I skidded around the corner of the bar, as Kaius lunged forward. Ducking away from his grasp, I increased my speed until I was inches away from the doorway. With both hands I pressed against the metal door using all my strength to throw it open but before I could get through, Kaius's hand latched around the base of my ponytail and yanked me back.

A scream ripped through me, but the sound only caused him to pull harder. My feet fell out from under me and I was suddenly suspended by my hair as Kaius drug me further into the empty bar. Astoria's terrified screams broke through the air, and I could hear Nolan trying to calm her, most likely holding her back from pummeling her brother right now. Kicking my feet out, I began to thrash against him, only making the pain in my skull grow more intense. In one quick motion my body flew up and then slammed down into the ground. I heaved hard as the wind in my lungs disappeared, tiny black dots dancing across my vision from the lack of oxygen now flowing to my brain. Rolling to my left side I curled into myself, a sharp pain in my back now screaming at me.

Kaius's dark figure loomed over mine, power dripping off him in heavy waves. This was the man that haunted my dreams. He was no savior of mine and in this moment, I knew he would not even bat an eye as he carved into me for his own sick satisfaction. Kaius ever so slowly bent at the knee until he was only inches above me. A

pathetic whimper slipped through my lips, causing a ghostly smirk to trace his mouth. He reached out, brushing a piece of hair off my sweaty forehead. I tried to scramble back but he was faster than me, his other hand reaching out to grip the center of my throat. His fingers tightened around it as he flattened me on my back once again and leaned in. We were so close our noses were brushing. I weakly clawed at his wrist, back arching further into him as my eyes rolled into the back of my head.

“Not so fast, kitten,” Kaius loosened his grip slightly, allowing air to flood into me once again. I heaved in a few ragged breaths, letting the color of the world around me come back with a raging force. Sinking closer Kaius flicked out his tongue, licking up the trail of tears that had pooled down my face. He groaned out once, “Sweet little Acelynn, I am going to have so much fun destroying you.”