

Chapter 11

The incident at school had a very telling effect on the children who witnessed it. They were quiet all throughout dinner, and the memory kept Aurella up most of the night. Eventually she gave up and walked outside, embracing the insomnia.

“Hey Ric,” she said, knowing he’d be sitting in that chair in the shadows. The wooden porch step creaked as Aurella sat, wrapping her arms around her knees.

“Still troubled about what happened at the school?” he asked.

“I just don’t understand how that could happen. They kidnapped a child!”

Ric came and sat next to her. The step gave a noticeably louder groan with his added weight. “It’s despicable, isn’t it? Deplorable. And I have lost more sleep than I could tell you worrying that one of my children will be next.”

“I should have done something,” Aurella anguished. “I could have stopped them.”

“Aurella, I don’t doubt your power, but I don’t think that was a fight you’d have won. They had backup, and they are all highly-trained knights. You’d have been taken away as well, and then there would be two kidnapped children instead of one.”

“I guess... but it still disturbs me.”

“As it should. Someone not disturbed by the kidnapping of a child has no soul in my opinion.”

Aurella nodded and leaned over onto her knees, listening to an owl hoot in the tree on the lawn. She looked up at the stars. Some of them twinkled, though one kept a steady light. Aurella tried to remember what her dad had said about that. Did that mean it was another planet if it didn’t twinkle? How did anyone know that?

“So...” started Ric. “How is Mavic doing with all of this? You know him. Do you think he will ever... forgive us?” He his jaw was tight and he scowled at the ground, probably uncomfortable asking a young girl for reassurance.

Aurella looked at him and smiled sadly. She couldn’t even begin to imagine the burden he’d been carrying all these years, and the anguish he felt at Mavic’s angry words. She understood why Mavic was upset. He had had a tough life. But she also understood that what Ric and Helaena did was the most loving act they’d ever done.

“Yes,” she finally answered. “I’m sure he already has forgiven you. Loyalty is everything to Mavic. I think he just needs a little time to realize that what you did wasn’t an act of abandonment, but a loving sacrifice that saved his life. Trust me. He’ll get over it. He’s not very good at holding grudges.”

Ric smiled. “I’d like to meet your parents. They certainly did a good job with you.”

“Yeah, they’re really great. I miss them a lot...” Her voice broke on the last word.

Ric nodded. “I’m sure they miss you even more.”



Ric and Helaena decided to keep the whole Mavic-is-actually-our-son thing a secret around town. It would raise too many questions about where he and Aurella came from and how Mavic had never met his parents until now. But it was a hard secret to keep. Things began to change ever-so-slightly in the Ric and Helaena household. Yes, Mavic was still Mavic, but each day he became more a part of their family, and less of an abandoned orphan. He'd already started calling them "mom" and "dad". The first time was more out of sarcasm – "Yeah, all my homework is totally done and my room is definitely clean, *mother*" – but after that it just sort of stuck. "Dad, tell Bianca to stop being annoying." "But Mom, I cleaned up after dinner yesterday." "Drandal, if you tell Mom and Dad that I broke that window, I will throw you through it. Now help me fix it before they get home."

There were many sweet moments too. Especially between the boys. On Drandal's birthday, Mavic felt bad for not knowing about it and not getting him anything. So he sat outside on the porch for a half an hour and came back with a little wooden knife he carved himself.

"Whoa, how did you do this?" marveled Drandal.

Mavic shrugged. "We never had any toys at the orphanage, so we had to make out own."

"This is so cool. Bam!" Drandal jabbed at Mavic with the knife. Mavic groaned dramatically and clutched his side, falling off his chair. Then he pulled Drandal on top of him and they wrestled until things got out of hand and they broke a piece of china, getting them both sent to their room.

It was all sweet and exciting for Aurella to witness, but it also made her feel homesick. Of course, she was beyond happy for him, and it made her almost cry out of joy for Mavic to finally be loved in the way he'd yearned for all his life. He deserved it. But it made her feel out-of-place all of a sudden. Now she was the guest in Mavic's house, and her family was far away.

And what about the future? What would happen when they found the heir? Would Mavic stay in Rashtica while she brought the heir to Mirella by herself? When Dovice was finally safe enough for her to live with her parents, would she ever see Mavic again? Aurella tried not to worry about it, but it began weighing on her quite a bit. She started feeling the way she felt when she blew it back in Dovice and didn't know Mavic was going to be coming with her to Rashtica. No matter when it happened, saying goodbye to Mavic would possibly be the hardest thing she'd ever do.

A couple of weeks after the family reunion, Mavic pulled Aurella aside after dinner.

"Hey, is something wrong? You've been acting all weird and sad lately."

"Nope," Aurella smiled. "Everything's great."

"How are you so good at making crap up when your life is on the line, but so bad at lying to me?" he chuckled.

"Shut up," said Aurella, walking away.

Mavic took hold of her arm. "Come on, elf. What's going on?"

Aurella sighed. "I'm just a little homesick is all. It's no big deal. Now let me go."

Mavic's eyebrows came together in sympathy. Then his eyes narrowed and then brightened with an idea. "Come with me, I have an idea."

With that Mavic turned around and walked out the back door. Aurella frowned and followed him out.

"Where are you going, Mavic?"

He didn't stop walking until he was standing in front of the well in the back yard. He pulled a bucket of water out and set it in front of Aurella. "Okay, so I read about this cool trick and I thought you'd wanna try."

"Okay?"

"Just trust me, you'll love it," he grinned. "So kneel in front of the bucket right there."

"Yeah, right. I am not falling for that one again," Aurella protested.

Mavic rolled his eyes. "I'm not going to dunk your head in, if that's what you're thinking. Just do it."

"Okay..."

Mavic walked back to the well and looked down. "Dang it, I should have brought the book with me, so you'd know what to say..." His voice echoed strangely in the depths of the well.

"What are you talking about Mavic?"

"Just uh, try to make me see your reflection and you see mine."

"Why?"

"Just do it, then I'll explain."

Aurella raised an eyebrow. "Alright... *Mavic reila ta shatran, ta raila den shatran.*"

Aurella stared down at the bucket of water as her reflection shimmered and slowly smoothed out. In the water she saw Mavic, puffing out his cheeks, flaring his nostrils, and crossing his eyes.

"Why are you making a stupid monkey face?" she asked.

Mavic grinned. "Just seeing if it would work. And it did! I forgot to make you make us hear each other, but I guess it doesn't matter right now since we're right next to each other."

Aurella sat up and looked over at the real Mavic. "Why are we doing this?"

Mavic pulled his head out, then sat down against the well. "Well obviously we'll send some kind of message to your parents to get them to look into some water so you can talk to them face-to-face."

Hope blossomed in Aurella's chest and was just as quickly stifled by the many things that might go wrong. "How could we send them a message to get them to the water at the right time? It's too far to send a paper boat without some help. I mean I guess if you, me, and Ric all pitched in, we could get it there in a day or two, but that's still a lot of work, and Ric never manipulates if he doesn't have to because he likes to save up his energy for healing."

"I thought about that," said Mavic. "Couldn't you just tell them yourself?"

“How?”

“Manipulate them to hear your voice. Tell them to go to that pond in the forest.”

“Could I manipulate them from this far away?”

“From what I’ve read, it’s definitely possible, but takes years of training and a lot of practice. Which basically means you’ll be able to do it the first time because you’re like Weirdo Super Witch, right?”

“If I made them hear my disembodied voice, it might give them a heart attack...”

“It’s your call,” shrugged Mavic. “You’re the one who said she was homesick.”

“Okay,” smiled Aurella. “Let’s do it.”



They waited until the next day to try it so the sun would allow for a brighter reflection. Ric had also told them that there was a time difference from Dovice to Rashtica, and if they sent a message to her parents at dinnertime, they’d already be asleep back in Dovice. Also they didn’t have school, so that allowed them to send the voice message during the day rather than the evening.

Aurella invited Mavic to come with her, but he decided to give her some privacy. She hadn’t seen her parents in almost half a year, so it was bound to get a little teary-eyed.

Aurella struggled with what she should say to them to get them to the pond. She didn’t want to say something like, “Mom, Dad, come see me at the pond in the forest!” because that would be misleading. They’d think she was physically there and then be disappointed when she wasn’t. Also, they didn’t live by the pond back in Lenic anymore; they’d moved to Clovice.

What she settled with in the end was, “Mom and Dad, I’m still in Rashtica, but I found a way for us to talk. You need a reflection for it, so find a reflective surface where no one will see you. See you soon!” She manipulated them to hear the message twice, because the first time they heard it, she figured they’d be too busy searching frantically around the house to find her to actually listen to what she was saying.

After waiting several minutes to allow them time to get there, Aurella performed the spell. “*Hashtic bor tashtic reila ta shatran, ta reila dent shatran.*” And then to allow them to also hear her voice and vice versa, “*Hashtic bor tashtic vor ta fiel, ta vor dent fielta.*”

And then Aurella waited. She could hear them before she could see them.

“Aurella? Aurella! Where are you?” her mom shouted.

“She’s not here, dear, she’s still in Rashtica,” said her dad. “We need to find something reflective. Hurry.”

“Where?!”

“Bathtub! Come on!”

Aurella grinned. “Mom? Dad? Can you hear me?”

“Ella!” cried her mother.

“Find something reflective, Mom, then you’ll be able to see me.”

Aurella waited over her bucket of water until she saw her father grinning down at her with his big mustache and soot from the forge smeared across his cheek. "Here, Joelle! She's right here!" He shouted. Then her mother joined. Her brown hair was pulled into its usual bun, but strings of it were falling out everywhere, making Aurella think she'd probably been out in the garden all day.

"Oh, my sweet baby!" Joelle gasped. "You're here! I can see you! And you've grown! Oh, I'm going to cry!"

"Hi, Mom," smiled Aurella, trying not to cry herself. "Hi, Dad."

"How are you doing this?" Tarrin wondered, sticking his hand in the water and swishing it around.

"It's magic," laughed Aurella. "Now stop messing with the water, I can't see you."

"How are you doing over there?" asked Joelle. "What's it like? Are you safe? Are you happy? Where are you staying? I've been worried sick with no information and no way of knowing if you'd arrived. Tell me everything!"

Aurella smiled and shook her head. Mavic may be just getting used to being ordered around by his parents, but she'd been missing it more than she cared to admit. Finding a more comfortable way to sit, she settled in and told them the whole story of how they arrived, came to Ric's house, started school, had been searching in vain for the next heir, and found out about Mavic's family. The last part caused them to ask her so many questions that she could hardly answer before another one came up, but eventually she had to cut them off.

"Hey, I'm sorry, but I'm gonna have to stop soon or I'm gonna get a really bad headache, because this kind of manipulation isn't all that easy," she explained.

"Honey, why didn't you tell us?" said Joelle. "Don't strain yourself."

"That's alright, Sweet Pea," smiled Tarrin. "We'll talk again some other time."

"Next week, same time?" asked Aurella.

"Now that we know you can communicate with us, I expect it every week from now on until you come home. If not more. You understand?" ordered Joelle.

"Okay, Mom. Love you!"

"We love you so much, baby!" cried Joelle.

"I love you too," Tarrin smiled sadly. "Come back to us soon. I miss my Ella."

"Alright, Dad. Bye!" With that Aurella closed her eyes. "*Tashta ven letta.*"

Their faces rippled away to reveal her own, and she looked away. How did seeing her parents again make her miss them even more? As if on cue, Mavic walked out the back door with a basket and a blanket.

Aurella turned and scrubbed away a tear with the heel of her hand. "What's that?"

"Some food," said Mavic.

"You could have just called me inside."

"I didn't want to bug you if you were still talking to them, but I figured you'd be hungry, so I thought I'd bring some out to you."

“Mavic, when you’re not the most annoying person on the planet, you can be very sweet.”

Mavic gestured for Aurella to stand up and laid out the blanket and sandwiches Helaena had made. “So how was it?” he asked, taking a seat and eating a fourth of a sandwich in one bite.

“It was great. Really. Probably the best idea you’ve ever had.”

“Then why do you still look sad?” Mavic asked, his eyebrows coming up in confusion.

“I don’t know... It was almost like seeing them again made it even harder to say goodbye. When I’m not thinking about them it’s easier, but now they’re right there in the front of my mind and I can’t stop wishing they were here. I don’t expect you to understand... I doubt you miss anything about Dovice.”

“That’s not true,” argued Mavic. “I mean, yeah, my life’s way better here, but that doesn’t mean I don’t miss anything. I miss the kids at the orphanage. And as much as I like going to school, sometimes I miss working; I like doing things with my hands. And I miss Kaila and Bev and Alec. I mean, I have way more friends here, but other than you, they were the first people I’ve ever met that didn’t immediately try to beat me up. They actually got to know us.”

They looked at each other. “Are you thinking what I’m thinking?” asked Aurella.

“That we need more sandwiches? I agree,” nodded Mavic.

“Mavic!”

“I’m just joking,” he chuckled. “Yeah, I think we should see if we can do that reflection thingy with Bev and them. If you’re up to it.”

“I’m up to it.” Aurella closed her eyes and manipulated their three friends to hear her voice telling them to find each other and then go to a reflective surface. She also went ahead and did the spell that would cause them to hear and see each other in the water. When she opened her eyes, Mavic was eating a pastry and staring at her.

“That’s seriously the creepiest language in the world,” he said.

“I wouldn’t know,” shrugged Aurella. “Do you think it’s gonna work? What if they’re busy? Or what if they don’t even care?”

“They care. Kaila does at least. Because of my manly face and body.” Mavic puffed out his chest and stuck his chin out.

“Shut up,” laughed Aurella, pushing him over and causing him to drop his pastry in the dirt. Mavic frowned, blew on it, then shoved the rest of it in his mouth.

“You are so gross.”

“I’m not gross. I’m hungry,” he mumbled, with his mouth full.

“You’re always hungry.”

“Aurella? Mavic? Where are you?” someone shouted. The sound seemed to be coming from the bucket of water.

Aurella smiled and went to lean over it, but Mavic held her back and put a finger to his lips. Aurella raised her eyebrows in confusion, but Mavic simply

mouthed, *don't move*. Then, suddenly, he leaned over the bucket with his hands up like claws and shouted, "Ahhh!!!"

Screams came from the bucket, then laughter.

"Mavic, you butthead!" Aurella heard Kaila say.

Aurella leaned over the bucket to see Kaila with her gorgeous brown hair and hazel eyes smiling up at them.

"Wow, it's really them," grinned Alec, his brown hair much longer than Aurella remembered. "I can see you guys."

"No way! So can I! It's totally amazing!" said Bev from somewhere out of the picture.

"They're over here, dummy," laughed Kaila, pulling Bev into view. His ice blue eyes gazed over their heads in amusement.

"How are you guys doing that?" asked Alec.

"The demon witch from Dovice has some tricks up her sleeve," grinned Bev.

"Well tell us all about Rashtica," enthused Kaila. "That's where you are, right? What's it like?"

"Well nobody's trying to kill us, so that's a plus," said Mavic.

"Yeah, I hate it when people try to kill me," smirked Bev. "So annoying."

Kaila rolled her eyes.

"So are there a bunch of warlocks and witches everywhere?" asked Alec. "Do you guys just like do magic left and right?"

"Yes and no," said Aurella. "Apparently the king here is just as cookoo as the one over there, so people don't do a lot of manipulation in public unless they want to be recruited or kidnapped into his army." Kaila's mouth fell open. "But other than that everything's great," Aurella said, trying to lighten the conversation. "We go to a school for manipulators, we have a small, possibly incorrect lead on where to find the next heir, and, oh yeah, Mavic has a family."

"What?" gaped all three of them.

"How?" asked Kaila.

"Where?" asked Alec.

"Why?" asked Bev. "Wait, I think I was supposed to say 'Who?'"

The two sighted friends' eyes turned to Mavic for an explanation.

"So basically they've been here in Rashtica and we've been staying in their house this whole time and didn't know it," explained Mavic.

"That's all you're gonna give us? Come on, details," demanded Kaila.

"Alright, alright," sighed Mavic, and explained the whole story.

"Mavic, that's so great," grinned Kaila.

"Yeah, congratulations, man," said Alec.

"I'm happy for you," smiled Bev. "Also, how old is your sister? Too young for me?"

Mavic's face went blank and his eyes turned hard. Kaila shoved Bev on the shoulder. "Not funny," she said.

"I'm joking!" Bev laughed. "I was just checking to see if his big brother instincts have kicked in yet. If he looks about ready to punch my face, I think they're turned on."

"You better be joking," said Mavic, cracking a small smile. "Because let me tell ya, you don't want to be on the receiving end of one of my punches."

"Enough with the threats," said Aurella. "Tell us what's been happening back home."

"Lots of stuff," said Alec.

"Very descriptive," said Aurella sarcastically. "Is the witch hunt over? Are the clankers still hanging around every corner? Is it like safe to walk the streets?"

"More importantly, is my awesome wanted poster still plastered on every wall?" Mavic jumped in.

"Things have cooled down a little," said Kaila.

"Yeah, most of the people from our little rebel group have gone home by now," said Bev quietly. "There isn't really anything to protest anymore."

Aurella's brows furrowed in confusion. The end of the witch hunt was a good thing. So why did Bev look so deflated? Maybe he missed being the leader and feeling like he had a purpose. She'd been told before that he wasn't exactly appreciated at home. As if reading her mind, Alec said, "Bev's been staying with me at my brother's house, since his parents suck."

"Alec," scolded Kaila.

"What? They do," Alec said defensively.

"No, he's right, they suck," said Bev, smiling wryly.

Aurella put her hands to her temples as she felt the beginnings of a headache brewing.

Mavic looked at her with concern. "Time to stop?"

"I'm fine. We can keep going."

Mavic raised an eyebrow.

"Okay, yeah, let's stop," Aurella relented.

"So we gotta go, or Ella's head's gonna explode," Mavic explained.

"That's gross," said Bev.

"Well it was so good to see you both!" smiled Kaila.

"Seriously guys, this was awesome," grinned Alec.

"I know, I haven't seen you guys in so long," said Bev.

"Technically you haven't seen us ever," said Aurella under her breath.

"There we go. Finally someone jumping in on the joke before me. Nice job, Ella, you're my favorite out of all these weirdos."

"Hey!" said Alec, Kaila, and Mavic.

"I don't see any of you doing awesome witch magic that lets us talk to each other from different countries," said Bev.

"Fair point," nodded Alec.

"Thanks guys, but how about let's not find out if my head will explode if I keep going," said Aurella.

They said their goodbyes, their friends' faces disappeared in the water's ripples.

Chapter 16: *The Abandoned Boys*

After Mavic finished swearing up a storm, they met Roderic back at the carriage and set back for Heibrica, everyone in a very foul mood. They all felt rather foolish in how they'd handled the situation. But rather than dwelling in annoyance and self-deprecation, Aurella quickly sought out a way to remedy the problem. She found an old piece of parchment and a quill and began writing a letter to Morton, explaining the whole story. She told about growing up in Dovice as a witch who didn't know who she was. She told about discovering her identity just in time to ruin everything. She told about meeting Mirella, and explained how she'd sent them to Rashtica to find her an heir – an heir that they believed was him. By the time she'd finished writing, the side of her hand was smudged black with ink, and her words had become smaller and smaller to make room at the bottom. After carefully folding it up into a paper boat she handed it to Mavic.

“Can you send this to Morton?” she asked.

“Do it yourself,” grumbled Mavic.

Aurella would have retorted with a sarcastic come-back, but was too busy feeling silly for forgetting that she too held warlock powers.

“Oh yeah... old habit.” she said.

She commanded the boat to fly to Morton, and watched as it flew out the window back the way they came. She hoped he would reply soon. She made sure to include where to find her and Mavic if he ever changed his mind. Hopefully that would happen soon. Otherwise she didn't know what they would do. They could always choose another one of Dovice's many descendants, but Morton had just felt so right. He fell within Tatautek's guidelines, and she was sure that he was the kind of person Mirella would approve of – brave, open-minded, willing to fight for what was right. He would have been perfect – other than the whole, rebellious, homeless vibe he had going, but that was easily overlooked when one considered what he'd been through.

Now that I think of it, he kind of reminds me of someone...

“Hey, Mavic,” she said.

“What?” he asked, looking out the window.

“I have an idea of someone we could talk to who might be able to help us get Morton to trust us.”

Mavic turned around, trying not to look intrigued. “Who?”



It took almost an hour after arriving at Ric and Helaena's house until they could escape to the back yard to do their reflection message. Helaena spent most of that hour hugging them fiercely, scolding them for taking longer than necessary, and feeding them until they were filled to bursting. Once they escaped, however, they headed to the well, to draw a bucket of water. They filled up the bathtub, figuring it was a larger body of water in which to see them and a better view. Also, then Aurella could take a bath afterwards without doing all the hard work on her own.

Hoping it was an alright time to contact their friends back in Dovice, Aurella sent a voice message, telling them to go find something reflective so they could talk. She considered just having Bev go alone, but figured their other friends would chew her out for forgetting about them. Pretty soon Bev, Kaya, and Alec were smiling up at them in the unused bath water.

"Oh," Kaila started, "is that you guys?"

"Of course it's us, who else would it be?" frowned Mavic.

Aurella looked over at Mavic and said, "Oh, I forgot to remove our disguises."

"You still look the same to me," said Bev. No one graced his lame joke with a response.

"Why do you guys look like you used to look?" asked Alec.

"Did you guys do something crazy to get yourselves wanted by the government again?" joked Kaila.

"Well..." started Aurella.

Kaila frowned. "Oh no, what happened?"

"In Ella's defense, she *was* saving a bunch of lives at the time, and I did something stupid first," said Mavic.

They explained about the earthquake and Aurella briefly running away and Roderic's plan to keep them safe. Lastly, they explained about finding the next heir of Dovice and how badly it went.

Bev was the first to speak up. "Really? You thought you could just drag him along with you and he'd go?"

"I know, it was so stupid," moaned Aurella. "And Mavic," she cast him an annoyed look, "was a little impatient. We were just wondering if you had any advice on how to get him to come with us?"

"Why are you asking us?" asked Alec. "We don't know anything about this guy. Or magic, or manipulation, or whatever you call it."

"Well, we're actually asking Bev," said Aurella. "Since he is probably the most likely to know what's going on in this guy's head."

"Are you referring to the fact that I am also a freak who ran away from home, was homeless for a time, and started rebelling against society?" he asked dryly.

"Well... yeah," said Aurella. "I mean, yes to the similarities, but not to the freak comment."

Bev sighed. "Well for one thing, he ran away from home, so he probably has family issues, which means he's also got some trust issues. Which means it's gonna

take a while for him to warm up to the idea of you actually being a friend and not someone who's out to get him."

"You warmed up to us pretty quickly," Mavic pointed out.

"Yeah, but that was my choice, and I was the one in charge."

"So what, we just sit around and hope he changes his mind?" asked Mavic.

"I'm not sure if you guys know this about me, but I do not just sit around."

"We're well aware, Mavic," said Kaila, rolling her eyes. "You did throw a rock at a palace guard just because you were getting impatient."

"We were being chased by a mob of angry teenagers and the fake queen of Dovice wasn't paying attention," Mavic defended. "I'm sorry if I panicked a little."

"Anyway," said Aurella. "I sent Morton a letter explaining everything. I told him where to find us if he ever changes his mind."

"That's probably all you can do for now," said Bev. "Because I can guarantee if you go out looking for him again, you're not going to find him. Also, if he's stubborn as well as rebellious, he doesn't like being told what to do. He has to come to his decisions on his own. If he decides to believe you, he'll come find you when he wants."

"Great," grumbled Mavic.

"There's still hope though. Right Bev?" asked Aurella.

"Hey, I'm just a blind kid with crappy parents. I don't speak for all the abandoned freaks," Bev smiled wryly. "But if it were me, and you sent me a letter explaining everything, not to mention if I'd met you before, I'd probably come around. Eventually."

"I hate eventually," said Mavic.

"Mavic, why are you in such a hurry to leave?" asked Kaila. "I mean, all your family is there."

"Oh," said Mavic. He blinked and raised his eyebrows. "I guess I didn't think about that... But I mean, we have to go back."

"What happens after you bring that kid here to be king?" asked Alec. "You gonna go back to Rashtica?"

Mavic held up his hands. "I don't know guys. I'll figure it out later. Just chill with the questions."

"Just wondering, man," said Alec.

"Yeah, we'd miss you if you never came back," said Kaila.

Aurella bit her lip in an effort to keep her emotions in. They were bringing up one of her biggest fears and she did not want to cry in front of everyone. She cleared her throat.

"Anyway guys, I haven't talked to *my* parents in a while. Mind if we end this little conversation so I can talk to them?"

"Of course," smiled Kaila. "Hope to see you soon." Before Bev had time to open his mouth Kaila said, "And Bev is going to make a really lame joke about having never seen you before or something dumb like that."

"Caught me," grinned Bev.

"Okay, well, bye everyone," said Aurella.

“Later,” said Mavic with a wave.

Their faces rippled away until all Aurella and Mavic saw were their own reflections.

“Hey, what’s wrong?” asked Mavic in surprise. “Wait, are you gonna cry? What happened?”

“What are you talking about?” said Aurella, physically straining to remove the frown from her face. “I just got something in my eye. Anyway, I’m gonna talk to my mom and dad. You wanna stick around, or what?”

Mavic stood and patted his stomach. “I’m gonna try to sneak some food out of the pantry before dinner. Have fun!”

Within a minute Aurella’s own parents were smiling up at her, her mother with her usual messy bun, and her father with the usual soot on his mustached face. Once they got a good look at her, their faces fell. Then Aurella remembered she hadn’t removed her disguise.

“Oh, hi, Mom and Dad. Sorry, I’m wearing a disguise, but it’s me,” she said.

“Why are you wearing a disguise, sweetheart?” asked Joelle, her eyebrows coming down in worry.

Aurella sighed. She wanted to avoid this conversation so as to not worry them, but knew she couldn’t lie to their faces – or their reflections.

“So a lot has happened. Please don’t freak out, because it’s all good now.”

She proceeded to explain all the events that had occurred over the past couple of days, essentially repeating exactly what she’d explained to Alec, Bev, and Kaila. Her parents interrupted her frequently, but eventually her story was finished and they were looking up at her with that worried look that made her feel incredibly guilty.

“So you’re not safe there either?” asked Joelle.

“Well, I’m safer than I was in Dovice. Here I can hide with a disguise. Down in Dovice I couldn’t, because humans can sense manipulators, so they were after me no matter what disguise I was wearing.”

“Oh, sweetheart,” sighed Tarrin. “I wish we could be there with you.”

“I know,” Aurella smiled sadly. “Me too. But you don’t need to worry about me. I’m staying with some good people. Mavic has some great parents.”

“Could we…” started Joelle, looking hopefully from her husband to Aurella. “Might we be able to meet them?”

“Oh, um, through a bathtub?” laughed Aurella. “Sure, let me go get them.”

Aurella ran into the house to find Mavic in the kitchen, trying to sneak a small carrot from a pile Helaena was about to toss into a stew. Seeing him out of the corner of her eye, she smacked his hand. He backed away, held up his hands, and grinned sheepishly.

“Um, Helaena?” called Aurella. “Do you know where Ric is?”

“He just got home, he’s changing now. What do you need?” she asked.

“My Mom and Dad want to meet you. They’re, uh, in the bathtub out back.”

“Oh.” Helaena blinked in surprise. “I’d love to meet them, but I won’t be able to see them. Witches can’t manipulate themselves to see those kinds of illusions.”

“Yes, but I can,” said Aurella, patiently.

“Oh, that’s right,” Helaena nodded. “Let me go grab Ric. Mavic, watch the stew, will you?”

“Fine,” sighed Mavic, sneaking vegetables into his mouth when she walked away.

“Ric,” called Helana, walking through the bedroom door.

Aurella waited out back for them to emerge.

When Ric walked out he smiled at Aurella. “We get to meet the people that raised the wonderful Aurella?”

“I guess so,” said Aurella.

She led them to the bathroom and performed the spell to allow the two sets of parents to see each other as they knelt by the bathtub. Pretty soon a very long conversation ensued that began with the mothers gushing over each others’ children and the fathers realizing they recognized each other.

“Hey, I believe you sold me a hammar years ago,” said Ric. “I still have it.”

“Small world,” smiled Tarrin.

Before long the conversation had turned very serious as her parents asked more specific questions on how they were keeping Aurella safe and if there was anything they could do. They were interrupted when Mavic stuck his head out the back door and yelled, “Mom! The stew’s burning! I’m not sure what I did.”

Helaena sighed. “He was probably too busy sneaking food to pay attention,” she muttered. “It was lovely to see you, but I need to go save the house from burning down.”

“I’ll, uh, go help,” smiled Ric. “Goodbye!”

“Goodbye!” Aurella heard her parents say before Ric and Helaena walked out around her.

She knelt down beside the tub. “Well, they sure seem like nice people,” said Joelle. “It seems Mavic has a wonderful family.”

“He does,” smiled Aurella. “Well, I gotta go. But it was good to see you, and we’ll do this again when I get the chance.”

“Goodbye sweetheart,” said Tarrin.

“Love you!” said Joelle.

Aurella smiled and blew them both a kiss before murmuring, “*Tashta van letta.*”