

Prologue:

Tatalia's boots scrape against the rocky terrain of the path her friends had chosen to climb. The shadows at her back stretch as though they're reaching for her. "We shouldn't be doing this." Tatalia says as they move along the mountain path. Her friends were already well ahead, pressing toward the summit.

Niela scoffs, turning to face her, "We have gone too far now to turn back. If you want to find the world of magic then we have to keep moving. If we turn back now, we won't make it home before dark." Niela continues up the hill.

Many from the village have tried to find the rumoured magical realm beyond Kilara Mountain. Few returned. Fewer still returned whole. Hunters who travel these woods for food often find bodies along the trails. It always leaves the village devastated—will that be their fate too?

The few who claim to have reached the realm were never the same. Most were taken to doctors, all of them were labelled insane. That didn't stop others from trying, including them. The stories spoke of magical creatures, people who looked human, but had pointed ears or the power to shift into beasts. The curiosity was always thick in the air, only a select few had the courage to act on it.

Tatalia glances at Niela's determined back and swallows hard. This is no longer just a game. Trekking up Kilara Mountain should've been just a joke, a way to just blow off steam, but now they are actually climbing it to see if the rumors are true.

Tatalia's friends are convinced it's real and want to find it. Life has become boring—every day the same— and they all crave something more. They do everything together, so when her friends said let's find it, Tatalia followed. Now there is no turning back.

She hurries to catch up and links arms with them as they reach the summit. They stand together, breathing hard, as they look out. Even if this magical world doesn't exist, at least they get to see a nice view.

"Well, isn't that something," Poppy mutters between breaths, her smile widening.

When Tatalia turns back the way they came she sees dark shadows dancing across the path. Inching closer. A shiver runs down the back of her neck, these shadows feel unnatural.

"Um, guys..." She starts, turning around to find her friends have vanished. They were just behind her. Now they are gone. "Poppy? Niela? Where'd you go?" Tatalia looks around frantically. This can't be happening. Her friends have disappeared into thin air. Fear seizes her chest, tightening her breath.

Tatalia makes a move to step backwards when arms reach around her waist and tug. She feels a ripple cross her skin as a scream tears from her throat. Before she can cry out, a hand clamps over her mouth. She begins to fight the grip to no avail. She is trapped.

“Shhh, they’ll hear you if you don’t be quiet.” A rough voice whispers in her ear. The shadows seem to be farther away as if behind some kind of shield. Her surroundings shift and the colours of the world seem more vibrant. The air feels more dense, a sweet smell assaults her senses.

Even the feeling of someone’s arm around her is more intense. She closes her eyes, the light cast from the sun making it more difficult for her eyes to stay open. It’s much too bright.

With a hand still covering her mouth she twists as much as she can to see that Poppy and Niela are also struggling against two hooded people. Their eyes wide in shock as they also take in their surroundings. The hoods hide their captors’ faces to keep their identities hidden. Have they truly just found the world of magic? Does it exist? Are they really safe here?

The shadows creep closer. Tatalia’s breathing grows ragged. Her heart rate spikes as she struggles. Just as they reach for her, a barrier stops them and they retreat. Moving back towards the trees.

A sigh of relief floods her. Once the shadows behind the invisible wall fade out of sight, the hand is removed from her. She is released, as are her friends.

She spins on the one who had her, “Who are you?” She snaps.

“Why did you come here? It is not safe for your kind here.” They interrogate, ignoring her question.

Tatalia shakes her head, *her* kind? “We um...” She stumbles over her words as if they aren’t hers, what in the hells was happening to her. “Someone told us about this place. We just needed to know if it is true. If the stories meant something.” The words just pour out as if she didn’t have a choice but to answer truthfully.

The hooded person shakes their head. “Oh for thorn’s sake. You humans are all the same. All searching for something that doesn’t exist. What is it that you are called?” Their voice slides over her skin like silk and static, making her feel as if she was in a trance. The air in this world feels heavier and she is finding it increasingly more difficult not to smile,

“M-my name is Tatalia, that’s Niela and Poppy.” She says, gesturing to her friends who were now speaking with their hooded people. “What did you mean by it’s not safe for *our* kind at times like this?”

The hooded figure’s shoulders slump, as a sigh slips past their lips. “You’re kind has always been too vulnerable here, but especially on nights like tonight. A Full Sun.”

Tatalia cocks her head to the side, “A Full Sun?”

“By the Moon’s Bond, do they never teach you humans anything? Tonight is a Full Sun, when night doesn’t come to our realm. The veil is thin, too thin. Humans aren’t the only things that can slip through.” They turn toward the vanishing shadows. “You’re lucky we found you first.”

A quick glance at her friends shows that they are okay, smiles adorning their own faces. Not exactly what she expected. Their saviours pull back their hoods to reveal long pointed ears, high cheekbones with angular slit eyes that flash a golden hazel. Tatalia stands staring mesmerized as the one standing by her reveals their long black hair that falls over their shoulders.

“Who and what are you?” She whispers.

“Fae. Welcome to our world. You’ll be here a while. One of my men will escort you into our Kingdom. They will stay with you until you are situated.”

Tatalia nods and follows the fae down the mountainside that leads to a gorgeous Kingdom. The colours that reflect from the sun off of the Kingdom are too sharp, too beautiful. Her heart aches just looking at it.

Her jaw drops as a small gasp escapes her lips, the weight of it all crashes in. She can’t stop the smile that spreads over her face. Or the feeling of eternal happiness that takes over her whole body. The fae called it a kingdom, what would a city look like in this world?

“What is your Kingdom called?” She asks.

“Kiltania,” the fae says, “The Kingdom of Magical Origins.”