



### FIRST ENCOUNTER

A strong gust of wind suddenly swept through the gloomy hallway, blowing off the torch Adora was using to light the way. The absence of windows made it difficult to discern the shapes that surrounded her, it looked as if a horde of monsters were stalking her from the shadows. She didn't let fear take hold of her, she couldn't allow it. The future of her people depended on what she could find in the castle, and a little bit of darkness was not going to make her waver. The room took on a new dimension in the absence of light, the walls seemed to lean towards her, suffocating, as if they wanted to trap her and prevent her advance. She continued walking down the gallery, her footsteps echoing off the bare walls. "It's strange that a palace as sumptuous as this doesn't have paintings decorating the rooms, noblemen usually love to pretend they have more than what they really do" Adora thought. An army of armors flanked her on either side, their empty helmets directed forward with hollow gazes. She approached one of them with curiosity and noticed that it had a crest on its chest, but the darkness did not allow her to see its shape. She was so focused examining the armor that she didn't notice the shadow looming over her from the ceiling. The creature watched her progress with narrowed eyes, taking great care not to be seen. It was not time yet.

Adora's path led her to a massive double gate framed by a majestic-looking bronze border. She tried pulling on the handlebar and it opened easily, allowing her access to the room. Her eyes widened in surprise. The area was illuminated by glass chandeliers, and in front of her there were huge shelves that covered each wall reaching the ceiling, all of them filled with books. Books and more books, of all sizes and colors, more than she could read in a lifetime. An intricate system of stairs and gangways connected all the bookshelves, allowing easy access to all of them. Books had always fascinated her, the stories they hid, what she could learn from them ... if only she knew how to read. It was her biggest source of shame. In the village, all available hands were needed to work in the fields, and education came down to learning how to write your name well enough for others to understand it, but Adora never had the opportunity to learn how to read properly. Being an orphan, she had been raised by everyone in town, and she couldn't be more grateful for it, but school was reserved for those who could afford it, and that was not her case. One of the volumes particularly caught her eye, a book that was opened awkwardly on one of the desks. It was bound in black leather and featured silver engravings on the cover. Although she could not decipher the meaning of the symbols, it clearly showed the drawing of a vampire. It had ink stains on the margins, as if someone had checked it recently. It was clear that the castle was not as empty as it had seemed at the beginning. Adora picked it up and began to flip through the pages, amazed by the level of detail in the illustrations, each one more macabre. The shadow that stalked her took advantage of her distraction to drop from the ceiling, falling silently behind her. She stood up, stealthily approaching her and bringing her nose close to the Adora's nape. She inhaled deeply, and the girl's fragrance flooded her senses. Sweat and jasmine, a bittersweet mix. Her mouth watered. Her fangs instinctively lengthened, but she tried to control herself. She knew she



couldn't drink. But she could have a bit of fun, and also give a lesson to this nosy human who fiddled with her books without permission. It had been a long time since someone ventured into her castle, she had made sure they didn't, but it seemed that the hoaxes she had run through the village were losing their effect. She would have to do something about it.

In one swift movement, she held the girl by the waist, pinning her against her chest, while she tangled her fingers in her golden strands exposing her neck. The girl let out an exclamation of surprise when she felt the vampire's fangs pierce her flesh, just enough to let the blood gush out. She did not allow the warm liquid to caress her tongue, she would lose control if it did. She pulled away from her as the first drops of her blood touched her lips, but she was still able to taste her. Her flavor was sweet, velvety, and its taste got trapped at the back of her throat. Hunger washed over her, taking her breath away for a moment. An almost uncontrollable desire pushed her to slit the girl's throat and drink until she was satiated. She noticed how her pupils dilated and turned blood red as she watched her prey. She had fallen to the ground and was clutching her neck in disbelief, staring at her with wide eyes.

Adora tried to control the tremors that ran through her as she covered the wound on her neck, blocking the bleeding. It had only been a scratch, but the attack had caught her off guard and for a moment she had been afraid to die. She could have, if the creature that stood before her now had wanted to kill her. The shadows in the room hid its face and didn't let her distinguish its features. When she finally managed to stop shaking, she steeled herself and said:

“What was that for?! I wasn't expecting a warm welcome, but attacking visitors is a good way to earn the bad name that precedes you!” after saying it, she suddenly felt stupid. The owner of the castle had almost opened her throat as a welcome and she could think of nothing else than to try to teach it protocol. PERFECT.

The creature finally moved forward, letting the moonlight that filtered through one of the large windows of the library illuminate its features. She was petite, and had olive skin. A long brown mane of hair fell to her mid-back, framed by a silver tiara on her forehead that had a blood-red gem set in its center. She wore a peculiar suit, half armor half dress, with a long transparent train that seemed to float as if moved by an unearthly breeze. But what caught Adora's attention the most were her mismatched eyes, one blue and the other gold, that gleamed dangerously bright in the moonlight. She was the most beautiful creature she had ever seen, and probably the most dangerous as well. She shook her head breaking the spell. She had tried to kill her. The stranger tilted her head and smiled cheekily, letting two long fangs show from her upper lip. She lifted one of her hands and wiped the blood from the corner of her mouth, licking her fingers slowly, savoring it as she looked at her. Adora felt her gut tighten, an emptiness that sent a current spreading through her skin and blocked all sane thoughts. She got goosebumps.



“Mmmmh, excellent quality. Bold and sweet at the same time. Maybe I should start drinking human blood again” she said to herself while licking her lips.

“What... what are you?!” Adora asked in a small voice.

The girl approached gracefully, as if dancing. She leaned towards her, bringing her face closer to hers and looked into her eyes with a mischievous smile. Her pupils glowed blood red.

“I'm your new favorite nightmare.”

**TO BE CONTINUED**

