

## PART 8 NIGHT

Weeks flew by between endless hours in the library and the brief moments Adora spent wandering through the castle. Though at first she had done her explorations alone, lately Catra had joined her scrolls.

The vampire had slowly opened up over the days, and now she seemed almost a different creature than the monster that had attacked her on the fateful night they had met. The wall of ice that seemed to have separated her from the world had slowly melted since Adora had arrived. She still maintained a certain reserve, though Adora associated it more with her introverted nature, but she spent less and less time cooped up in her quarters, preferring to accompany her on her walks while Adora chattered incessantly. The bond between them had grown strongerr, and though Adora had not said so aloud, she already considered her a friend. There were times, however, when she would just stare at her without realizing it, and she knew perfectly well that it wasn't out of simple friendship. Seeing her laugh sometimes took her breath away. She was aware of what was happening to her, but she didn't dare to consider a deeper meaning, it was too complicated.

Though her stay at the castle was proving to be more pleasant than she had first thought, it was taking longer than she had anticipated. At night, in the darkness of her room, Adora allowed herself to miss her people. She missed the late night chats with Glimmer and Bow, the three of them curled up in the same blanket in front of the fireplace talking about absolutely everything. They had been her family for as long as she could remember, and spending so much time away from them made her realize how much she needed them. However, she wouldn't be able to go home until she broke the curse, and there was no sign of that happening any time soon. Catra spent hours and hours in the library (Adora suspected even during the night), poring over volumes endlessly. She tried to help her where she could, somewhat clumsily since she was still learning to read, but she felt it slowed her down even more, and that frustrated her. That was why she had decided to improve on her own so she could help her properly. The storybook Catra had given her in one of her first lesson was now her roommate, and Adora tried to read it every night before going to bed.

They were strange stories, dark for a children's book, though she could see why it had been one of Catra's favorites when she was little.

It was during one of these nightly readings that she finally stumbled upon the first clue. She was flipping boredly through one of the stories while trying not to close her eyes. Tales of fairies and goblins had never appealed to her, she always preferred stories of adventure and legendary warriors who saved the day by swinging their swords, but just as she was about to skip the tale one of the illustrations in the story caught her attention. It depicted a figure, the silhouette of a man trapped in a luminous circle in the center of a forest clearing. His face was unhinged, as if he were in indescribable pain, and the fingers



of his hands were twisted at impossible angles. Superimposed over him was another figure, a disfigured monster that almost completely engulfed the dying man. Surrounding the scene and hidden in the undergrowth, small, slit-eyed creatures could be seen, witnessing the scene with malevolent grins.

"And to think the fairies were usually the good ones" thought Adora.

She took a closer look at the image and noticed that the light trapping the beast-man was coming from strange symbols on the floor. Runes. When she checked the story she discovered that the man had been trapped in a ring of fairies, centers of magical power created by feeric beings to capture the unwary and amuse themselves at their expense. The mischievous nature of these creatures meant that their games sometimes went beyond the limits of cruelty, and on occasion their "pranks" had dire consequences. In this case the spell anchored to the ring made the victim to be transfigured into a lupine creature whose existence was tied to the full moonlight to which the magic that had transformed him was anchored. It seemed to Adora that the tale bore some similarity to Catra's story; transformed into a monster subdued in this case not by moonlight, but by bloodlust. Her pulse quickened with anticipation. That was it! Perhaps this was what they had been looking for!

She scrambled out of bed and hurried to the library. She had to look for more information, she was sure she had seen a treatise on witchcraft somewhere at some point, she just had to find it. Fairy rings were also known as witch circles. If she could figure out how to break the magic associated with the power source of the spell that affected Catra, maybe they could break the curse.

When she reached the library door she pulled the handle decisively and entered the room. Even though it was night, Catra liked to keep the lamps on. Sometimes the darkness still caught them poring over volumes and they didn't notice the lack of light until they could barely make out the letters on the pages.

Adora turned the corner, looking for the shelf where she remembered seeing the book, running index finger along the spine of the volumes in hopes of finding it. At last she came upon the treatise, and pulled it with difficulty from the shelf. She had begun to flip through it absentmindedly when she suddenly noticed the figure slumped over one of the desks. Catra had fallen asleep with her head resting on a thick, dusty volume, the pages crumpled beneath her cheek as she snored softly in a deep sleep.

Adora turned away from the books to approach her. She knew that she had continued to sneak off to study even though Adora was helping her. She always called it a day before dinner and escorted her to her quarters to say goodnight, but Adora had a suspicion Catra continued her tireless search alone to keep Adora from losing hours of sleep. Adora supposed she was doing it for her; the vampire always insisted that Adora take a break now and then, as if she felt guilty that she was spending so much time supporting her in her research, but Adora didn't want to hear a word, and always insisted on staying with her.



As he stood beside her she noticed the dark shadows under her eyes. She must be exhausted. Her sleeping countenance made her look much younger, almost childlike. She noticed the almost imperceptible shiver that shook Catra when the cold air caressed her exposed skin. Adora she took one of the blankets that covered the divan seats beneath the window and covered Catra with it so she wouldn't catch cold. She couldn't help herself, and on impulse she leaned over and placed a soft kiss on her cheek.

"Rest. I'll take it from here" she whispered in her ear. Catra stirred in her sleep.

Adora smiled sweetly looking at her. She picked up the book and sat down next to the sleeping vampire to continue her tireless search. She had a curse to break.





