

PARTE 6: THE CURSE

“Curse? No, I hadn't heard anything about that,” Adora replied confused.

Catra gave a half-smile, somewhere between resigned and sad.

“ Sometimes I forget there's a whole world outside this castle” she muttered to herself.

She stared blankly for a few moments as Adora watched her. She was the picture of loneliness. Adora's heart sank. She must have been alone for years. It was thought the castle had been empty for more than a decade; more than ten years without being in touch with anyone. Adora couldn't even begin to imagine what it would feel like to spend a minute on her own. Even though she hadn't been able to meet her parents, the people of the village was her family; Glimmer and Bow were practically like siblings to her, she'd never really missed a biological family. And for that she would be eternally grateful to them.

“So, what is this curse about?” Adora asked in an attempt to divert Catra's mind from whatever it was that made her get that look on her face. Catra's eyes focused on her again.

“Yes...” She shook her head, trying to focus. She took a deep breath, “I suppose you know that my family has ruled these lands for over fifteen generations,” Adora nodded, “Well, your village and the other lands prospered during our rule. People lived happily, and my ancestors were beloved by their subjects, especially for the principles of justice and honor that were the hallmark of my family.

Catra remembered how her mother had told her this very same story whenever she sat on her lap. How her voice swelled with pride as she spoke of the legacy of their ancestors. Listening to her speak soothed her, and she loved to lay her head on her chest as she told her fairytales. She could feel each word rumble inside her, as if the story was born from within her. She had been able to listen to her talk for hours without ever getting tired. She put that memory aside, carefully tucked away in a corner of her mind, where she treasured her happiest moments. The ones that had kept her afloat for the past few years. She continued with the story as Adora listened attentively.

“The kingdom remained prosperous when my mother ascended to the throne. As queen, she perpetuated the principles that had governed her mother's rule before her, and for most of her reign things remained the same.” she paused. “But...”

She remembered perfectly well the day when everything had gone wrong. The castle doors opening; a dark figure shrouded in mist; green eyes glowing with a venomous gleam, laden with empty promises of grandeur. The throne room subjected to a sepulchral silence, flooded with ashes; their smell permeating every corner, poisoning her lungs, her throat...and then came the unquenchable thirst.

Catra clenched her fist tightly, digging her nails into her palm. The warm blood began to slide through her fingers, falling onto the open pages of the book. Adora let out a choked gasp when she noticed it, and grabbed her hand in an attempt to loosen her grip. She intertwined her fingers with Catra's to keep her from hurting herself any further. Catra averted her gaze to watch their hands and seemed to awaken from the nightmare she had been plunged into. The touch of Adora's hand anchored her to reality. She looked up and met her heavenly eyes, watching her with concern. She squeezed her hand lightly, a silent signal to tell her it was okay, and continued with her tale.



"I'll spare you the gory details, but about twelve years ago, when I was eleven, a strange traveler came to the castle. She introduced herself as a wise woman, offering her advice unselfishly in exchange for a place to live. My mother, enraptured by her words and promises, made her her first counselor, her right hand. From the moment she started to advise her, her attitude changed radically; she began to make risky decisions, more... ambitious, so to speak. She wanted to expand the territories, she made enemies with neighboring monarchs, she began to invest the royal treasure to increase the bulk of our troops... and she achieved her purpose. Our kingdom prospered more than ever and expanded as it had not done in the last hundred years. However..." she hesitated.

She didn't want to tell the human what had happened next. Partly because she didn't understand it very well either, but mostly because she didn't want to remember. She didn't want to relive the moment when her personal hell had begun.

"What happened?" Adora asked, urging her to continue the story.

Catra shook her head, trying to collect her thoughts, and continued.

"But everything suddenly fell apart. The counselor was in reality a sorceress, a very powerful one I might add. She had used dark magic to ease the expansion of the kingdom, but all magic requires something in return to maintain the balance of the world. My mother wasn't willing to pay the price, and she flew into a rage. She betrayed us. She cursed this land, turning it into a wasteland where nothing would ever grow again. Where do you think the drought that has decimated your village for years come from? Or the plague that is killing your friends? It's all connected," Adora stared at her in disbelief. Catra continued, "But her rage didn't stop there. Sacrificing all her magic, she used her last remaining embers to destroy the entire court...and to curse me," she felt her voice break.

She remembered every image, every heartbeat thundering in her ears as she listened to the terrified screams that night. Her tiny fist, pounding on the throne room door, desperate to get in. And suddenly, silence. When she finally opened the door she was greeted by an empty room. They had been there, but now there was only ash, dust. And suddenly, a powerful rush of magic had run through her from top to bottom, changing her entire being.

"It transformed me into a monster ruled by craving, by thirst. A thirst that is partly linked to this land. It was no accident. My curse is the corrupt magic that plagues the entire realm, they are linked. Unless I am able to break it, neither drought nor disease will leave your people," she looked at her seriously. "The help I can give you right now is only a stopgap, Adora, a temporary thing. But as soon as the gold in the coffers runs out and you can't send any more resources to the village, you'll have the same problem again. We're all doomed. And we're running out of time."

Adora was trying to process all this flood of information. Her target had always been the castle; from the beginning she had assumed that if she could just get the help, everything would be solved. But then she was suddenly faced with something much bigger, of colossal magnitude. Magic, no less. She wished for a moment that Madame Razz was still among them. The old woman had been eccentric, but she always had the perfect solution to every problem, and if not, a good slice of her delicious homemade cake would soothe any spirit.

"But then...if what dooms this land is a spell, there must be some way to undo that magic, right? We definitely have to break your curse," Adora nodded resolutely. She looked at Catra. "How can we do that? We could...we could find the witch, I'm sure she knows how to do it," she looked at her with hope.

Catra shook her head. There was a strange look on her face, a sharp glint in her eye.



"The sorceress is not an option." she answered sharply. The tone of her voice brooked no reply. Adora found the way she said it odd, but she didn't insist.

"Oh...so, do you have any other ideas," Adora asked hesitantly.

At those words, Catra recovered her sly smile.

"What do you think I've been doing for the last ten years locked up in this library," she asked with a grimace. Her fangs peeked out from under her upper lip, giving her a feline look. "I'm pretty sure the key to the curse is the creature she's turned me into. A vampire of sorts. I've spent years researching their way of life, their behavior, how to kill them. I think we need to figure out how to break the blood curse that rules their will. I hadn't found out much until I came across this bestiary," she began to turn the pages of the book she had been consulting until she found the passage she was looking for and placed it in front of Adora. "Here, see?" she pointed to one of the paragraphs on the page.

Adora looked at the symbols; she knew some of them but couldn't decipher what they said. She looked away embarrassed. Catra continued talking without noticing.

"It says that the only way to free an undead from the curse of blood is to cut off the cycle, to stop it from drinking. The problem is that would ultimately end its existence. Vampires are animated corpses, after all. My case is different, though, because I wasn't dead when I was cursed. So if I stop drinking, I should be able to return to my original form. In theory." She turned her head to see Adora's reaction and realized she wasn't even looking at the book. "You could at least pretend to listen to what I'm saying. Weren't you so interested in helping your friends," she snapped at her as she closed the book.

"It's not that..." Adora answered quietly. She was rubbing her hands together nervously. Catra looked at her confused.

"Then, what is it?" she asked.

Adora squirmed uncomfortably, but didn't answer. Finally, after a few moments of hesitation, she raised her head and looked into her eyes, flushed with embarrassment.

"I just can't read."



