

What They Say About Her

CHAPTER 7

Harmony Court had gone strangely quiet as Ethan and Luna walked side by side, their footsteps soft against the cobblestones. It was one of those rare, peaceful Saturdays when they'd managed to steal a few hours between assignments to actually practice. The morning had gone well. Luna had buried herself in one of the dense, ancient texts Ethan had given her, and now they were heading to the dueling practice room to try some of it in real time.



Ethan glanced over at her. She was talking with energy, her hands moving with every point she made. "I mean, it still takes me forever to get through it," she said, a thoughtful crease forming between her brows. "I'm not some machine like you, but

I'm picking it up faster than I thought I would."

He nodded, though his thoughts were already beginning to wander. Over the last few weeks, they'd settled into a rhythm - steady, natural, and surprisingly easy. They split their time between research and practice, each learning from the other. Ethan never would have imagined working with Luna could feel this balanced. He handled the theory and ancient texts; she handled the

hands-on magic that kept dragging him out of his comfort zone. Somehow, it worked.

And then there was Luna herself. Lately, he kept catching himself watching her more than he meant to - the furrow in her brow when she concentrated, the way she brushed that same stubborn strand of hair from her face only for it to fall right back into place. He was doing it again now, his gaze lingering a beat too long on the faint curve of her smile, so lost in the moment that he didn't realize until-

"Ethan?" Luna's voice pulled him out of his thoughts like a sudden gust of wind.

He blinked and straightened up. "What?" he asked, his face heating as he realized she'd caught him staring.

"I said we should start with shield spells today," she repeated, one eyebrow arched, a hint of amusement dancing in her tone. Oh yeah, she had definitely noticed.

"Right, of course. Shield spells," he muttered quickly, turning away in what he hoped looked like a casual gesture. He cleared his throat and forced himself back into the present, doing his best to shove the awkwardness aside.

They pushed open the heavy door to the practice room - a wide, circular chamber built for duels and spellwork. The hinges groaned in protest, and their footsteps echoed against the polished wooden floor. Rows of enchanted targets and mannequins lined the walls, faintly humming with leftover traces of magic from past battles. The room was empty, still - the perfect place to train.

Ethan rolled his shoulders as he looked around. His stomach tightened a little. He hadn't exactly been looking forward to this. Every time Luna had tried to teach him, it had ended badly.

"Maybe we should keep it simple," he suggested, half-hopeful, half-cautious.

Luna turned to him with a smirk. "This is simple."

Ethan groaned, already bracing for disaster. "Maybe for you, princess."

Her eyes sparkled with amusement, and a grin tugged at her mouth. "Don't worry. I'll be gentle."

He couldn't help but smile. "Just make sure you explain it first, and don't use me as your test subject."

Luna gasped and pressed a hand to her chest. "I'll have you know, I'm an excellent teacher," she said, pretending to be offended, though the gleam in her eyes ruined the performance.

"Sure you are," Ethan said dryly, though his voice carried a warmth that hadn't been there before. It still surprised him how easily he could joke with her now. A few weeks ago, the idea of a casual conversation with Luna would've felt impossible. It didn't flow as effortlessly as it did with Alden, but whatever existed between them had developed its own rhythm—one that made him loosen up without realizing it.



Luna strode toward the center of the room, her steps light and confident. “Alright,” she said, her voice sharpening into focus. She tossed her bag to the side and brushed her hair back with a flick. “Let’s see where you’re at.”

Ethan followed, the familiar twinge of nerves returning. “You’re not expecting miracles, right?” he asked, only half-joking.

Luna arched an eyebrow, smirking. “Not yet. Baby steps, Ethan. Let’s not get ahead of ourselves.”

Ethan rolled his eyes, though the corner of his mouth lifted. “Fine. Where do we start?”

“First, you need to understand something,” she said, slipping fully into instructor mode. “The spell you tried on the Umbra Wraiths was too advanced - and it might not even suit you. Every realm has its own magical affinities, and the Scholars’ realm breaks into different branches: clairvoyance, illusions, manipulation. We just need to figure out which one is yours.”

Ethan frowned, his mind flicking back to that night with the Wraiths and every clumsy attempt he’d made in class since. “So what you’re saying is... I’ve been barking up the wrong magical tree?”

“Pretty much,” Luna said, a teasing smile touching her lips. “You’re not bad at magic, Ethan. You’re just trying to force it. Magic isn’t something you command. It’s something you learn to work with.”

He nodded slowly, letting the idea settle. Luna’s ease with magic was on another level; she made it seem as natural as breathing. The way she moved with the energy around her felt almost instinctive - almost second nature.

“Alrighty then,” he said, straightening his back with a determined look. “Show me how it’s done.”

Luna smiled and stepped back, lifting her hands. “Let’s work on channeling energy for the shield. The kind I make is a little different from yours, but the concept’s the same.”

She demonstrated, her fingers glowing faintly as she drew magic from the air around them. The energy shimmered, coalescing into a soft, translucent wall of light. It wavered for a heartbeat before steadying into a smooth, radiant surface.

“See? No need to force it,” she said calmly. “You’re guiding the energy, not fighting it.”

Ethan nodded, studying the way she breathed through the movement, the effortless grace in every motion. “Looks easy when you do it.”

Luna shot him a grin. “Your turn.”

Ethan drew in a deep breath and lifted his hands, mirroring Luna's movements. He tried to feel the current of energy in the air, drawing it toward him, inviting it to answer. For the briefest instant, it did - just enough for a spark of connection to flare through him—before it slipped away again, leaving only stillness behind.

Luna let out a soft chuckle, her tone kind. "Relax," she said. "You're overthinking it again."

Ethan arched an eyebrow, half-smiling. "Right. Relax. Because that always makes magic cooperate with me."

"You joke," Luna said, folding her arms, "but it actually does. You can't treat magic like one of your rune puzzles, Ethan. It's not something you solve. It's something you move with."

Ethan drew a slow breath and closed his eyes, trying again - this time not to command the energy, but to let it pass through him. It responded more easily now, a faint static gathering around his hands. It wasn't much, but it was there, buzzing softly in the air.

"That's it," Luna said, her voice suddenly closer. He opened his eyes to find her standing beside him, eyes bright with excitement. "Keep going."

His pulse jumped. They were standing closer than they ever had - close enough for him to feel her magic, warm and alive, brushing against his own. Her arm grazed his as she adjusted his stance, and for a single heartbeat, the world narrowed to that one point of contact.

Ethan made himself focus, stepping away just enough to regain control, but the connection broke, and the static vanished.

“You were so close!” Luna said sheepishly. “See? I told you I was a good teacher.”

Ethan laughed, shaking his head. “Alright, alright, I won’t question your methods again.” His tone was light, but as the laughter between them faded, he found himself watching her - really watching her. Her eyes shone with amusement, and the sound of her laughter filled the room in a way that made something tighten in his chest.

He tore his gaze away, reminding himself why they were there. Practice. That was all this was. He stepped back, needing the space, though it did little to steady him. “You’re good at this,” he said at last, his voice softer than he intended.

Luna blinked, a little taken aback by the sincerity in his voice. For a moment, their eyes met, and her expression softened. “Thanks,” she said, smiling in a way that felt gentler somehow. “You’re not too bad yourself.”

Ethan looked away quickly, heat creeping up the back of his neck. He rolled his shoulders, trying to shrug off the tension. “Let’s try that again,” he muttered.

They practiced for the next forty minutes, settling into a rhythm of casting and correction. Ethan stayed locked in, determined to let the magic flow through him instead of fighting it. But when his shield flickered and collapsed yet again, he groaned and rubbed the back of his neck. “You’ve

got to be kidding me..."

"I didn't think I'd ever see the day where you'd willingly step away from your books, Ethan," a familiar voice called out.

Ethan glanced up to find Alden leaning casually against the doorframe, arms crossed and wearing a grin far too satisfied with itself.



"Wow, so funny," Ethan replied dryly. "Glad to see you've mastered the art of sarcasm."

Alden pushed off the door and sauntered into the room, his grin only growing as his gaze landed on the fading shimmer of Ethan's failed spell. "Sarcasm? Please. I'm genuinely impressed," he said, amusement dripping from every word. "At this rate, you'll be dueling Arcanes in the Grand Arena by next week."

Luna laughed softly, clearly enjoying the exchange. "I think he's doing pretty well," she said, her voice light with amusement. Ethan glanced her way, and her encouraging smile eased his frustration more than any pep talk could have.

"At least someone appreciates my efforts," Ethan sputtered, though there was a hint of humor in his tone.

Alden lifted his hands in mock surrender. "Alright, alright. I'm impressed. For someone who practically lives in the library, this is groundbreaking."

Luna arched a brow at him. "What about you, then? You have trouble with practical magic, too?"

Alden shrugged with easy confidence. "We scholars aren't exactly duelists, but..." He shot her a grin. "Let's just say I'm operating on a different level than this guy." He gestured toward Ethan.

Ethan rolled his eyes. "Right. Why don't you go ahead and try out for the dueling team, then?"

"Hey, I could, if I wanted to" Alden said, pretending to take offense, his grin not faltering for a second. "It's all about balance. A little theory, a little spellwork... and a lot of charm. Works for me every single time."

Luna lifted a brow, clearly entertained. "Oh really? So are you using charm on your Convergence project too? Who's the unlucky partner?"

Alden chuckled. "Aria. Realm of nature. She's incredible with elemental magic - summons storms like she's ordering tea. Honestly, it's a little terrifying."

"That sounds useful," Luna said, smiling. "Maybe she can teach you how to keep your ego in check."

"Or dangerous, depending on the situation," Ethan shot back with a laugh. "She could probably just hurl you halfway across the realm the second you inevitably piss her

off.”

Alden laughed, but before he could fire back, Ethan noticed Luna watching them with a soft, amused expression.

“What?” he asked, raising an eyebrow.

She shook her head, her smile lingering. “Nothing. I just... I like this side of you.”

Ethan went still. The warmth that spread through him had nothing to do with magic - just the quiet, unexpected sincerity in her voice. He opened his mouth to answer, but Alden got there first.

“Well,” Alden said with a mischievous grin, “if you like him so much, you can have him. He’s a pain in my ass most days.”

“Shut up,” Ethan said, punching Alden’s arm hard enough to earn an exaggerated yelp.

Luna laughed, the sound spilling out of her as her eyes crinkled, watching the two of them bicker like little kids.

“Alright, alright, clearly I’m not wanted here,” Alden said as he headed for the door. But before he left, he snagged Ethan in a quick headlock and leaned in just enough to whisper, “Don’t mess this up.” He tipped his head toward Luna, winked, and slipped out before Ethan could react.

Ethan stood there for a second, frozen, his face

warming as embarrassment crept in. He tried to brush it off, to focus on the spellwork again under Luna's steady guidance, but Alden's words stayed lodged in his mind.

Don't mess this up.



The evening air was cool, a soft breeze tugging at Ethan's hair as he made his way back to the dorms. His thoughts were still on the day's training - on the steady rhythm of spellwork, on Luna's calm guidance, on how easily she'd helped him focus. He was so caught

up in it that he nearly missed the figure stepping into his path.

"Elara," he said, blinking in surprise. She was alone for once, with no crowd of admirers or friends trailing behind her. "What's up?"

"I've been meaning to catch up with you," Elara said, her tone light but edged with something sharper. "But you've been spending a lot of time with the princess lately."

Ethan frowned, his shoulders tightening. Elara had always been polite, friendly even, but there was something different in her voice now. A hint of contempt? Curiosity

that cut too deep? Whatever it was, it put him on guard.

“We’re working on our project,” Ethan said curtly.

“Oh, the project.” Elara’s voice brightened as she fell into step beside him. “How’s that going? Anything significant yet?”

Ethan glanced at her, wary. “It’s been tough,” he said evenly. “But we’ve made progress.”

“That’s good,” Elara said with a smile before letting out a dramatic sigh. “I wish I’d been paired with someone like you. My partner’s just some random guy from the Realm of Nature. He barely says a word.”

Ethan gave a quiet hum of acknowledgment but kept his gaze ahead, guarding his thoughts carefully. He wasn’t sure how much he should say, or if he should say anything at all. This wasn’t just his project anymore. Luna was part of it too, and what they were uncovering wasn’t something to throw into a casual conversation.

Besides, he still hadn’t told Alden about the Umbra Wraiths. And until he figured out what they were dealing with, he wasn’t planning to.

“I don’t really want to talk about the project right now,” Ethan said after a pause, his tone polite but firm. He offered her an apologetic look.

Elara’s smile faltered, and for a few quiet moments, the only sound between them was the rhythm of their footsteps on the path. Then she spoke again, her voice

softer now, edged with something darker.

“You should be careful,” she said.

Ethan stopped, turning to face her fully. “Careful about what?”

Elara glanced around before looking back at him, her expression tight. “About Luna,” she said, each word deliberate. “There’s something off about her. People say she’s manipulative, that she treats everyone like pieces on a board. She’ll do whatever it takes to come out ahead. She’s... dangerous, Ethan.”

Ethan’s chest tightened at her words. It wasn’t as if he’d never thought the same before - back when he’d first met Luna, he had assumed she was just another arrogant prodigy, someone who looked down on everyone around her. But that was before the long nights of research, before the Wraiths, before she had stood beside him when everything went wrong. He knew better now.

“No,” he said, his voice steady as he met Elara’s gaze. “Luna isn’t like that.”

Elara’s smile was soft, almost sympathetic, but it never reached her eyes. “I just don’t want to see you get hurt, Ethan,” she said quietly. Then she turned and walked away, her footsteps fading into the dark and leaving him standing there with unease coiling tightly in his chest.

As she disappeared into the shadows, Ethan’s thoughts refused to settle. Tension climbed his back like it had a mind of its own, and doubt arrived like that one guest

who never understands when it's time to leave. Was he wrong about Luna? No. He shoved the thought aside. It was just anxiety again, doing what it always did - trying to pull every string it could reach. Not this time.



Under the fading light beside the dorms, Ethan promised himself he would trust what his instincts were telling him - and they told him Luna wasn't the villain.