



Hard As Cake

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Category: Romance, New Adult, Paranormal

Description: Six hunters drag her into the dungeon.
One forbidden monster may be her only way out.

Twenty-year-old Fiadh thought the exalted Order Academy would unlock her magic; instead, she's stuck cleaning up after nobles who view her as a plaything. When a squad of ruthless classmates decides to drag her into the sentient Dungeon, Fiadh sacrifices freedom for the people she loves, even knowing no one who enters the labyrinth returns unscarred... if they return alive.

Deep beneath the academy, amidst dripping stone and lethal traps, waits a creature she's only ever admired in the forbidden monster book she's been studying for ages: a towering, emerald-scaled Naga whose coiled body could crush a man... and whose dark eyes promise a different kind of ruin. Caged by a confinement of his own making, he is everything her human tormentors pretend to be: dangerous, powerful, irresistible.

Forced into tight quarters and a crushing embrace, Fiadh must decide whether to trust the monster she's sworn to fear or the men who are monsters pretending to be human. But each breath she shares with the Naga awakens the truth of what the Order tried to scrub from her soul.

If she chooses the monster... her world might never be the same.

Monstrous kisses, forced proximity, and a happy-for-now ending await in this fast, fun novella set in the Chaos God universe. Perfect for readers who crave monster romance straight to the spice with crushing stakes.

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ChapterOne

FIADH

“Don’t look, Fiadh,” Anna said, emphasizing the fee sound of my name and breathing out the uh like a sigh. “But one of the shitheads just pointed at our table.”

The sounds and sensations of the room buffeted my brain, overwhelming me with stimulus like it always did, drowning out my friend's words for a few moments. Low, muffled hisses and clanks drifted in through the double doors at the far side of the commons, but nearer to me, the air vibrated with sharper sounds: chairs scraping against marble, utensils tapping porcelain, and dozens of overlapping conversations. Aromas of toasted peanuts, tamarind, and fresh lime mingled with the warmth of bodies. The sweet smell of cake filled the air, floating over the aroma of Thai food.

They had cake.

I tore my mind away from the sudden awareness of the cake, focusing on what my friend had just said to me.

“Glitter bombs,” I cursed under my breath. I clenched my fist around my fork, the cool steel edges pressing into my palm, and fixed my gaze on the glossy noodles cooling on my plate. I had been halfway through eating what I assumed was pad thai—no labels marked the dishes that servers ferried out from the unseen kitchens. “Why look at us? The Kings just put on a big enough show that no one should be paying attention to us.”

A few minutes ago one of the Princes, or the shitheads as we liked to call them, had gone up to the Kings table and gotten his ass handed to him. It didn't bode well for us mundanes. Shitheads always took out their anger on those who couldn't fight back and there was no way that Uthred wasn't angry after getting stomped like that.

I lifted the bite up to my mouth, making sure none splattered on the book I had open on the table. They didn't teach us anything useful in class, so I raided the library on a regular basis.

I eyed the cake that was out on the central table.

Dinner first, then I was going to get some. That was the only saving grace of this hellish place. They never skimped on the desserts or restricted portions. There was always an abundance of food. I could take a whole cake if I wanted to, and no one would bat an eye.

I eyed the cake with the hard chocolate frosting and the ring of strawberries along the top and gave the thought some serious consideration. I bet the shell on the outside would crunch when cracked open, revealing a gooey center inside.

I'd rather focus on cake than the fact that the Princes were looking at us.

Being the target of their attention could only lead to bad things.

"I heard something happened to Uthred last night," Anna said, her voice low. Her tone dropped even lower as she leaned into me, practically whispering in my ear. "I heard he was caught with one of the Kings."

I shot her a glance.

"Like, with with?" I asked.

She widened her eyes and nodded.

“That isn’t in ‘Proper Order’,” I whispered back, glancing around to make sure no one was listening to us. We could be punished just for talking about something like that. Two people of the same sex being intimate with each other was punishable by death here, and if anyone overheard us even implying that, especially of a Prince and a King... it would put us at risk.

“They might be looking to use a mundane to help dispel that rumor,” Anna whispered. “You remember what Becky said?”

Disgust rose up in me, and I swallowed it down like bile.

This place was evil.

I didn’t like to think about that, so I focused on the sensations around me.

Sunlight filtered through the towering glass geodesic dome overhead, fracturing into shifting rainbows that slid across dark mahogany tables carved with looping runes, filling the room with a soft, idealistic glow. Students in varied academy uniforms leaned over plates piled high with unlabelled dishes, steam curling around their whispers and casual gossip alike. All the students near me wore different shades of red, the color of the mundanes. The ‘Proper Students’ wore a myriad of different colors, silver, green, violet, or different colors assigned based on their year or their ranking. The end result was a room filled with beautiful colors and beautiful people, all acting as if they hadn’t seen someone be tortured to death in this room when they first got here.

I could feel my heartbeat increase inside my chest and I closed my eyes for a moment, taking a deep breath as I tried to drag my thoughts away from anything that wasn’t a sensation. I failed.

I had known nothing of this realm until the Order Academy brochure arrived in the mail, revealing that people from this world called mine the Mundane because it was bereft of the magic that saturated the Magic Realm like humidity in the tropics. Magic didn't work as well in the Mundane, so to learn it was essential to come here, to this school.

I thought that I was going to learn real magic.

Instead, I learned the meaning of hell.

They are planning to take you into the Dungeon, my familiar, Nibblet, chirped in my mind as she put a small paw on my leg. She was sitting next to me on the bench. Anna, myself, and a few other mundanes who had survived the last Blood Moon were all crowded together in a clump on a few tables this time. There were a lot more empty lunch tables around the room.

I didn't want to think about that either.

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Focusing on the empty lunch tables that used to be filled with first year mundanes wouldn't help me. Panicking about whether or not they were going to take me with them wouldn't help me. Running I knew for a fact wouldn't help me.

There was nowhere to run in a closed off Caldera that they couldn't find me.

I rested my hand on the open book in front of me on the table and looked down at Nibblet. She was about the size of a rabbit but looked like a field mouse and a chinchilla had a love match and played roulette with their genetics. She has huge, fluffy white ears that were almost as big as her body, and a lovely, silky, fluffy tail. I barely got to see her nowadays, as she spent most of her time working in the school farm fields.

"Are you sure?" I asked her.

I knew the room was a bit noisy for her, but she tilted her ears back to the Princes', focusing on their conversation as best she could.

"Careful," Anna murmured, keeping her eyes focused on her plate in front of her. "If they think you're using your familiar to eavesdrop, it will be worse for us."

"How much worse can it get?" I asked.

I shouldn't have said that.

"Don't ask that," Anna whispered, her voice hoarse.

I tightened my grip on the fork, its polished tines imprinting faint crescents in my fingertips. The tremor persisted, so I exhaled, placed the utensil beside the plate, and flattened my palms on the tabletop. Focus on the sensations that so often overwhelmed me. Focus on my breath going in and out. Focus on all the things that were interesting to look at or feel that didn't matter. Cool lacquered oak met my skin, the grain rising in fine ridges beneath a glass-smooth finish. Even the cheapest of the tables were finer than what I had back at home. Along the edges, sterilization runes formed interlocking rings; the wood silent as the sigils waited for the magic to power them, ready to cleanse the surface.

That was the one thing they taught me—how to power other people's spells.

A muted clang of trays echoed from the kitchens beyond the double doors, while nearer at hand, chairs skidded, cutlery chimed, and low voices overlapped beneath the dome's crystalline vault. Warm air carried the scents of tamarind, toasted peanuts, and citrus oil, mingling with the faint bite of ozone from activated spellwork.

I was a glorified battery.

Even with my hands braced against the table, a tremor quivered in my forearms. This was my second year; of the students who had filled my first-year lectures, more than half were dead.

It was made clear to us all during first-year orientation that we were all disposable.

I looked up.

I didn't look at the Prince's table. Their table was on the same level as ours, set apart in the outer ring of tables where all the 'Proper Students' sat, a little fancier with chairs instead of benches, but not much different from the other high-ranking student tables. The only table in the room that was vastly different was the King's table,

which was elevated, raised above the rest of the room on a platform. There should only have been five chairs there, but there were eight now, and only a few of them had Kings in them. I tore my eyes away from them.

Not that they would save me from the Princes.

None of the so-called 'Proper Students' had ever lifted a finger to save a mundane. The Kings and the Princes, only two of whom were actual royalty, served merely as titles for the dungeon-diving crews, ranked by their triumphs in the weekly contests that unfolded on the sprawling, emerald school fields. The first afternoon I witnessed those matches, I stood on the bleachers and watched bodies and spells arc through the air. Their shields cracked like thunder, blades rang against conjured stone, and the sweet reek of scorched turf drifted on the wind. Their power, both physical and magical, rivaled scenes I had only ever believed possible with clever cinematography back in the mundane world.

My admiration dimmed the moment I realized that women were vanishing.

Not all women...only the mundane ones.

I'd noticed but hadn't understood the pattern until Becky, after her first shift in the damp, brine-scented fish hatchery, explained to me in graphic detail what exact type of hell hole this place was. Thanks to her warnings, I'd managed so far to avoid the fate of the others.

Becky had died three days ago, torn apart by a Thutar.

My heart rate jumped again as anxiety dug its claws back into me.

I had to focus on something else.

Some of the monsters around me were attracted to fear.

I rested one palm on the runes carved along the tabletop's edge, their grooves cool beneath my fingertips. Steam coiled from the plates of noodles beside me, mingling with the sharper aromas of citrus polish and sweat clung to the high-vaulted dome shaped room. I glanced over at the volume propped open beside my plate. On the vellum page sprawled an ink illustration of a pulsing mound of flesh, its tentacles flailing, its circular maw lined with needle teeth, the Thutar. Thick strokes of sepia ink suggested the creature's slick hide; tiny cross-hatching hinted at mucus sheen.

I had never set foot inside the Dungeon myself because when I enrolled, women were barred from entry. That rule changed this year, after the Goddess awoke.

I put my hand on the page and flipped it to a different one, a familiar one.

The page I kept coming back to.

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I felt my heart rate calm in my chest as I stared at the long sinewy tail of the monster on the page in front of me. There were four skulls on the page, a clear indication of just how dangerous he was, but even so, when I looked at the strong lines of his body sketched out onto the page, it made everything melt away.

They're planning a dungeon dive, Nibblet said in my mind. They want Uthred to prove himself. I don't know what for, but they... they're coming over here.

That melty calmness solidified back into the jagged edges of terror.

I reached out and took a steak knife from where it rested on the table, sliding it into my lap.

Anna looked at me with an expression I knew far too well. Fear sits on a bed of exhaustion, like a horse forced to run too many miles, stumbling one hoof after the other towards the end. We couldn't run. The school was in a massive caldera, with a fortress built at the only opening to keep us trapped in here. Even if we got out of here, none of us knew how to make a portal to get back to the mundane. The only fate that was left for us was to try to survive here.

Survive long enough to learn enough to find a way out.

"You, mundane, what is your name?" a voice came from behind me.

I hunched my shoulders and I looked back over one of them to see what I feared had come true. The Princes were behind me, standing around our table, and they were all looking at me. They weren't wearing their blue jackets that marked their ranking at

the school. Instead they were dressed in Dungeon diving attire, different types of armor based on their role in the party. I didn't know most of their names; there was only one of them I really paid attention to, one whose exceptional cruelty was whispered about around campus, and he was the only one who had a small crease in his forehead, like he didn't understand what was going on.

Except for Uthred who was dressed like he was going to a party that was both casual and high end at the same time.

He had red sweatpants that had black stripes following the lines of the pockets, zigzagging back and forth, like they were supposed to be designer pants instead of just plain old sweats. He had paired them with a black tank top, and a pair of gold sneakers. He also had a gold chain around his neck.

Uthred towered over the rest of them, a good foot and a half taller than the rest. It was normal for lycans to be big and bulky, but he was the biggest one I'd ever seen, built like he was born to wield an ax and pillage the shores of distant countries. He was tidier than I was used to seeing him, having buzzed his hair and trimmed his normal five o'clock shadow. My stomach dropped at the sight of him.

Uthred had a bad reputation, even for a lycan. That reputation wasn't improved by the fact that he had just challenged one of the Kings and gotten his ass handed to him in front of the entire commons room. Everyone just witnessed his humiliation just a little bit ago.

I suddenly realized someone had asked me a question.

It hadn't been Uthred.

One of the other princes, the shortest one with sandy brown hair and more freckles than was reasonable on a person, was sneering down at me, the smile on his face a

sickening accompaniment to his look of disdain. What had he said? Did he ask my name?

“I’m Fiadh,” I said, hoping that was the right answer to a question I didn’t pay attention to.

“Feeeuh?” he asked, both his eyebrows shooting up. “What kind of dumbass name is that?”

I didn’t respond.

I knew better than to talk back.

In my first month here at the school, I’d seen a ‘Proper Student’ cut their initials in another student’s cheek because they didn’t like the way they spoke to them. Mundanes were never considered ‘Proper Students’. To be a ‘Proper Student’, you had to have been born in the magic realm and grown up in their messed-up school system.

Being imported meant you didn’t matter.

“Look at what she’s reading,” The blond man said as he leaned forward over the table, his cracked lips curling into a twisted grin that showed too many teeth. My eyes flickered over the details of his appearance. His hair was cropped unevenly, as though hacked with a dull blade, and strands of it fell over his pockmarked forehead.

I’d noticed that some of the ‘Proper Students’ didn’t seem to know how, or didn’t care to take care of themselves. They were ragged looking.

The worn leather of the ragged blond man’s vest creaked as he pressed his weight on his scarred, calloused hands, the dirty nails tapping on the open page of the book.

“We have a wannabe monsterfucker.”

I sucked in a harsh breath at the label.

He wasn't wrong.

I'd rather bang the monster on that page than any of the monsters standing in front of me.

“Which one is she dreaming about boning, Rorik?” The redhead to the right said as he crossed his muscular arms, his scarred knuckles ridged and raw from some recent fight. His tangled curls looked stiff, as though they hadn't seen water in weeks, and his hollowed cheeks gave his face a feral, hungry look.

The crusty blond, Rorik, straightened as he dragged the book off the table, hitting me in the shoulder with it as I flinched to the side. I took the opportunity to grab another napkin off the table, dropping it on top of the dirty steak knife I had in my lap. He held it up, and four of the five of them looked at the page that was open.

“This little monsterfucker wants to ride a snake,” Rorik laughed. “Looks like you picked the right one, Uthred.”

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Uthred's face twisted in disgust as he glanced from one to the other.

"There is no point to this," Uthred said, rolling his shoulders as if his own clothing was causing him discomfort. "Leave her alone."

I blinked.

I never, in a million years, thought I would hear Uthred of all people say that. Why would he tell them to leave me alone? From what I'd seen, they were a unified team of shitheads. The thought that Uthred would try to corral in his buddies simply made no sense at all from my understanding of him.

"You're not sounding like yourself, Uthred," the last man said.

I jerked my attention over to him, focusing on his appearance.

The last man had sandy hair and a bony frame, and a perpetual scowl pinched the skin above his brow. The glass filtered sunlight spilled across his coat, revealing a dozen mismatched patches of cracked leather coated in flecks of grease.

Behind him, a spoon rang against a metal bowl, the note echoing off the vaulted stone, jarring my attention and smacking away my thoughts with its sharp sound. I lifted a hand and rubbed my temple, close to my ear.

Rorik tossed my book on the table next to me.

I glanced at the open page.

The monster on the page was gorgeous, a muscular handsome man with the lower body of a giant snake. He was the kind of monster who didn't hide who he was behind the vestiges of humanity. He was a predator, plain and simple.

The Chaos God had made far too many of his monsters beautiful, and the naga was no exception, with hard lines of muscle and deceptively gorgeous faces. Yet at the same time, the men who surrounded me were physically fit and could be considered attractive, but the weight of their attention made my skin crawl.

The only monsters I'd met at this school were the ones who wore the forms of men.

"Well, maybe I've had a spiritual awakening and had a complete change in personality," Uthred said, crossing his arms. "It could happen, buddy."

"My name is Thorne, not buddy," the sandy-haired Thorne said.

"What are the rest of our names?" the short, freckled one asked, his eyebrows narrowing in suspicion.

"Garrick, Rorik, Bram, and Thorne," Uthred said, pointing at each one. "Now what the fuck are we fucking around here for. Let's go to the dungeon."

Garrick put his hand on my upper arm, his fingers wrapping around to dig into my flesh with a painful grip as he dragged me off the bench with no other warning. The steak knife clattered to the ground as I stumbled to keep from falling.

Bram, the redhead with stiff, dirty hair, bent down and picked it up.

"You don't need a knife to have meat for dinner," he grinned at me, showing off the thick yellow coating of teeth that hadn't seen a toothbrush in far too long. He slapped it down on the table next to Anna, who winced. "We'll make sure you're well stuffed

on our dungeon dive.”

“For fucks sake, Bram, stop being so gross,” Uthred’s mouth twisted in disgust.

“This is for you, Uthred,” Rorik muttered. “You’re the one who started this whole thing. We’re just trying to remind you what you really love in life.”

Uthred hesitated, looking at him.

“Fine,” he said. “But no one hurts the girl.”

Nibblet crouched, as if she were about to jump over to me.

“Nibblet, stay here!” I gasped out, panic rushing through me.

But you need me, she said, hesitating as her huge ears flicked back and forth.

“I need you to stay alive,” I whispered.

Chapter Two

FIADH

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“Bring the familiar, she’d make a great snack for your new boyfriend,” Bram laughed. “In fact, why don’t we bring your friend too?”

He was looking at Anna.

Panic slashed through me. They were going to drag my friend along. I knew going into the Dungeon would be a death sentence, or worse, I could end up in the fish hatchery. I couldn’t subject Anna to that, not when I could save her.

Not when I could save them both.

I had to get these guys away from them. I had to use the lycan’s instincts against him.

“Stay here!” I hissed at my friend and my familiar as I yanked my arm free from Garrick’s grasp.

There was one thing I could do, one thing that would ensure they would leave my two best friends behind.

I bolted, running for the door.

I heard the small gasp of delight from behind me, and the thud of footsteps chasing after me. I slammed into the double doors, shoving through them to stumble out into the bright sunlight outside.

“Don’t run,” Uthred said, his deep voice rumbling over me as he caught up to me.

“Makes me feel weird.”

What a strange thing for a lycan to say. Of course, it made him feel weird. Running triggered the instinct for him to chase. It was one of the safety tips passed down from the mundanes who managed to survive the first few years - don't run from lycans, don't steal from dragons, and never, ever sleep with an angel. Angels had dangerdicks.

Better to avoid the whole lot of them, but that wasn't a choice mundanes could make.

"You're a lycan," I glared at him before I remembered I wasn't supposed to do that. I dropped my gaze back down to the ground in front of me, slowing to a walk.

Something slammed into the back of me, and I stumbled forward off balance.

My arms pinwheeled as I stumbled, trying to keep my balance as my back radiated pain.

Then a greasy hand wrapped around the back of my neck and my collarbone, pinching against my skin as it yanked me backwards. My spine ached from the sudden change in direction, but I couldn't focus on that as an arm wrapped around my neck and squeezed. I choked against the sudden pressure and the arm relaxed.

I looked up to see Garrick grinning down at me.

I smiled back at him, an instinctual panic reaction.

I'd learned that it was normal for me to smile when I was afraid, especially if the source of a fear was a man.

I reached up and pushed his arm off, trying to slide out of his grip, and his grin grew wider, more of a baring of teeth than anything resembling a friendly facial expression. He hooked his elbow around my neck to yank me close to him again.

Uthred reached out and grabbed Garrik's wrist, twisting and pinching it to force his hand open and off of me. Garrick's upper body bent with the motion, twisting with his arm to keep it from breaking in Uthred's grasp.

"Ow! Uthred! Stop!" Garrik said.

"No one touches her!" Uthred snapped as the others caught up.

My heart pounded in my chest as my brain flip flopped around my intense confusion. I'd seen Uthred beat a mundane guy to death in my first year here. He was not, and had never been, the type to protect a mundane.

Uthred twisted a little harder, and a small pop echoed, the distinctive sound of a joint coming out of position. Garrick let out a scream, and Uthred let go of his hand. Garrick pulled it against his chest, holding it with his other hand as he backed away from Uthred.

Maybe he just had beef with the other shitheads and was using me as an excuse.

"Enough messing around," Thorn said. "We made a big enough scene already. Let's get to the dungeon."

I kept quiet. I didn't want any of them to focus on me. I'd seen that scenario play out enough times where one 'Proper Student' gets hurt by another, so they turn on the nearest mundane who can't fight back. Just because Uthred was defending me now, didn't mean he would defend me later. I needed to get away from Garrick before he cast a healing spell on his hand and then lashed out at me.

I turned and headed towards the Dungeon, my arms wrapping around me as I strode towards my doom.

“You don’t have to come with us,” Uthred said as he caught up with me.

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“I like that,” a new voice said. “No one should be forced to do things they don’t want to do.”

I looked back over my shoulder to see that a new guy had just jogged up. He was wearing the violet jacket that marked him as on the same level as the Kings. Since he wasn’t one of their team, that meant he had to be one of the nobles’ brats. He had white, crystalline skin, as if it should sparkle in the sunshine or instantly burst into flames, but it did neither. His eyes had jet black irises, but other than that, they were pretty normal-looking. He had the round ears of a human, black hair that was trimmed neatly with a French crop that was a little longer on top with shorter sides. He was shorter than Uthred, the top of his head coming just under Uthred’s chin, as if he would fit there perfectly in a snuggle.

I narrowed my eyes at the thought, glancing back and forth between them.

“Are you coming with us to the dungeon, Rian?” Uthred asked him.

“Oh yes, if that’s alright with you,” Rian smiled up at Uthred, all sunshine and innocence, as if Uthred was where the sun began and the darkness ended. “I’d love to see how this whole thing plays out. I believe your group has nefarious intent.”

I narrowed my eyes as I wrenched my gaze back in front of me. These guys were messing with me. I knew why they were taking me into the Dungeon. They knew I knew why they were taking me there. All the talk of not hurting me and nefarious intent was designed to mess with my head.

They were fucking with my head before they fucked with me.

“You won’t break me,” I said. “I know what you do, and you won’t break me.”

“Ah, okay,” Uthred said. “Sounds like a plan.”

I looked back over my shoulder to see him giving me a thumbs up. The gesture was so strange and yet not, it took me a minute to realize why it was so weird. The students who grew up in this world didn’t make that gesture. Putting your thumbs up was something that came from the mundane. A ‘Proper Student’ like Uthred would never mimic a lower-class mundane gesture.

The confusion of that observation faded as we approached the entrance to the dungeon. There was a huge new barricade, a giant wall placed between us and the opening, with a small gate at the bottom. It wasn’t surprising that they repaired the damage so quickly. They built things faster here, using magic that they wouldn’t teach to us lowly mundanes. The structures for the arena battles and the Blood Moons usually went up within the course of a day.

Soldiers were on top of the wall, holding crossbows, all looking down at the entrance.

“Going in again, Princes?” a tired-looking soldier asked as we approached the gate. His eyes fell on me and his chin dipped down towards his chest, his shoulders slumping with a minor expression of guilt. “Another one?”

Even the soldiers knew what was happening here.

“Is there a problem with that?” Bram asked.

The soldier looked from one to the other of them before shaking his head.

“No, go in,” he said. Then he raised his voice. “We have entry!”

They knew what was happening here, and they weren't going to stop it. They hadn't stopped what happened to the women who were brought before me. They weren't going to save me. It wasn't surprising. Mundanes learned quickly to avoid the Order Army encampment as well. They weren't any better than the beasts that this place labeled 'Proper Students'.

I clenched my fists down at my sides, my fingernails biting into my palms.

Soldiers boxed us in as we approached the gate, their spears all pointing at our backs. The gate clanked open, and we went through. We crossed the barren dirt ground from the wall to the jagged maw of the dungeon. It still looked a bit like an animal's mouth. I glanced over at Uthred out of the corner of my eyes and then picked up the pace, walking faster as I strode into the dungeon.

The entrance was different from the drawings in my books. Most of the time, it was supposed to be dirt. Every so often, when the Dungeon wanted to draw more people in, it was a lush entryway filled with valuable herbs.

But it was neither of these.

The ground and walls were all made out of smooth marble slabs, interspersed by pristine columns.

Uthred rushed past me and down the hallway.

"Uthred!" someone shouted from behind me. "The traps! Duck!"

Uthred threw himself down to the ground. A large blade whooshed in the air above his head, embedding in the wall next to him. I pressed my lips together to hold back my disappointment and excitement.

Maybe I could survive this.

Maybe the Dungeon would kill them all before they tortured me.

“What are you doing?” Bram asked as we all caught up with him. “You know the Ordered section traps. They are always the same. They never change.”

“The Ordered section?” Uthred asked. “There is an Ordered section?”

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Something was seriously wrong with Uthred. He had done hundreds of Dungeon dives. He would have had to become a minor expert on how to survive in this place for his group to reach the rank of Prince. His not recognizing one of the sections of the Dungeon was unthinkable.

Not that I knew what an Ordered section was. I'd never heard of it before.

"You really must have fried your brain with..." Rorik's eyes slid over to me before he continued. "Whatever you were doing last night. Come on, I'll lead the way."

Uthred got to his feet. Rorik edged to the opposite side of the wall, walking along it with his back pressed against it. Then he ducked and crawled forward. After that, he made a sharp diagonal across the floor and jumped over a section.

We all followed after him, copying his movements.

He eventually stopped in an area that was solid rock, a nice brown granite rather than the smooth white marble of the hallway behind us. Uthred stopped and put his hand on the wall, so I walked past him after the group.

"Are you there?" Uthred whispered from behind me.

"Who are you talking to?" Rorik asked.

"The Dungeon," he said.

My skin crawled, like spiders were running along my flesh under the fabric of my

school jacket. Rule forty-two: don't attract the Dungeon's attention. This place was a shifting malevolent sentience, a behemoth made up of shifting rooms and manifested monsters.

Rorik's eyes widened, and he took a step back from Uthred.

"Are you suicidal? Don't get its attention!" he hissed. "This only works because it doesn't pay attention to us. It's too busy with the Goddess spreading her Order within it."

"Sure, I'll just take a minute to get myself together," Uthred said. Then he closed his eyes.

I didn't realize how fascinated I'd been with him until fingers closed around my arm, squeezing hard to layer new bruises over the old. Garrick yanked me backwards, dragging me away from Uthred. He threw me, and my back slammed into the wall, knocking my breath out of me as my skull cracked against the marble, sending a sharp pain through my skull. His hand went around my throat, one of his dirty fingernails scraping against my jaw.

"You'll be a good girl," he sneered.

This time I didn't smile in response, as my anger overwhelmed my fear. He didn't get to say that to me. He didn't get to take an expression of love and twist it into one of hate.

They were going to torture me anyway. My friends were safe.

I might as well end this quicker by fighting back.

"Fuck you," I gasped out.

I swung one of my clenched fists at his face.

Garrick raised his forearm, blocking the blow with a laugh. Then he slapped me across the face and squeezed so hard that black spots floated in my vision. I writhed in his grip, my own fingernails clawing at his forearm before he suddenly relaxed his grip, letting the air flow back into me.

Panic and fear rushed over my anger, drawing it out, and tears pricked at the corners of my eyes. I knew this was going to happen. I knew this was what they did to the women they brought in here.

Garrick's free hand dove down and lifted up the bottom edge of my skirt. His filthy fingernails scraped the inside of my thigh as he grabbed my underwear.

"That isn't in Proper Order," Rian said, his voice soft as he put a hand on Garrick's shoulder.

My relief at the interruption faded just as quickly as it arrived, vanishing as Garrick's fingernails dug into the skin over my pubic bone.

"You can have a turn next," Garrick sneered at him before he yanked hard, and I heard the tear of fabric as he ripped away the last of my meager protections, yanking out several of my hairs with it.

Rian's fingers dug into Garrick's shoulder, and he jerked him back. Garrick let go of my throat as his eyes widened in surprise, and he staggered backwards. I sucked in air, staying where I was pressed against the wall, eyeing the two men.

What was Rian's game?

"I said that isn't in Proper Order," Rian said, his voice harsher.

“Proper Order is that the strong take what they want and the weak do what they must to survive,” Garrick snapped at him as he tried to shrug off the other man’s grip.

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“What are you doing?” Thorn demanded from behind Garrick.

Beyond the two men, I could see Uthred open his eyes.

“He’s talking to the dungeon,” Rian offered as he walked back towards the other men, dragging Garrick with him.

I shot him a glance, my brow furrowing.

“What he said?” Uthred lifted an eyebrow at Rian, his forehead wrinkling.

“You are so weird today,” Garrick muttered.

“Come on, let’s get through the Goblin chief so we can get to a safe room,” Thorn said.

“How do you know that is up ahead?” Uthred asked.

“Because the Ordered sections are anchoring parts of the Dungeon so it can’t move around,” Thorn replied, frowning at Uthred. “Everyone knows this. You know this.”

Everyone was just ignoring me. I sidled to the side, eying back the way we came. Maybe I could run. I glanced back over at Uthred. If I ran, he would chase me. If I got away, these guys would hunt me down, and if they did, they might find me with my friends again and take them too. My entire body stiffened as I warred with my desire to run, to survive.

If I ran, more people would get hurt.

If I fought, they would hurt me worse than they already planned.

I swallowed against the taste of bile in my own mouth.

“I know nothing,” Uthred replied. “And I do a lot with it.”

“You know what, just watch the girl,” Thorn said. “Keep her alive during the fight.”

“I can do that,” Uthred said.

Thorn took a few steps over to me, and I shrank back. He reached out and grabbed me by the back of the neck and shoved me. I stumbled towards, crashing into Uthred as he reached out to grab my elbows to steady me.

“What did I say about touching her?” Uthred growled.

“For Order’s sake, Uthred, what is wrong with you?” Thorn shook his head and then turned and walked off down the dungeon. The others followed after him. Uthred let go of my elbows and stepped back.

I wanted the answer to that question, too. Uthred had been at this school for years. He had a clear reputation for being an active participant in the types of ‘activities’ groups of guys at this school participated in. This whole savior act he was pulling had to have another purpose. There was no way I was going to believe he actually wanted to protect me.

“You can just go,” Uthred said.

Those words had to be a trick, some sort of trap.

Was this his game? To act all kind and protective so he could mock me for trusting him later?

“I’m not stupid,” I said. “I’m not going to run off so that you can use that as an excuse. There is no pretending this is anything but what it is. You don’t get to lie to yourself about this.”

“Lying to oneself is not Proper Order,” Rian said. “It is my main guideline.”

I frowned at him, not understanding him at all, then turned and headed after the others.

“I’m not trying to lie to myself,” Uthred said behind me. “I don’t really know what is going on. You want to enlighten me?”

“The rest of your group intends to harm that woman,” Rian said. “I think you know that, but you are lying to yourself about it because it is easier to believe that you would be wrong than that they would be that evil.”

I snorted in disgust and picked up my pace so I didn’t have to listen to the two of them talk. I had heard first-hand from Becky that Uthred was one of the bad ones. I knew all about the mundanes he had killed. I knew what he and his friends did to Abigale.

We walked into a cavern.

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I immediately sidled to the side, pressing myself up against the wall to stay out of the fight. I might not be running from these guys and my fate, but that didn't mean I was going to help them fight the monsters in here.

The other four were already in a fight with the biggest goblin I'd ever seen. He was about twenty feet tall, and his legs looked like their only purpose was to move him from one seated position to another. He did just that, standing up and toddling forward before sitting back down with a heavy thump that shook the room, causing Thorn to stumble.

Uthred came over to join me.

"You're so sick," I said.

"How am I sick, Fiadh?" he asked.

Disgust welled in me. I knew I should keep my mouth shut to avoid triggering whatever mental illness these guys had. I should be meek, submissive, and non-confrontational. I couldn't make them face themselves because they would just take it out on me.

But I couldn't stay silent.

"You five keep bringing mundane women in here so that you can feed them to the fish hatchery," I said, not looking at him. "Not everyone comes out of here after going in with you. The ones that do say that they just did everything you asked of them. I know what you are going to do to me. Please don't make me say it."

“Oh shit,” Uthred said, stepping back as his eyebrows raised in surprise.

“What is the fish hatchery?” Rian asked.

I didn’t listen to Uthred’s answer. I couldn’t stand to hear the horror of what I already knew.

“That isn’t in proper order,” Rian frowned. “That place must be destroyed.”

“Already did that,” Uthred gave him a thumbs up.

Again with that mundane gesture. Everyone knew that the fish hatchery had been destroyed. It was how Becky died. Everyone knew who was responsible, and it sure as heck wasn’t Uthred.

“You didn’t do that at all,” I snapped, anger rushing through me that this shithead would take credit for the work of someone else. “The God of Chaos did.”

Bram rushed around the back of the massive goblin and darted to cut its hamstrings. It let out a huge bellow and swung its arm backwards, catching him and sending him flying across the room.

“Get it together, Bram!” Rorik yelled. “This is a starter boss!”

“Do they do this a lot?” Uthred asked. “Attack women as a group?”

“You took my friend Abigale the first week she was here. She was in the fish hatchery when it...” I sucked in a sharp breath as I fought against my rising hatred. She had been there for a few months. “I don’t know where she is now.”

“I’m pretty sure she is in the dungeon then,” Uthred said. “I got them out before I

smited that place.”

Uthred was insane.

“The God of Chaos did the smiting,” I frowned. “That is what everyone is saying.”

Uthred let out a sigh.

“Hey, Fiadh,” he said. “I just want to let you know that I’m going to kill all of them.”

“What?” I asked.

“Not your friend Abigale. Sorry, I really need to be more specific sometimes. Hey, nice to meet you again, I’m not Uthred,” Uthred said. “I’m... let's just say I’m not Uthred.”

“What?” I repeated.

“I mean, I know that is like crazy to hear, but why fight it at this point?” Uthred shrugged. “I’m not really good at making things better through kindness, I might as well destroy the things that deserve to be destroyed.”

“Are you actually... you’re messing with me?” I asked.

Of course, he was messing with me.

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The Goblin boss let out a scream as Rorik burned off his ear with a blast of fire.

“I can confirm that there is no Uthred here,” Rian said.

I just stared at him, and he smiled back at me with that warm, friendly expression.

The Goblin boss screamed again, this time the tone was filled with existential terror.

“You know what, it doesn’t matter. I need to get Fiadh out of here. Fiadh, you need to go have fun,” Uthred said. “That’s apparently what my journey is about right now, so why don’t you do that?”

“This isn’t fun for me,” I crossed my arms. “What you guys plan to do will hurt me. It is severe torture to do what you’re planning on doing.”

Rape was torture. It wasn’t love, it wasn’t sexual aggression, it wasn’t a lack of control or any bullshit like that. It was pain and humiliation inflicted on another person for the sake of the torturer’s amusement and personal gratification. It was hate.

I heard Bram laugh, and there was a huge thud.

I turned and saw the Goblin boss lying on its back.

“We’re out of time,” Uthred said. “If you could go anywhere in the dungeon and be safe, where would you go? What does fun look like to you?”

I didn't understand his questions. I didn't understand any of this. There wasn't anywhere to go. This school was a prison, this Dungeon was a trap, and these men were monsters.

"Fun?" I sneered at him. "I'd rather fuck a naga than have fun with you."

"Well, alright, Dungeon, don't hurt her even if she says dumb shit but give her what she wants otherwise," Uthred said. "Fiadh, make sure you express your desires out loud, the Dungeon doesn't know what you want if you don't tell it."

"I don't understand anything you're saying," I said.

"Let's go, Uthred!" Thorn called out. "It's time to celebrate in the safe room."

"Have fun!" Uthred said with a smile. "Know that they are already dead."

Then he reached out with one hand and pushed me.

I stumbled backwards, but the floor wasn't there to steady me. My feet flailed as I tipped backwards into nothing. The last sight I saw was Uthred's maniacal smile as he stared down at me from the opening of a hole, an opening that grew farther and farther away as I fell into darkness.

ChapterThree

FIADH

I woke up to a shifting, sliding pressure between my legs.

I let out a soft groan, feeling dampness against my mouth. I licked my lips, tasting my own spit and something else. I breathed in the scent through my mouth, tasting it as

much as smelling it, the scent and flavor of wild honeycomb spilled over fresh-baked bread. I opened my eyes, seeing at first only darkness. Then the sight of moss on the walls, glowing with a soft turquoise light, not enough to make much out, but vague curving shapes that I had trouble making sense of. It looked like there were curving tree trunks sloping around me, catching the edges of the light over smooth curved surfaces. Had I fallen into a pile of debris?

I lay there, taking in the sensations of my body.

Nothing hurt from what I could tell initially.

The surface under my face was soft and pliable, warm to the touch. My whole body lay plastered on some sort of cylindrical length, my knees hanging down on either side of it. My skirt had ridden up around my hips, my bare thighs in full contact with the warm log I lay on top of. My feet brushing against another level down below that wasn't the hard surface of the floor. My entire belly and chest, where I lay on the log, were warm. The air against my back was cold.

I wiggled my toes, and my shoes moved against the pliable surface down below.

The surface beneath my dangling feet twitched.

A stab of adrenaline rushed through me, and my entire body tensed. I added the clues together - the warmth, the smell, the fact that the surface my head lay upon was lifting up and then down, ever so slightly, in a rhythmic, breathing pattern.

I wasn't lying in a pile of debris.

I was on top of something living.

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I took a slow, deep breath, resisting the urge to panic. Fear was a trigger for predators. I already knew that it was important not to run or panic in front of the monsters that roamed the surface of the school; the same had to hold true for the ones beneath its surface.

Even if I was draped on top of a living creature that felt much larger than me, it hadn't hurt me yet. Either it didn't feel like it or it was asleep.

If it was asleep, the worst thing I could do was thrash about and wake it up.

I lifted my hand and put it next to my face. I could feel the steady thrum of a heartbeat through my palm, and I slid it up, feeling the ridges of muscle that felt... familiar. I hadn't come to this school as a blushing innocent. When I was twelve I'd gotten suspended for giving blowjobs out under the bleachers. The high school boy whom I was caught giving them to wasn't punished. When I told them what else I'd done with him, my parents had sent me to a school for troubled youth which ended up being a place for me to meet more boys who told me that was the best way to show my love for them. When I turned eighteen and finally got to go home, I'd been told to pack my things and get out.

I had no skills, no idea of where to go, no good idea of how to support myself.

The only thing I had was the pamphlet for this school and a willingness to try anything. I'd performed the ceremony and summoned my familiar. I made the Bond and got into this school.

Only to find out it was just as bad as the mundane I'd left behind.

I wasn't an innocent, so when my sliding hand found the curve of strong pectorals, I knew exactly what I was touching.

I was lying on top of a man, not a monster.

There was a deep groan in the darkness, the rumbling echo of masculinity I could hear deep in his chest from where my ear was pressed against bare flesh.

I pushed up, both my hands on his abdomen. As I did, my lower body slid up as well, my clit dragging along the soft, rough flesh that lay between my legs. Flesh that was textured with leathery scales. I gasped as heat bloomed between my legs, a sudden wetness of desire that turned my slide into a glide.

More facts trickled from my subconscious mind to my conscious mind.

The upper body of a man, but what lay between my legs wasn't the hips and legs of a man. I was sitting on top of something thick and strong, like a huge muscle that pulsed with a strength made to crush and devour.

Excitement and terror slammed into me, conflicting emotions that pummeled each other to see which would rise to the top, all the while my heart pounded in my ears and I wondered if maybe... just maybe... I was touching the monster from my book.

I should climb off of him and sneak away.

Instead, I shifted my hips again, my eyes fluttering as they rolled upwards and I let out a soft gasp to accent the pleasure I shouldn't be taking.

Large hands settled around my waist, stopping my movement, holding me where I was, straddling the body of a monster.

“Human,” a deep voice growled from the darkness.

“Fuck me,” I cursed under my breath.

ChapterFour

TYPHON

I awoke from my mating hibernation early.

The soft thud of something falling on me was the first sensation that dragged me from the depths of my slumber. My hibernation wasn't done, and I fought the intrusion even as the soft scent trickled over me, tickling me back into the shallow levels of awareness. The scent was intoxicating, clawing at the edges of my mating rut.

Female.

Desire woke me, its harsh edges bringing me closer to a waking state. I'd sealed myself in my den to avoid this, to avoid the females of my kind. I'd planned to hibernate through this rut, avoiding the torture that the males of my kind were subjected to by our raging needs. I wasn't ready to pursue a mate of my kind and commit myself to the type of life that would follow afterwards.

So I sealed myself away so I would have more time.

Someone had broken in.

I groaned as a soft hand slid up over my abdomen and pecs, feeling out the strength of my upper body. The intoxicating smell of her arousal filled the air, coiling around my mind, dragging me from the last vestiges of my slumber as her body shifted on top of me, rubbing against my swelling sack as the female attempted to tease my

length free in my slumber.

I reached up to still her movements, my fingers wrapping around a waist that squished slightly under my fingers, soft like a pillow. There was something strange about it, and as I felt the warmth of her thighs wrapping around me, gripping me with a sensation I'd never felt before. This wasn't the wrap of a female naga coming to violate me in my sleep.

This was someone far more delicate, more vulnerable.

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“Human,” I growled out, identifying the intruder who straddled me, pressing her wet opening against the pulsing heat of my sack’s slit.

“Fuck me,” she whispered.

I tensed my entire body as I gripped her, using every inch of my self control to hold my slit closed against the ache of my primal need.

Why had a human crept into my chamber? Why had a human climbed on top of me and rubbed herself against me, calling me from mating hibernation? This wasn’t a thing that humans did. Humans ran away or fought. Humans tried to kill me. Humans were the constant force of evil, the enemies that wandered the halls of my home. They were to be hunted, their corpses fed to the Dungeon.

The pulsing need in my sack paired with the intoxicating smell in the air added a new detail to my knowledge of what humans were for.

Humans could be fucked.

“Why?” I hissed.

ChapterFive

FIADH

I could feel the prick of his claws around my waist, just enough to let me know they were there but not enough to hurt.

The word ‘why?’ hung in the air between us, a question that pulled my stuttering mind over the short sequence of our communications. He said human, I said fuck me, he said why.

He said Why.

There was something swelling between my legs. I could feel it, hotter than the tail my legs were wrapped around, a focal point of heat that was pressing against my opening, pushing up against my lower lips to give a firm pressure. He was holding me there against it.

My next words caught in my mouth, and I held them there, tasting them, rolling them around as I weighed them against the total sum of my experiences, against the desire that had caused me to turn back to that page over and over again. I weighed them against the shame I had felt when one of those assholes had called me a wannabe monsterfucker, shame that came because it was true, shame I knew I didn’t need to feel, but couldn’t quite escape.

The only options at the school were monsters.

I stared at that page in the book because the idea of being with a monster who showed who he was on the outside called to me. I’d rather be a monsterfucker than a woman who settled for a partner who pretended to be a man so that he could hurt me.

I opened my mouth to let the words out.

“Why not?” I asked him.

His thumbs were over my hipbones, and one of them began to move, tracing a circle around the edge of it, shifting the fabric as the gentle touch was fuel on the flames of my desire.

“I am in my mating cycle,” came the low voice from the darkness. “I will rut you until I am satiated.”

Out of the pot and into the fire.

The urgent heat between my legs was ready to ignite.

“Is that a promise?” I asked, barely believing the words coming out of my own mouth.

I heard him suck in a harsh breath and the pressure between my legs increased. I shifted my hips, rolling them forward to press my nub against it, to rock myself into the pressure. Pleasure spiked through me, and I pulled in my own sharp gasp.

“You can still leave,” he growled as his hands tensed around my waist.

He was willing to let me go?

The thought shifted my perception of the situation. Yes, I was clearly hot for him, that was apparent from my inappropriate behavior, but at the same time, there had been the added element of the fact that part of me was afraid for my life. If he wanted to bone me, maybe he wouldn’t off me.

Except he just said I could leave.

He wanted me.

The Princes didn’t want me; they wanted to hurt me. They wanted to use me, to use my body for their amusement, to torture me so that they could protect one of their own. They didn’t care about what I wanted. If I ran from them, they wouldn’t let me go. They would have hunted me down and hurt everyone around me to teach me a

lesson.

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This monster wanted me, and he was willing to let me go.

Except he also said he was going to rut me like a wild beast. If I stayed instead of leaving, what was I committing to?

“Will you let me go after if I stay?” I asked, just to clarify.

“Yes,” he replied, his voice as dark as the shadows that surrounded us.

I swallowed and rocked my hips, more deliberately this time. I slid over the raised mound between my legs, dragging my wet lips against it.

He let out a low hiss, his hands relaxing and tightening on my hips, both of his thumbs trailing circles around my hipbones. I couldn't see his face in the darkness. I couldn't see what was pressing up against me in between my legs.

I didn't know what I was getting into. The book didn't detail Naga anatomy.

I didn't care.

I hadn't hooked up with anyone at this school because of what Becky told me about the fish hatchery. I knew the danger that came with thinking I could fall in love with a 'Proper Student'. We were nothing to them. Nothing but toys to be used and discarded.

I knew I wasn't anything to this naga. He didn't know me. He wasn't in love with me. I was just some woman who fell on top of him and started dry humping him in the

darkness. This could be a one-night thing, just a fantasy for me to claim for myself, something to hold on to.

Someone to make me forget the real horrors of the world.

“If you keep moving, I will penetrate you,” he said.

“Do it,” I said, sliding myself against him again, rocking with the urgency of my own need to have something that I chose, something for myself.

“No,” he hissed.

Then I felt something wrap around my waist, thick and warm like his body, rough and textured. It was his tail. He lifted me up, hoisting me up in the air like I weighed nothing.

“First, I will eat you,” he growled.

My delusions of monsterfuckery shattered against the sudden reality of his words. Eat me? Of course, he would eat me. He was a Dungeon monster! Here I was thinking I was about to get railed, and instead I was faced with the reality of what would actually happen if you ran up to an apex predator and rubbed on it.

I was going to get devoured.

“Please don’t eat me,” I squeaked out like a mouse, and his coils tightened around my waist.

ChapterSix

TYPHON

My face was inches from the junction of her legs when her words penetrated the haze of my rut. Even as the lust consumed me, I paused. I wanted more than anything to taste her, to lick her slit and cover my scent receptors in her intoxicating aroma. I wanted to feel her shudder. I had assumed that her kind were similar to my own, where the female would need to be aroused and coaxed by my mouth to minimize my chance of sustaining damage.

But she didn't want me to.

"No?" I shuddered with the effort of holding myself back.

"I don't want to die," she cried out, thrashing in my grip. I resisted the urge to tighten, and instead, I shifted my bulk, creating a space in the center of my coils. I set her down carefully so that her feet touched the ground and withdrew, releasing her completely.

I didn't know anything about human anatomy other than the glimpses I got of their innards when I tore them apart or squeezed so hard they popped. Those were all males, though. The humans didn't let females into the Dungeon until recently, something the Orcs had gotten into an excited frenzy about. The last time I stopped by to visit Gorasha Ironfang's clan, they had been in a tizzy coming up with plans to separate the females from the groups and spirit them away. They had a small human female with them already who appeared to be enthusiastically involved in the plans.

Even with my limited knowledge, the thought that I could kill a human by licking them surprised me.

"You will die if I lick you?" I asked.

"Lick me?" she said.

“Between your legs,” I clarified.

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The haze of my rut was clawing at my mind, but I had weathered enough of my rut cycles alone that I was used to it. I could control myself. At least, I knew I could as long as I wasn't actively mating. I hadn't done that yet, so I didn't know what it would be like once I was actually inside a female.

"Ooooooooooh," she sighed out. "Cheese and rice, you meant you would give me head. No, I won't die if you lick me. Unless you have venom or something like that? Or barbs?"

.

"I am not a female," I said. "Mating with me will not amputate you."

Saying those words out loud broke fully through the haze of my lust. I couldn't do this. I couldn't give in to the mating urge after so long of keeping myself safe.

"Amputate?" she said, her voice high-pitched and squeaky. It made me want to wrap myself around her, and I satiated that urge simply by circling her, coiling on top of myself as I spun around her, inching closer to her.

I gritted my teeth.

I needed to let her go. I needed to find how she snuck into my den and close up the hole.

"Yes," I hissed. "You are female, are you not? You snuck in here to capture me in my rut and sever my manhood with your nether teeth."

The sound that burst from her was so bright and loud that it startled me.

She was... laughing?

“WHAT?” she shrieked.

“You are laughing?” I asked, rearing back, lifting my body up in the air as I stared down at her. She had doubled over in the center of my coils, her arms wrapped around her soft middle. She was pleasant-looking for a biped, more of an even tube of flesh that demonstrated good health in a naga.

“I don’t have TEETH down there!” she cackled. Then suddenly she straightened, her laughter dying down as her tone sobered. “Wait, are you saying female naga can amputate... body parts... with their... with their...”

She sucked in a deep breath.

“Mating is dangerous for males,” I said. “Is it not that way for humans?”

“Human females are often smaller and weaker than human males. I mean, there are variances in genetics and physical training, but on average, we are significantly weaker. If human males are raised stupid or listen to stupid people,” she grimaced. “They end up thinking they have the right to mate with females whether the females want to or not, and then they hurt them. Some of them will do that to other males as well if they can.”

“This is the natural state?” I asked.

“No, not at all,” she shook her head. “Human males are perfectly wonderful if they grow up in environments that teach them to be loving. The harm comes when they are led to believe things that aren’t true, like believing they are better than women or that

physical strength gives them the right to control others..”

“Naga females are raised to believe they have the right to maim,” I said, recalling what my mother had taught me. “They don’t have to do so to procreate.”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” the human female said.

“Why are you sorry?” I asked her.

“I’m sorry that you’ve been afraid that mating would hurt you,” she said. She reached out and set a hand on one of my coils. I continued to move around her, allowing my tail to slide under her hand. She left it there, her fingers spreading out to stroke along my tail. “I am sorry I laughed at you.”

“I don’t require your apology,” I said. She hadn’t done anything wrong.

She lifted her hand up, and I missed her touch, wishing she would place her palm back down against me. I shifted a little closer, coiling in on her so that my bulk was mere inches away from touching her. My flesh burned for her. She was not of my kind.

She was safe.

“What do you require?” she asked, her voice breathless.

“For you to leave,” I said.

She sucked in a harsh breath.

“Or for you to let me taste you,” I finished. “To let me rut inside your toothless cavern.”

“Well, when you put it that way,” she said.

ChapterSeven

FIADH

“I would very much like you to lick me,” I said.

I was up in the air so fast I didn't understand what happened. He was so quick, striking like a viper. His tail was around my waist, suspending me in the air again, his hands on the inside of my thighs, spreading them. Then his face was there, breathing against my mound of hair, his own hair tickling against my sensitive flesh. I reached down to touch his head, to feel the thick hair that I knew would be there. The drawing from my book showed a monster whose upper body was pure humanoid, having hair and facial hair just like I would expect from a human being. The book said it was to allow them to hide the danger. Their females would appear as a topless woman, naked and vulnerable, begging for help. Dungeon divers would be lured in close, unaware of the bulk of the monster that hid in the shadows.

All thoughts of the pages of my book faded as he dragged his tongue along my slit.

I moaned and gasped.

“Yes?” he murmured, his voice muffled by my skirt, which had flipped up over his head.

“Keep going!” I said.

He licked again, slow and deliberate, teasing me as his tongue wove in between my folds, exploring the nooks and crannies of my orchid, circling the nub of my pleasure. I gasped and rocked against him, my fingers tightening in his hair as I pressed myself against him.

He devoured me, chasing the swansong of my pleasure, following the serenade of my cries like they were a golden pathway leading towards treasure. His tongue stroked and dipped, sliding into me, ripping up and over me, slathering me with his unrepentant hunger. My thighs quaked against the sides of his head, my whole body shaking as I crunched forward, cascading towards a peak of quivering emptiness, a crest of need that demanded to be filled.

“Delicious,” he murmured as he withdrew his tongue.

Then his arms were around me, and the wet mess between my legs was sliding down his ripped abdominals, sliding down to rest against the bulge that was right where I needed it to be.

“Bring me forth,” he said.

I let out a moan and rocked my hips, feeling the tantalizing press of my twitching nub against the mound of his desire. Something shifted between my legs, flesh parting. I felt the press of the head of him against my opening. I rocked against it, feeling something else slide forward, slick and wet, between my lower lips.

I reached down to feel with my fingertips, tracing the thick shape.

The two thick shapes.

“Two?” I gasped.

“I am unmated,” he said. “Completely unsevered.”

“Lucky me,” I chuckled, rocking my hips against the tip of his lower member, the other one sliding in between his body and mine, a thick rod to rub against.

His arm tightened around me.

Then I was on my back, the thick pad of his tail under my spine, his body over me, his hips in between my thighs, the head of one of his maleness pressing, spreading me open, inching into my opening.

Then he shifted, twitching his hips.

He plunged into me, his thick length spreading me, opening me as he sank deep into me, bottoming out as the head of him pressed deep into me, all the way. Pleasure speared me as he did, the incredible sensation of fullness paired with the welcoming of a body aroused enough to be receptive to the sudden invasion of everything I always wanted. This was everything I wanted. This was aggression and claiming, forcefulness with the foresight to prepare my body for it.

“Yessssssss,” he hissed.

I gasped, reaching up to claw at his back as I wrapped my legs around his hips, digging my heels into the place where his glutes would be if he had legs.

“MOAR!” I roared, maiming the word with my urgent need to get absolutely railed by this beautiful monster in the dark.

He obliged.

He dragged himself out of me, plunging back in over and over like he was dancer in a

club high on energy drinks, pounding into me with a determined rhythm even as he held me in his soft grip, my back pressing down into the thick cushy flesh of his tail, the second thick log of his desire sliding back and forth against my bundled nub of nerves, stroking me to greater heights even as he hit the perfect spot inside of me.

He took me, used me, devoured me, destroyed me.

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I came apart, spasming around him, my inner muscles fluttering and spasming with every gorgeous, intense stroke. He lifted his head and roared, heating shooting into me as he twitched hard and deep, like he could drill himself inside me. Hot ropes of his excitement shot across my belly, coating my jacket, drenching it.

I let out a trembling gasp as I lay there in his coils, the remnants of my waves of arching pleasure causing me to clench against him. He was still hard inside of me, his pelvis pressed against mine as he kept himself lodged in between my legs.

He stroked a strand of hair from my face.

“You are so soft inside,” he murmured. “No teeth at all.”

The words hit me, crashing into my psyche as they cut through the layers of my defenses. I was soft inside. I was the woman who got the wolves to chase her so they would leave her friends alone. I was the one who would drop to my knees behind the bleachers because I’d grown up hearing it was the only thing women were good for. I was the one who looked for love in monsters, because I’d never met a man who wasn’t one.

Tears pricked in the corners of my eyes.

“I am so soft,” I agreed.

I felt him twitch inside of me.

I reached up and ran my fingernails down his back.

“How long do you want me for?” I asked him.

“Do you mean how long will my rut last?” he asked.

“Sure,” I smiled up at the monster I could barely see in the dim light, the man who had broken through the hard shell of my exterior to find the gooey center inside.

“Days,” he said. “Will you stay?”

“You promised me you would rut me until you were satiated,” I said.

He shifted, and I let out a gasp as his still hard length rubbed against that spot inside of me.

“Will you stay after?” he asked.

“You don’t even know me,” I said, my heart taking trembling little flip flops at the potential of his question. He wanted me to stay? I didn’t want to leave.

“I know that you are sorry for things that are not your fault,” he said. “I know that the softness inside of you is a reflection of the gentleness of your heart. I know that if you stay here with me, I can protect you and our young.”

“But can you give me cake?” I asked, my mind rock-skipping over the whole protecting our young thing. He was a naga; we couldn’t procreate, could we? I eyed the muscular upper body of a man pressed against me in the dark, and I realized a flaw in my logic. He was human-shaped. I was human-shaped.

“Yes,” he said with an absolute certainty of tone. “I will provide cake.”

Eh, in for an inch, in for a mile.

“I’ll let you know after I try your cake,” I said. I shifted my hips, driving my heels into him to slide myself on his still-hard length. “But first, I require more monsterfuckery.”

“Your requirements will be met,” he said, his tone serious even as he slid out of me just enough to slam back in, bringing a gasp of delight to my lips.

“You can’t actually get me pregnant, can you?” I asked as he slid out, oh so slowly, dragging his bare flesh along the walls of my own.

“I will do my best,” he said. “If it is possible, I will accomplish it.”

Then he was driving back into me, and I let pleasure drive thoughts of the future away.

Epilogue

TYPHON

“This is really good cake,” Fiadh moaned through a mouthful.

I smiled down at her, pleased at her enjoyment. She was standing there, a slice of cake in her hand as she took another bite out of it.

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“Though next time I want a plate,” she said, and took another bite, chocolate smearing across her cheek. “Where did you even get a cake? There is no oven in your grotto.”

She insisted on calling my den a grotto. At first, when I had increased the light to show her my multiroom home, she had wandered around cussing, as if she were upset. My understanding of her emotions shifted when she stripped and flopped into the hot spring that fed through one of the rooms. She wasn’t upset, she was delighted.

“The Orcs have rescued a number of the kitchen staff from the school,” I said. “One of them is a trained pastry chef.”

“Let’s kidnap a fashion designer next,” she said, glancing down at the leather skirt she was wearing. I had gotten the clothing from the Orcs, trading some of the weapons I had taken from the corpses of Dungeon divers. The Orcs preferred simple loincloths and tunics, though the ones that fought more frequently ended up wearing more armor. Just because the Dungeon could bring us back to life didn’t mean we enjoyed dying.

Fiadh’s familiar chirped and hopped up onto the table where I had placed the cake, reaching over to lick it.

“Nibblet would like carrots instead of cake,” Fiadh said. “I like the roasted meat a lot, but I want some veggies too.”

One of the ‘requirements’ the human had put upon me was to help her retrieve her familiar. That requirement had become easier now that several of the Dungeon seals

had broken. There were now secret pathways onto campus, allowing us, Dungeon dwellers, to explore the surface without having to fight our way free through the soldiers guarding the entrance.

The final battle was coming, and I knew my place would be beside her, keeping her safe.

“Vegetables will be provided,” I agreed.

Fiadh looked up at me, a smile on her face.

“What do you want provided?” she asked.

“Softness,” I reached out and trailed a finger through her hair. She leaned into my touch, her cheek pressing into my hand as she looked up at me with eyes that shimmered.

“What kind of softness?” she asked.

“Any kind you wish to share with me,” I murmured.

She turned her face and kissed my palm, and I knew what my subconscious had known the moment she had fallen into my world, changing it forever. Determination cemented in my heart. I would do anything to make her want to stay with me.

I was going to learn how to bake a cake.