



# Regal Rising

**Author:** *Viola Grace*

**Category:** Romance, Paranormal

**Description:** Regis has spent her life knowing that she had a mate, and he was imprisoned. Sneaking into the Stronghold to find her mate was almost as difficult as leaving him there.

Regis grew up with a good family and supportive friends. Having an old soul in her system caused her to skip a lot of the experiences that were treasured by those around her, but she knew what she was after. Her husband and daughter were out there somewhere; she just had to find them.

Her sister, Rex, is at her side during her adventures, and with her nerves of steel, she faces down deadly guardians blocking the way. It is enough to get them into the Stronghold, and from there, Regis has to let her link to her past lead them from the past and into the present day.

**Total Pages (Source):** 49

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:16 am*

## Chapter One

The office sounds wereslowing, and Reggie finished tidying her desk. Rex stopped next to her. “Are you ready?”

“Are you done getting your ass kicked?” Reggie asked.

“It pays my bills. Come on. We need to hit the road.”

Reggie smiled, turned off her computer, and grabbed her purse. “It’s now or never. Literally.”

“Are you sure you want to do this?”

“Rex, I know that you weren’t born with someone else in your head, but the lady in question is screaming that it has to be now. Right freaking now!”

Rex nodded. “In that case, I am going to drive.”

Reggie waved farewell to the others, and she and her sister left the office of the cleaning company that their parents owned. Owens Cleaning was moderately successful and staffed by family.

They headed downstairs to the vast garage of company vehicles. Rex’s sand-coloured SUV was waiting for them, fully gassed and ready to go.

Rex asked once again, “Are you ready?”

“Yeah. I have done the test, and things should be ideal in twelve hours or so.”

“I can’t believe we are doing this.”

Reggie got into the passenger seat, buckled in, and they were on their way. Outside the city and following the sunset, she asked, “On a scale of one to ten, how crazy is this?”

“Twelve. We are driving through the desert to the Stronghold so that you can get laid, and we can make a run for it immediately afterward.”

“That sounds rather crass.”

“Reggie, no matter how many times you say it, your belief that you are the reincarnation of a dead queen from hundreds of years ago is a little weird. I love you, but it’s odd.”

“I know. It doesn’t sound less crazy in my own head, but there are two of us in here.”

“You are serious?”

“Oh, yeah. She’s like a weird conscience, but she is militant that this is what I have to do.”

“So, you have to find a dead woman’s husband in the depths of a place no sane woman would dare to tread?”

“Yup. Except he’s my husband or her husband or something.”

Rex chuckled. “So you have said. Is this also why you purchased that plot of land with your entire savings?”

Reggie groaned. “And a loan. She was positive, and she got the architect when she pushed me to the back.”

“Wait. So, she isn’t just a way of thinking; she can actually butt you out of the way?”

“Yeah. She says that once this mission is over, we will integrate, but I don’t know how that is going to happen.” She rubbed her forehead.

“Headache again?”

“Yeah. She’s excited, but I wish she would chill it with the hormones.”

“Bad?”

“Yup.”

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:16 am*

“Suppressors bad?”

“No. I don’t need any. Not this time.” Reggie winced.

Rex muttered, “That wasn’t your voice.”

“No, it wasn’t. Tawney has been popping in and out a lot more this week.” Reggie rubbed her forehead again.

“Four hours left. Are you sure they won’t see us?”

“I am sure. She’s got this covered. She’s going to give me enough power to keep us alive. Our survival is very important to her.”

Rex nodded. “If you say so.”

“Are you good to drive if I nap?”

“Absolutely. This is going to be rough for you. If you had tried this on your own, I would have been panicked.”

Reggie pulled her jacket up over her and smiled. “I would not have done this without you, Rex.”

She settled in and slept.

Four hours later, they had followed the GPS coordinates and parked under a granite

overhang. Reggie looked at her sister and the crack in the stone. It was just large enough for them to pass through.

Rex whispered, “You are sure you want to do this?”

“I don’t have a choice. Stay close. I may need an assist.”

“If you think I am leaving you, you are deluded.”

“There may be a time inside where I need to be alone with him. You might not want that memory.”

“Fine. Just warn me.”

“Oh, you will know.” She drank some water, passed the bottle to her sister, and walked toward the crack in the wall.

The scent was all she had to go by, but she could follow it no matter how far. She heard a click behind her and felt a tug at her waistband. Rex didn’t want to get lost, and they weren’t talking while they were there. Reggie was the only one who knew where they were going.

They passed a dead Elite and kept going. Slow steps up and cracks in the wall that had to be felt, but they weren’t going far. Her husband was in the lower levels.

She felt his proximity, and her hands slipped with sweat. Rex caught her with a hand to her ass and kept her against the wall.

They continued climbing until another jagged hole in the wall let them ease through and into a wide chamber.

Reggie's sweaty hands were suddenly clammy as she saw the huge gates ahead of them. Her eyes could see in the dimness, and Rex was at her side. They walked to the gates, and when they reached out for the doors, two drakes rushed them from inside the prison.

Tawney's memory provided the names. "Ignis, Kael, I need to speak with my husband. It is past time."

The heads that looked down from a fifteen-foot vantage point blinked slowly. They shook slowly, left to right.

Rex looked at them, swallowed, and said, "I don't know who or what you are, but my sister wants to talk with her husband, and she's probably in heat, so you should probably get the fuck out of the way. Or get out of the way of a fuck. Literally."

Reggie muttered, "You know that?"

Rex muttered in return, "I saw the ovulation test. There is only one reason for that, considering your dating history."

The drakes blinked and sat back like large dogs. One reached out and pushed the gate open with the flick of a claw.

Rex whispered, "Go. I will stay back here and keep them from looking."

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:16 am*

“I have to find SIRRUSH first.”

Behind the drakes, there was a huge stone wall, and then, inside the wall, an eye slowly opened.

Rex whispered, “Found him.”

Reggie elbowed her and eased through the gate. She was brought to an abrupt halt with a sharp tug on her waistband. A look back showed her Rex carefully gripped in the claw of one of the drakes. Rex reached down and unclipped the tether. “Go, Reggie. This shit is weird enough.”

The drakes were sniffing Rex from head to toe, and she was glaring at both of them. For some reason, this seemed to encourage them. Rex was punching any head that got too close. Reggie grinned and turned back to the enormous eye. She walked up calmly and stroked the stone. “It has been too long, husband. This is a different era, and I am in a different body, but I am Tawney, and I have missed you, SIRRUSH.”

The stone shifted until a dragon of smaller proportions stood staring down at her. She smiled. “You are still not quite what I had in mind.”

The tongue flicked around her face, breasts, and belly. His tail lashed in excitement. “You have her scent.”

“I have never gotten over that enunciation, my beloved, bullheaded idiot.” She reached up and caressed his muzzle.

“You have returned to me.”

She paused. “You will have to remain here for ten more years until I come for you again.”

He looked and hissed angrily. “You are receptive.”

“Yeah, and I will need fire again to make sure we both have fun, but a decade of dreams will have to suffice.”

He paused. “How long has it been?”

“Seven hundred and ninety years.”

His eyes went wide. “If I return to my normal form, they will be on us.”

“No, they are scattered across the world, tracking down all the dark Elite who were scattered in time.” She smiled. “They are creating a distraction for as long as we need.”

“I will give you fire now. Remove your strange clothing.”

“This clothing does not come off in an alluring manner.”

“Seeing you again, no matter the body, is nearly driving me mad.”

She grinned and pulled her shirt over her head, unsnapping her bra and then working on her sneakers and jeans. Panties and socks hit the floor.

The dragon licked his lips as she walked toward him. “So, mate? Fire?”

He grabbed her and pulled her to him, exhaling hard into her open mouth. He lowered her to the floor and moved between her thighs to do the same there. The fire went in, and after a moment, it spilled back again.

He lifted his head in surprise. “You are ready for me.”

“Not you. The man who eased my fears and held me close that first night. The man who went on a killing spree when me and our babe were murdered. The man who went to the greenhouse and made me a crown of roses every day of my pregnancy. That man is invited into me today.”

Warm hands were touching her a moment later, and he smiled with tears in his eyes. “Little star. You have always been in my dreams.”

“And you in mine.” She caressed his shoulders and tried to pull his head to hers, but he dove between her thighs. Pleasure started slowly, considering the proximity of their audience, but she couldn’t resist it. She gave in to the one man she had truly trusted, the man who had tried to burn the world before his men held him back.

His advisers had helped to soothe things before they left. With no colony in process, they had no jobs to do. Her soul had watched them leave with her daughter’s next to her.

Tawney cried out as she hit her first climax. The pleasure with him was not a surprise; it was expected.

He knelt between her thighs and pulled her up to him, lifting her and pressing into her slowly. When she was finally containing him, he shuddered but then began to lift and lower her over him. The friction became pleasure, and the precum warmed her. She moved with him, digging her claws into his shoulders as they worked to make the impossible, another daughter.

\* \* \* \*

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:16 am*

Rex looked at the drakenearest her and then inhaled sharply as it grabbed her and started sniffing. The other one began to join in the inhalation of her scent, and when it pressed its muzzle to her lower back, she twisted and struck him. She knew how to throw a punch, but it still stung.

The drake holding her got the same treatment when the hard nose bumped her breasts.

There was an amused gleam in the beasts' eyes. She felt cool air rush at her back and turned around again, but there was a low crooning sound, and then a tongue ran up her spine.

She reached behind her and grabbed the tongue. The sound she heard was of surprise. It was nearly a chicken squawk.

The one holding her looked toward the gate and slowly closed it.

“We aren’t staying.”

The one behind her walked into view and took on a human shape. Well, elf, well, elf made of midnight skin, white hair, and red eyes. No clothing was visible.

“Whoa. We definitely aren’t staying.”

He smiled and beckoned to her.

She drummed her hand on the claw holding her. “Sorry, naked dude. I am

indisposed.”

The drake holding her set her down, and the first elf approached Rex. Cool air blew on her back, and her shirt was loose. The male bowed low as the second drake became an elf as well.

“Uh, guys. I am just here to make sure that my sister got where she was supposed to be. A few more years and you will be out to find your own partners, and you don’t want to spoil your palette or anything.”

The man bowing low straightened and stepped toward her. “Mostly, sex is just sex.”

The other man shifted, and his features were blockier than the first. “We will be careful, but your sibling is in heat, and her scent is enthralling.”

“Great. Stop snorting my sister.” She felt a tingle in her palms, and when they moved toward her, the swords came out. “Stand back.”

The men halted. The one who had held her said, “We mean you no injury, only pleasure.”

“When two guys eighteen inches taller than you approach you with dripping erections, tell me how relaxed you would be.” She gritted her teeth.

The guys looked at each other and smiled sheepishly. “We apologize, miss, but the scent of heat is very enticing.”

“Yeah. I know.”

“You are coated in it.”

She wrinkled her nose. "I guessed as much."

"Will you dismiss your blades?"

"Oh, absolutely not. I do that, and he pins my arms while you start chewing on me."

They paused. The broader one said, "How do you surmise that?"

"I work in stunt work. You are advertising your intent with your posture."

"What is stunt work?" the first of the two asked.

"I fall off cliffs in place of more delicate actresses so that the audience believes she faced peril in the entertainment production." She also tried to formulate it for someone who hadn't lived in the modern era. "I also get punched and shot a lot."

They both frowned. "You, a lady, are courting injury?"

"No. I rarely get injured. I know how to fall and take a hit." She kept the swords aimed at their midsections.

"Where do your blades come from?" The one on the left had moved closer to her.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:16 am*

“Not a clue. They have been here since I was a teen.”

She kept her hands steady, and when they moved, she moved. Long slashes from hip to shoulder made them stumble back. The cuts were shallow but got her point across.

They each touched their wounds and examined their fingertips. The blood surprised them.

“Welcome to the modern age, where no means next time you can lose a hand.”

They looked at each other, blurred, and she was suddenly unarmed, and her shirt was gone as they held her hands behind her back. “Oops.”

They were scowling down at her. “We are not ones to threaten, lady.”

“It wasn’t a threat. It was a fear display.” She muttered, “If this is what you think I deal with on a normal Saturday, you are out of your fucking minds.”

They paused but didn’t let her go.

“I understand this is the first time you have seen a female in nearly eight hundred years, but trust me, I am not the one. Wait a few more years until things settle, and there will be women fawning over you. Cute ones. Pretty ones.”

One of the men stroked her hair firmly enough to tilt her head back. “You are lovely, and it isn’t just the abstinence.”

She swallowed. “Uh-huh.”

“What is your name, lady?”

“Rex. Uh, Teagan, but everyone calls me Rex.”

“I am Kael, and that is Ignis. We are the king’s assassins.”

Her stomach went icy.

“Also, his private guard and oldest friends. We held him back when his mate was murdered and kept him here so that the rest of your species would not have been wiped out.”

“Yay, you.”

His hand shifted to loosely grip her hair and keep her head tilted back for him. “So, we are wired to know our mate when we see them. We knew you the moment Ignis grabbed you.”

“So, you weren’t mates to a dead woman?”

“No, you had not been born yet. Had there been no attack, we would still have been waiting.”

Ignis murmured, “For you. For now.”

“Oh, no. I am not going to chance a pregnancy. Reggie needs me, and us both being knocked up wouldn’t be good.” She swallowed. “I need to keep her and her child safe. You know what happened when it was left to the guys last time.”

They winced.

Ignis rumbled. “We didn’t think of someone attacking a labouring woman, let alone an infant. It is so foreign to our natures, we were in shock.”

“I get it. She gets it. We get it. But this next time, she is having their daughter on her terms, with her friends and family to protect them. She will return, and she will be protected.”

“You are sure the same soul will return?”

Rex nodded. “She hasn’t left her mother’s side in all this time. It has been driving Reggie nuts. That was why we came here; it was time for Tawney and her baby to get together again.”

Ignis nodded and smiled. “And you came with her because?”

“She needed someone to drive and watch her back.” She could see a pale body on her hands and knees under the darker one. “Seems like her back is currently covered.”

Kael smiled. “She’s definitely safe. No Elite or dark mage can come through those gates without our agreement.”

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:16 am*

“Well, the Elite are busy trying to find all of the dark Elite who were released ten years from now and are making noise all over the globe. Time travel is interesting.” She was leaning back on Kael’s hand, and he was supporting her.

They smiled, and Ignis asked softly, “Just to touch? Just to taste?”

Kael said just as softly, “Please, lady?”

“Why me? Aside from the fact that I am the only other woman here.”

Kael smiled. “Because I could shift for you, he could shift for you, and because you could injure us with a soul blade. These are things that mean much to us.”

“So, like, is this comfortable to you because it is very weird to me?” she muttered.

Kael leaned in and pressed a kiss to her neck, tasting her before pressing his lips to her neck. She widened her eyes, and Ignis pressed his lips to hers before his tongue slipped in to taste her. She was still held at her wrists, and she moaned as Kael moved from her collarbone to her breasts.

When the pale silver fire began to spill into her, she closed her eyes and let it in. She would have ten years to plan to kick their asses. She felt a hand unfastening her jeans.

She was going to be ready in five.

Chapter Two

They drove home in silence, wearing black gowns that the guys had provided for them. It was nice they had offered something to wear because the drakes had shredded Rex's clothing.

Reggie murmured, "So, uh, did they..."

Rex held up a hand. "Nope. We are not discussing it. Not at all. Not ever."

"You have a braid."

"Yeah."

"I am sorry. I had no idea that they would do that."

"It's fine. They didn't get to penetration, but it was more than I was expecting."

Reggie was still limp and marked from SIRRUSH's mouth and hands. "Oh. I am so sorry."

"I am okay. They dumped enough fire into me to light the salt flats up." Rex grimaced.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:16 am*

“Well, at least they made clothing for us.”

“One step ahead of the Elite coming back. Twelve hours. We were there for twelve hours and then had to go down a rock wall without being able to feel our thighs.”

Reggie smiled softly. “A few more days and I will know if she’s with us again.”

“You sound more blended than you were before.”

“I am. She’s settling into me now. She was supposed to find a host when they were born, but I had my little accident, and she jumped into a three-year-old.” She smiled. “Reggie was already firmly attached to this body.”

“The day you died.”

“And came back with two souls. Neat, huh?” Reggie chuckled. She was exhausted, and her whole body throbbed.

“So, what is the plan? You have the property and the mortgage on it. So what now? We put tiny houses on it and make a hobbit town?”

“Sirrush said what I needed would come to me.” She smiled. “I am also covered with jewellery under this dress. He was always good with that sort of thing. He is pissed about waiting to meet his daughter and not being able to spoil me this time, but I am not letting the Elite near us this time. It is going to be friends and family and no one else.”

“So, big delivery party.”

“Uh, maybe just me and a midwife for that.”

“You have time.”

“From my memories, it goes faster than you think.” She caressed the twisted lock with her blood and his.

Rex laughed. “That’s what Mom said, too. It is the longest blink of an eye that you can have.”

“Can I nap?”

“Yup. We are on the way home, and your hubby is locked behind those doors for another decade. I can’t decide if it is a time-out or a bad-dragon box.”

Reggie laughed and snorted as she curled up in her seat. “Bad dragon. Beware the tails.”

“Yeah. No shit about the tails,” Rex muttered and got them off the desert track and onto the main road.

Reggie smiled and relaxed. Four hours to home.

\* \* \* \*

Reggie watched the progress from her camera array. The workers didn’t mind. They didn’t want her waddling all over unless they were ready to help her over the stone and debris. “I wish I could have her there.”

Kay was a doula, and she folded bedding and arranged toys in the nursery. “Why can’t you be?”

“They haven’t finished a room, let alone a nursery.” Reggie chuckled.

“May I?” Kay gestured to the belly.

“Sure.”

Kay touched Reggie’s belly and smiled. “You still have a few days. She’s patient. I will see what I can do.”

Reggie touched her hand. “What can you do?”

She smiled. “What I need to for an up-and-coming mom.”

\* \* \* \*

Kay walked to the site and looked at the blueprints. The architect was there, as was the contractor and stone mason. “So, what is needed for the main habitation?”

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:16 am*

They explained the plumbing and electrical systems that were needed. She smiled. She could work with that. She just had to call her uncle. She grinned. That's what djinn were for.

\* \* \* \*

Reggie smiled sleepily. "I don't know how you did it, but thank you. Little Amiraith is very thankful that you could make this happen. I don't know how you got this done, but thank you."

"It is fine for a few days, but then we need to get you back to a fully formed home." Kay fluffed the pillows around Reggie. "This place is safe and sound, but the guys are trying to work on tippy-toe with whispers."

Rex was sitting next to the door, and Luna was watching out the window. Amiraith was snuffling in her mother's arms, and all the women were tense. Kay finished fussing and murmured to Reggie, "Play with your twist, Regis."

"Why?"

"It will help you heal."

"How?"

"It will make your mate pull his own weight." Kay chuckled. "Have you given any thought to the idea of a shop?"

“Really?”

“Sure. You can have your baby in the office and go to her when it’s needed. Limit your hours until you can do more. I have recipes and a list of restaurants that need high-grade desserts. You can apply to them and see who sticks. Then, you just have to bake for orders and go home unless you want to maintain a storefront.”

“How do you know that?” Reggie chuckled.

“I have been around. Now, slide the baby into the bassinet, and get some sleep. You are protected.”

Rex said softly, “You are protected.”

Luna turned with her eyes lit with cold fire. “You are protected.”

Reggie smiled. Kay eased the baby into the bedside bassinet and smoothed Reggie’s hair. “Rest easy, little Mom.”

Kay looked to Rex. “I will be right back.”

She walked down the stairs and out the door, where the contractor asked her, “Is the baby here?”

“She’s here. Healthy and bright.”

The whispers filled the job site, and Kay walked to the edge of the property. She softly sang a lullaby, and the words wrapped around the edge of the property and created defenses for mother and daughter, just as she had for the shop she had gifted to Reggie.

“You just can’t stop dancing, can you?”

She glanced at him and ended her song but continued the slow dance. “No, I can’t stop. So, Uncle, I have another favour to ask of you.”

“Well, you have not abused it yet, but what do you need?”

“Protection for Reggie and Amiriath. Prosperity for everyone here, and I want you to help any beta who gets trapped in the dark mage dimension.”

“Is that an order, Mistress?”

“No, Uncle, it is a request. I fear someone will soon be trapped in the darkness.”

“What are you doing?”

“I am letting myself fade so that I can become a companion to another.”

“Won’t this hurt?”

“I am a good memory for them, and they will feel I am familiar to them. It’s enough. It’s more than I would have had if I hadn’t...”

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:16 am*

“You have done well. The imperial house will be appalled, but you have done well.”

She grinned, and then her expression sobered. “I wish things had turned out differently, but things unravelled the way they were meant to, and now, Reggie and her daughter are firmly tied to this time. They are good, and I can go for a while.”

“You are coming back to them?”

“Absolutely.” She laughed. “I have sung myself out of their consciousness, and now, it is on to the next thing. I think a clothing store is in my future. The omegas are going to get taller in the next few years. Oh, and assisting at Regis’s bakeshop.”

“They don’t know who you are?”

“No, and they won’t. Not until the imperial house comes to reclaim me. That could be forever.”

“Do you ever wonder about it?”

“The emperor was ill, so I wonder if he is all right, but that’s about it. He was kind, if too generous, with his staff.”

He chuckled. “Yes, well, that is how we got here, isn’t it?”

“You didn’t have to come.”

“He asked us to. He knew you wouldn’t listen to anyone else.”

She smiled. “He looked smart.”

Her uncle laughed, and they left the new palace for new projects to keep Kay close to persons of interest. Her other uncle usually had something to say about things, but he was focused on his own eventual partner. There was a thick column of events that had to be carefully tended.

\* \* \* \*

Ten years later.

Regis delivered to Denith’s restaurant and noticed something strange as he looked over the desserts they had ordered for their new menu. “Denith, are you doing all right?”

He nodded. “Yeah, just feeling a little weak lately. Shit, why did I tell you that?”

“Mom vibes. Everybody tells me when they are feeling gross.” She put two fingers on his wrist and felt a surge of energy leaving her. “Ah. Well. I hope you are feeling better. The new menu is going to be a stressor over the next few weeks.”

Denith nodded. “Yeah. Thanks. I feel a bit better. The desserts look great.”

“Here’s the invoice. The cake for the special order is in that small box. It’s a glossy finish, so watch your fingers.”

“Yes, Regis.” He smiled, and his eyes looked bright.

She nodded, took her delivery rack with her, and headed to the van. She had just enough time to pick Ira up from school.

The balance of being a mom and a business owner had been tricky, but no matter what happened, there was always someone to keep her from going mad and give her a break. Ira was a blessing. She was so sweet, so smart, and very intelligent. Regis knew she had gotten lucky.

She was going through dessert options in her head for the three weddings she was going to be providing for on the weekend. Having the shop was great, but having the bakery attached to the new palace was a delight. The whole group of them could get in on it.

Regis got to the school as the doors opened and grinned as Ira walked slowly past Miss Penny and headed for the company van. Regis got out and walked around to hold her daughter's door. "Hey, little bit. How was school today?"

"Pretty good. Only two people left in my class have a problem with my age."

"Girls or boys?"

"One of each. One from Lady Olyna's family and one from Lady Fen's."

"Ah. Well, if they bully you, I will have a chat with the ladies and get them to rein their family in."

"Thanks, Mom. I can handle the boy, but it looks like Lady Fen's granddaughter is going to be an alpha. She's hitting puberty hard."

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:16 am*

Regis patted her shoulder. “Keep me posted.”

Ira nodded. “Any leftovers?”

Regis slid the rear door open and pulled out a slice of cherry-topped cheesecake in a takeaway container with a wooden fork taped to it. “There you go. Pandora’s making dinner.”

“Yay!” Ira was already opening the cake.

Regis closed the doors and got back behind the wheel. “You just like it when she cooks because she forgets vegetables.”

“She makes a salad.”

“Fruit salad isn’t a salad.” Regis buckled up and grinned as her daughter munched her way through the dessert.

She carefully eased out of the lane and got back into traffic. The school was bustling with young alphas, betas, and omegas getting on buses or being picked up. They lived outside the catchment area, so someone always needed to be available to pick her up. It wasn’t difficult. Their little community always had time to get their little princess.

Regis wondered who was joining them for dinner. Pandora only cooked if they were having guests.

Ira smiled. “I wonder if she’s frying tonight.”

Regis snorted as she drove them home. “Homework before deep-fried anything.”

Ira mumbled, “Yes, Mom.”

During the drive, she heard about the science fair project that Ira had planned. Pandora was going to have to help because it was a project on the spread of gases and the environmental impact of contaminants in the standard atmosphere.

Regis sighed. Ira was scary smart. She must get it from her dad.

Ira said, “You are thinking about my dad.”

“How can you tell?”

“You get a soft, silly smile at the corner of your mouth. How much longer now?”

“Months. We just have to get through a few hurdles, and the Stronghold comes down.”

“Is it going to be dangerous?”

Regis turned onto their drive. “I am setting Pandora loose on the Stronghold. What do you think?”

“Oh, dangerous for them. Got it.” Ira closed the dessert container with the fork inside.

The scent of a feast hit them when they entered the main doors, and Regis grinned. “We are having company.”

Ira had her backpack and sprinted into the kitchen, where Pandora had woks, fryers, and noodles ready to go. The counter was covered with precisely made snacks, and

Pandora grinned. “Do your homework at the table, Ira.”

Regis popped a dumpling into her mouth. “Who are we expecting?”

“Four of the necessary twelve.”

Ira looked up, “Twelve?”

Regis nodded. “Twelve women have to enter the Stronghold and walk out intact. If we take less, the ladies get hurt.”

Ira smiled. “So, you have four to start with.”

“More, but they haven’t activated yet.” Regis sighed. “And I can’t help them. So, we have another two that will be with us, so six at full power. If Pandora says she has four, she has four.”

Pandora continued finely slicing carrots. “I have four, previously un-introduced.”

## Page 11

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:16 am*

Regis groaned and reached for another dumpling. “Where did you learn to make these?”

“I hung out in a fog bank in Chinatown on the coast. Lots of nice restaurants there.” She smiled and kept chopping. “Have as many as you like. I made more. Freezer is full.”

Regis smirked. “Shop was slow today?”

“No, my assistant is amazeballs. She had it all under control, so I played hooky and made dinner.”

“You can’t rely on her forever.”

Ira nodded as she got her homework out. “Just like Mom couldn’t keep you working for her forever, so you had to go and open your clothing shop.”

Pandora chuckled. “Exactly like that.”

Regis sighed. “Do you know when Rex is coming home?”

“She’s in on a planning meeting for a new movie. She will give us details when she gets back.” Pandora smiled.

“Why are you cooking up a storm?”

“Well, first, it is nice to make a good impression, but mainly, it is because one of the

ladies has been injured and is homeless, so I want to give her a nice boost for her biology.”

Regis paused. “Homeless?”

“Yes. She’s been hiding from the Elite for a while, so she has no place to live, and she said she loves Chinese food, so I am doing my best.” Pandora smiled. “Can she stay here?”

Regis blinked. “I will have to meet her. I don’t just let anyone into proximity with Ira.”

“I know. I want you to meet her so you can tell.” Pandora nodded. “But I watched her, and she will be helpful.”

Regis asked, “You didn’t help her?”

“She didn’t ask for help. Oh, and she’s wounded. She needs medical assistance.”

Regis paused. “Pandora, where is she?”

“In my room. She’s getting a bath, some rest, and changing clothes.” Pandora smiled. “I guessed that you wouldn’t mind. I am vouching for her behaviour.”

Regis looked toward the wing that housed Pandora. “You sure?”

“Yup. I have a gas cloud on standby.” She smiled brightly and kept chopping. “The ladies will be here in two hours. Ira, if you want to sit in, you will be done with your homework.”

Regis watched her daughter scramble to get her homework done. Nothing motivated

her more than gossip.

### Chapter Three

The three who drove there were seated around the table when Pandora saw her new friend. “Ela, please join us. This is Regis, and if you pass the vibe check, you will meet Ira.”

The woman’s appearance drew gasps from the others, and Regis covered her mouth in shock. Rex looked stunned.

Ela tried to cover her wrists and her neck in short, quick movements. “I am sorry. They won’t heal, so I am stuck with them.” Her wrists and neck wore abraded bands that looked sticky with blood.

Pandora nodded. “Her ankles, too.”

Regis asked, “Where did that happen?”

“I was bolted to a table in a salon for passing Elite. The abrasions were a side effect of the motion.”

Regis was stunned.

“How did you get away?”

“The table broke. I beat the client unconscious and ran. It wasn’t until later that I was able to get the bands off.” She asked softly, “Do you have a medical kit or anything?”

Rex got up and said, “Come with me. I have a kit.”

Ela nodded and followed. She was six feet tall and pearly white. Her hair was cropped against her head, and her eyes were crimson. There were bite marks and scars visible on her collarbone. Pandora’s clothing just covered most of her, not all of her.

\* \* \* \*

Ela was seated at a desk as she apologized. “I am sorry if this is upsetting.”

The woman with her brought out rolls of gauze. “I have seen a lot of injuries, but few have made me this enraged. What happened to your hair?”

“They shaved it every two months. It kept growing back.”

“How long were you there?”

“Two years? I think. I am not sure.”

“You never got pregnant?”

“No. I didn’t let them have that. I could control that.”

“How?”

Ela paused. “I just did it. My name is Elaheh. Ela for short.”

“I am Rex. It’s short for Teagan.”

Ela grinned. “That’s fun. T-rex.”

Rex focused on winding gauze around the wounds. “You got it the first time.”

“I was a teacher.”

“What happened?”

## Page 13

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:16 am*

“My husband was having an affair and sold me to the salon so that he had enough money to live happily ever after. He tossed divorce papers at me, and the salon enforcers made me sign them.” She glanced down. “This happened afterward.”

“You mean your height.”

“Yeah. That was when they strapped me down and invited an endless wave of Elite.”

“Oh, fuck. I am so sorry.”

Ela shrugged. “It happened. It’s over. But when I got loose, I had nowhere to go, so since I was being drawn this way, I kept going. Pandora found me in an alley with some kittens. The kittens went to the shelter, and she brought me here. She’s very kind.”

“So, you were like this in the alley?”

Ela blinked and made herself invisible. “This is why they had to strap me to the table and keep me on a chain.”

Rex stared at where she had been. “Whoa. Right. I am sorry. I don’t know what to say.”

Ela resumed her appearance, and Rex kept wrapping. “It’s fine. I am either very calm or completely mad right now.”

“Are you dangerous?”

“To the women here? No. Absolutely not. If I find my enemies, I am guessing that I can be.”

“What is your attack?”

“I just do things with my hands, and things happen.”

“What?”

“I wave my hands, and things happen. It’s why they locked me down.”

“Your wounds are infected. You will need to see a doctor.”

“Oh. It will be a while before I can work.”

Rex smiled, knelt, and patted her knee. “We will bring someone in. Now, your ankles, please.”

Ela carefully put her socked feet up on Rex’s knee. The wrapping made her wince, but the burn was welcome.

“What was inside the cuffs?”

“Oh. Small teeth. Like a cheese grater. It was supposed to hold me still, but they put a moving section in the centre to open my legs, and it changed the angle, causing damage every time.”

There was a soft gasp, and Rex’s head came up. “Ira. Are you eavesdropping?”

Ela saw a small girl poke her head around the corner. The girl looked like a more golden version of Regis.

The girl looked at the ankle that wasn't wrapped. "Someone hurt you."

"Yes, but I am free now. Each day, I get better, and I have something I didn't have before."

"Your hair is short."

"I haven't had time to let it grow. If it distresses you, little miss, I can make it grow."

Ira touched the soft fuzz. "Does it hurt to grow?"

"A little. I have been using my energy to keep from being infected."

"Oh. So, someone did that to you?"

“They did.”

“Why?”

“They wanted to be mean. There were more of them than there were of me, so they won for a while, and then I got away. Pandora found me.”

“Oh, she’s good at that. She found me when I had my leg cramping in the pond, and she picked me up before Mom could even react. That was when I met her.”

The little girl stuck out her hand. “I am Ira.”

“I am Ela.” Ela shook hands with the little girl.

“Are you staying?”

“Pandora is letting me get some rest and giving me some clothing, but I think your mother does not want me to stay near you. She does not trust strangers, and rightly so.”

“You aren’t a stranger.”

“I am. You know better than to take kind words from strangers. Until your mother can confirm what I told her, you should not be alone with me.”

“Fine. Auntie, are you done with her?”

Rex sighed. “Ela, do you have any other parts that need bandaging?”

Ela looked at the little girl. “Yes, but she should not be here for this.”

Ira frowned. “I can do first aid.”

“Not this much. Please, Ira. Go to your mother and meet the other ladies.”

Ira scowled. “No.”

Rex said softly, “Ira. You might be an old soul, but you are still eleven. If she doesn’t want to show you, it is an adult thing, so leave her some privacy.”

Ira sighed, nodded, and left them.

Ela set her feet on the floor, pivoted, and unbuttoned her shirt. Rex gasped in shock.

“Rex, if you have some cream to spread on the scars that opened, I can reach forward and do my chest.”

“You... you’re covered with scars.”

“It was years, and I did not cooperate. For some of the clients, the pain was what got them off. That was why they had to shave my head. The hair got in the way of the whip.”

“Fucking hell.”

“Yeah, that does sum it up.” Ela sat while Rex went over her opened scars and then took the tube from her to get the ones on her lower abdomen. It looked like her skin was suffering from frost. Scars bloomed into other scars and crept into the loose

trousers.

“How far down do they go?”

“To the knees, but the skin is thicker past my hips.”

“Win can probably heal you. She’s familiar with this sort of extensive scarring.”

“There is another?”

“A few others. None with your identical circumstance, but yes.” Rex sighed. “How can they do this and think it’s okay?”

“I am the wrong person to ask.” She handed Rex the tube back and put her shirt back on.

## Page 15

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:16 am*

“At least you aren’t actively looking for a mate.” Rex sighed.

“No. I am not. I have had enough sex for a lifetime. Well, they had sex. I was just in the room.”

“And some were just there for torture.”

“Yeah, the dark mages. They also paid for my hair and my blood.”

Rex paused. “You definitely need to talk to Win. When we get downstairs, I will call her. This is something she needs to know.”

“Fine. That is fine. Now, Pandora said she would feed me, and I am very hungry.”

Rex paused. “You aren’t showing me what you actually look like.”

“Of course not. There is a child in the house. Pandora can make an image if she likes.” Ela stood up. “She has described me as a walking skeleton with a tennis ball for a head. That made me smile.”

“Ohmygod.”

“So, I am going to go eat. She’s promised to feed me.”

“Oh. Please.”

Ela smiled and walked back down to where the other ladies were waiting and eating.

Pandora smiled. “Eat what you like. When you are ready for more, it will be there.”

One of the women was staring at her with wide eyes. Ela knew that look. Pandora had it, too. “You can see me.”

The woman nodded. “I can.”

Rex spoke to Regis. “I need to call Win. There are... issues.”

Regis nodded. “Make sure she arrives after dinner.”

Rex agreed and went to make the call.

Ela didn't know who Win was, but it seemed she had experience with scars. Ela began to eat, and when she got tired, Pandora brought her a cup of green tea and a slice of dessert.

She was able to continue, and her body broke everything down as it entered her. The other ladies helped and encouraged her. She was able to continue longer than she thought while Regis spoke to the others about the upcoming plans.

A beta wearing jeans and a tee shirt came in and greeted Regis. Regis smiled and introduced the others, ending with Ela.

“Win, this is Ela. Ela, this is Win. I believe you have a lot to talk about.”

Ela grabbed her tea and a handful of cream puffs and followed both Regis and Win into an office.

Win looked at her. “You are bleeding energy.”

“Am I?”

“Yes. Out of the scars. What did they do to you?”

Regis leaned against the desk, and Ela shrugged, explaining it all. She defined where, what, and by whom. Win paused and nodded. “Got it. I can’t help now, but if I stretch out, I will. Regis, are you going to blur my memories of you again?”

“Of course. That is what the palace is for.”

Win chuckled. “Elf tricks.”

“Correct.”

Win sighed. “Well, Ela, I have a similar situation. Nothing scars our flesh more than an Elite. Well, it should begin to heal once you have transformed, but your healing is delayed due to your physical condition.”

## Page 16

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:16 am*

“Ah. Their feeding of me had to be administered by hand, and they forgot. They also forgot to bathe me or allow me normal toilet functions.” Ela grimaced. “They cleaned me when the next client was at the door.”

Win sighed. “But they took hair and blood?”

“They did.”

“So that is how they are drawing your energy. We can stop the draw, but we need a more powerful mage who isn’t Elite. I just happen to know one.”

Win picked up her phone and spoke, “Hey, Wren? Can you come to the new palace? We have a vulnerable victim with an active energy drain who needs help. I can’t do anything unless I shift, and I am not going to do that without making a bloody mess.”

There was murmuring from the other side, and Win smiled. “See you soon.”

She smiled at Ela. “She’s on her way. If you stop the power bleed, it is easier to regain weight.”

“How do I find out about my family and my bastard ex-husband?”

“Oreli can help. She has an unwholesome attachment to the internet.”

Ela nodded. “Sounds like buddy material.”

Win chuckled. “If you like psycho ob-gyns. She’s hooked on delivering more Elite

babies than her business partner, Oriel.”

“The name thing must be an issue.”

“Likely, but when you meet her, it is blatantly apparent.” Win nodded. “And you will be meeting her. You likely have issues that Wren is not equipped to handle.”

Ela nodded. “Of course. Is there any food left?”

Rex nodded. “Yes. Ira is out and doing her homework now.”

“How long until Wren arrives?”

Win smiled. “Fifteen minutes. She’s nearby.”

“Good.” Ela made sure she was decent again and said, “I am going looking for more food.”

She left the others talking quietly while Regis was sitting next to her daughter. Ira was frowning and asking a question about designing robots, and Regis was blinking.

Ela smiled, and Pandora got her another plate.

Ela quietly grabbed a napkin and wrote a diagram of what Ira was trying to get Regis to explain. “Like that.”

Mechanism, action, and power source were all identified.

Regis blinked. “You know how to do this?”

Ela lifted a hand above her head and pointed toward it. “Teacher. Science teacher.

Took me forever to logic out why I could go invisible.”

Ira smiled. “What was it?”

“Refraction on my skin with a chemical booster that makes people not see me.” Ela started eating. She smiled.

Ira looked at the diagram and grinned. “Mom, can she stay?”

Ela looked to Regis. “I am strong but not violent. I just want a place to rest and heal.”

Ira smiled slyly. “And to help with homework?”

“I can help with homework.” Ela nodded.

## Page 17

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:16 am*

Regis sighed. “Do you cook?”

“I can manage family-style meals.”

Ira perked up. “Fried stuff?”

“Yeah, I can do that.”

Regis sighed again. “We will make a meal plan and do the shopping while you recover. Pandora makes clothes, so expect to be a mannequin frequently.”

Pandora called from the kitchen. “She will wait until you are recovering, but I can get you some sweats and caftans tomorrow.”

“Thank you.” She finished the food and acknowledged the feeling that she was only getting a portion of what she was consuming.

Ira slid around the table and sat next to her. “Mom has to organize something, so I can sit, and you can help me figure out what kind of bot I want to build.”

“Can I?”

Ira looked at Pandora, and more sweets arrived on the table. She grinned. “Pandora is a source of unlimited snacks.”

Pandora grinned. “She thinks of me as a dispenser. So, we have ten of our number assembled. Now we just need to get the last two.”

Ela stuffed a profiterole into her mouth and mumbled, “They are in the gardens under the arch. They aren’t sure that they are doing the right thing. My hearing is really sensitive.”

Regis grinned and got to her feet. “Nice. Okay, I will go talk to them.”

Ira smiled. “So, Mom has what she needs. This is good. Maybe now I can meet my dad.”

“You haven’t met him?”

“No. My mom says that I got started for destiny so that nothing bad could happen again like the last time. This time, I would be safe before they would confront the Elite. So, I am nice and safe now. Now is the time. I am planning on asking him if he rides horses. I like horses.”

Ela laughed softly. “I like them, too.”

“Did you live around here?”

“I lived across the continent. The area I was in was filled with farms and ranches.”

“So, lots of horses.”

“Lots.”

“Can you show me how to ride one?”

“Probably, but when the dark Elite are out, I think some of them rode horses every day. They would be better as mentors.”

Ira shrugged. "I dunno. You are a pretty good teacher."

Ela chuckled, and then a beta walked in, radiating competence. She looked at Ela and blinked. "I think I have found my patient."

Ira nodded. "Ela is really skinny, and she's bleeding power. She needs help."

"You are Wren?"

"I am. You are obviously Ela. Did you want to go outside for this?"

Ela nodded. "Just a moment. I will let Rex know we are leaving Ira to her homework."

Rex walked in. "No need. I am back."

## Page 18

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:16 am*

Win trailed after. “Hey, Wren. I can hardly wait until you can remember me, or I can remember you, or I can remember being here.”

Wren chuckled. “The rush when we speak is always disconcerting, like I am getting a download. Right, Ela, let’s take a walk.”

Ela murmured to Ira, “Always focus on the end action and work backward.”

Ira beamed and kept drawing what she wanted to achieve, making notes and giggling.

Ela walked out with Wren, and they moved across the green and toward the trees.

“Win says you are bleeding power.”

“I am bleeding life force, but I didn’t want to argue.”

Wren chuckled and then sobered. “May I see the marks?”

Ela shrugged. “It’s your nickel.” She kicked off her footwear, dropped her pants, and pulled her shirt off over her head.

Wren hissed, and her hands began to glow. “Scream if you need to. I have put a barrier up.”

“I am fine. I didn’t scream then, and I won’t scream now.”

The magic user began to mumble and cast spells, and Ela felt the surface of her skin

catch fire. She remained still while the pain rippled over her for an hour until Wren was finished.

With shaking hands, Ela got dressed again.

Wren murmured, "I can't believe you just stood there."

Ela pulled her shirt on. "I didn't scream for them then; I wasn't going to do it now. Is the drain gone?"

"Yes. You can begin to rebuild now."

"Thank you. I am grateful for your efforts."

"It's no problem. Regis pays me in cupcakes."

Ela smiled. "It seems they have what they need."

"You are part of it. Don't think you aren't."

"I know I am. It just feels strange to have survived it. I should rest again."

"You should. I will talk to Regis. You just need a few days to settle and then eat like a horse."

"That sounds really good." Ela was exhausted.

"Come on. You need rest."

They walked back to the house, where Regis was with two women who were standing there with calm expressions on their faces.

Wren smiled, “Regis, Elaheh needs a place to rest. Can you provide it?”

Regis looked at Ela and nodded. “Yes. We have a guesthouse. It will be quiet for her, and we will leave food for her to help her recover.”

Ela smiled and swayed. “Deal.”

Regis paused, and then Rex stepped out of the house. Rex looked at Ela. “Come with me. If you need, you can lean on me.”

“Thank you. I am very sorry for all the fuss.”

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:16 am*

“You had something horrible happen to you, but Regis doesn’t know how it is going to affect you, and she won’t even consider a possible threat to Ira.”

“I understand. Safety of her child is first. Having sat with Ira for a few minutes, I understand it.”

Ela waved at Wren, and the woman bowed before talking to Regis.

Rex kept a light hand at her back as they walked. “Could she help the scarring?”

“No, but I should be able to start healing myself.”

“Well, if you find your mates, the healing will be faster.”

Ela muttered, “Mates are the last things on my mind. If a guy comes near me again, I’m going to fillet his junk.”

“Oh. Right.” Rex winced. “Your mates are going to have an uphill struggle.”

“Their problem. My problem is healing.”

“Right. Here you go. The house is yours to do with what you please. Rest where you feel safe, and food will be brought in for you. Drink a lot.”

The building seemed to appear out of the woods, and Ela looked at it and smiled. It looked safe, and safe was what she needed. “Thank you for your help, and thank Pandora again. She saved my life.”

Rex nodded. “She’s incredible and will probably be checking on you.”

“That’s fine. A little fog never hurt anyone.”

Rex laughed. “You believe that if you want to. Good night, and get some rest.”

Ela looked at the interior of the guesthouse. It was clean and silent. “I think I will.”

She stepped inside the dark building and closed the door behind her. It felt like it would keep her secrets. She walked to the upper level, found a bed, and got naked before climbing between the sheets. She should have wrapped up against the wounds opening, but she was exhausted. She would wash up after herself later.

## Chapter Four

One month later.

Regis looked around at the assembled ladies. “Are we ready?”

## Page 20

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:16 am*

Honey nodded, Pandora gave her a thumbs-up, and Gia grinned. The others all nodded.

Poppy and Win flexed their shoulders, and Win lifted her hand. “Say the word, Regis.”

Regis looked back toward the new palace where Ira was safe with a family friend. “Word.”

Win flicked her fingers, and the gateway opened. The twelve surged forward and entered the Stronghold.

Ela headed for the confinement areas. Some took off for the children’s spaces, others for the new women, and more to the women’s quarters. Honey went off on a rampage; Win and Poppy kept the others under control. It let Regis and Rex head to the lower levels.

They moved through the hallways that the others had described. Poppy would follow when Win had finished draining magic out of the men above. Pandora was checking the floors for prisoners and survivors.

Each of the ladies had their tasks, and Regis and Rex waited while facing the gates. Poppy eventually arrived and nodded. “Ready when you are.”

They walked toward the gates and pulled them open, to the astonishment of Rex’s mates.

Regis said, “Everyone is free tonight, but Poppy is going to throw you back in time so that you can learn the modern era and then reunite with us on this night or just beyond it. Any longer and I will come looking for you.”

The huge dragon opened and closed his eyes before he resumed his elf form. “Our child?”

“Eager to meet you. She’s amazing.” Regis smiled as he slowly paced toward her. “Still haven’t learned to manifest pants?”

He grinned. “Do I need them?”

“Yes. This is a rescue, not a rendezvous. If you want to see me and your daughter, you can come and visit us tomorrow. I am assuming you can track me?”

“Yes, dear one. I will track you.”

She gave him the date, and he nodded. “Not before then. I understand. Our girl, she is safe?”

“Oh, yes. She’s brilliant, sweet, charming, and old beyond her years.”

“She looks like you?”

“She has gold hair, but her eyes are all you.”

He smiled. “I am looking forward to meeting her.”

She touched his cheek. “I am glad. You can’t live at the new palace until we find homes for all of the women and children from the Stronghold.”

“In that case, I will endeavour to make myself useful in the interim.”

“You don’t mind?”

“I can watch from a distance and keep you safe. That is all I need to know.” He touched her cheek.

Her heart ached, and she leaned toward him. They met in a soft and delicate kiss before there was a soft clearing of a throat behind them.

Rex’s mates whirled and growled. Poppy looked at them. “Oh, please. My guys are way scarier than you.”

The drakes paused. One asked, “Who are your mates?”

Poppy smiled. “Not telling you. You would tell them, and then things wouldn’t shake loose properly. I know how this works. I am the temporal witch.”

They stared at her.

Poppy smiled. “Okay. Final kisses, and then you can come and find your mates in a few days. You have waited this long; you can wait ten years knowing that they are safe and will be here for you. Mark the date and come out of the shadows. They will be waiting.”

Regis smiled and turned to her mate. “Yeah. We will be waiting, SIRRUSH.”

## Page 21

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:16 am*

He pulled her into his arms, and the kiss that he gave her was so sweet it made her soul ache. He stepped back from her, and Ignis and Kael stood beside him.

Poppy smiled. "Ladies, step back."

Regis and Rex stepped back, and their mates simply disappeared.

Poppy dusted her hands and smiled. "Okay, the guys are all out. Let's collect the ladies and get out of here. This place gives me the creeps."

Regis looked around and inhaled with a shudder. "You are right. This is a world of pain and murder."

Rex put a hand on her shoulder, and they headed up the stairs again with their senses on high alert.

The Elite were zip-tied and kneeling. Their power was gone, and the women and children were gathered while they waited for everyone to reappear.

Poppy said, "The guys are gone. Do we have everyone?"

Pandora formed up from mist with a woman who looked alarmingly human. The woman smiled. "Hey."

Pandora said, "She was in a portal below."

Regis saw the Elite fill with fear. The woman smiled. "Just keeping shadow mages

from joining the party.”

Pandora blinked. “Do I know you?”

“My name is Kay.”

Regis felt recognition come and move over her in a wave, and then it was gone.

They gathered their charges up and simply left the Stronghold with all of the vulnerable and abused members walking through the gateway that Win held open.

Regis looked back at them and said, “Your time is over. Our time is coming. You should have chosen another way.” The doorway opened, and they began to walk.

She made sure all her people were with her, and they headed to the new palace. It was time to sort the ladies and children. Homes had been arranged, and it would be a few days before everyone was in a safe place. The legal case was started as soon as the women could get their statements and identities proven.

On the other side of the gateway, the house was waiting. Wren and Ira were putting out all the snacks. Ira brought food to the kids, and Regis watched carefully as they moved to get everyone settled. Ela moved from person to person, softly asking them what they needed, and she was clutched at by two of the ladies as they sobbed in relief or panic.

The first hour after the attack was chaos, but then the children were settled into their bunk beds, the adults were put into rooms, and the house swung to quiet.

Regis looked around and tidied up the great room. Ira yawned and said, “Mom, can I sleep in your room tonight?”

“Of course, baby.”

Rex said, “I will take the first watch.”

Elaheh shook her head. “Sleep now. You had your own emotional moment tonight. For me, this was just physio.”

Poppy looked around. “Where’s Wren?”

Ela said softly, “She left the moment we had snacks.”

Poppy smiled. “I need to check in with her. I will take my leave.”

Regis smiled. “Go ahead. We have it now. Get some rest.”

Poppy chuckled. “Rest is a bit distant, but I have to brief her a little. There were details I couldn’t mention here.”

Regis frowned. “Where did that woman Kay go?”

“Pandora had her mates take her home. Then, Gia’s took her home.”

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:17 am*

Rex smiled. “We’ve got this. Elaheh, if you have first shift, we will be good.”

“I will wake you in six hours.”

Regis smiled. “Thanks.”

They slowly gathered together and headed up the stairs.

\* \* \* \*

Ela cleaned up and found another person with her, helping her tidy things. “Kay, right?”

Kay smiled. “Yes. I knew they wanted me gone, so I left and then came back.”

Ela looked at her. “I know you from somewhere, but as soon as I think about it, I forget.”

“Yes, that is an agreement I made a long time ago. I am glad that you are all here and recovering.” Kay smiled as she loaded the dishwasher.

“You are talking like you know us.”

“You and hundreds like you over the years. I can’t stop the trouble from happening, but I can get them out of it if necessary.”

“Wait. You? How?”

“I am older than I look.” Kay smiled, and with a snap of her fingers, the room was clean, and the dishwasher was humming.

She got them each some lemonade, and they settled in the great room.

Elaheh looked at her. “Why couldn’t you save me?”

“I got there as soon as I realized there was an issue. At this point, there are twenty-four thousand of my people around the world, and I spend most of my time trying to keep them alive. You were alive until you were in danger of dying, and that is when your frame broke. You had to make the run for it. Survival instincts are one of the most important things in the world.”

“What are you?”

Kay smiled. “I was a daughter, I was adopted, I was imprisoned, and I took my freedom.”

“When was that?”

“A while ago.” She sipped at her lemonade. “I was bound from stating who and what I was, so I did what I could with those I was protecting.”

“Why?”

“Words have power, and certain words ring through the cosmos. I was allowed to stay and help under specific circumstances, and those were that I not be involved in those I was working to protect.” She smiled. “As long as no one rings that bell, I can stay.”

“I don’t understand.”

“What would you like to happen to your ex-husband?”

Ela sat up. “What?”

“He sold you to the parlour, so he deserves a special reward. What should it be?”

Ela blinked. “Uh, I guess I would like him to feel what I felt while I was there.”

Kay grinned and patted her hand. “Done and done.”

Ela watched a glow fill Kay, then there was a pulse, and it was over.

Ela sat with her lemonade in the quiet house. The folks taken from the Stronghold were safe, and she felt lighter as if a weight had been lifted. She scrolled on her phone with a smile on her lips while she sipped at her drink.

## Page 23

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:17 am*

It was a really nice night.

\* \* \* \*

Pandora came into the shop on Monday, and Kay was sitting with a bright light focusing on her work, embroidering.

Pandora looked at her. “Are you going to tell me what you were doing at the Stronghold?”

Kay kept her focus on her work and smiled. “Sightseeing?”

Pandora sighed. “So, you aren’t going to tell me.”

“Nope. Thanks for the extraction. They had a pretty good grip.”

“It was my honour. What are you working on?”

“The last stitches in the Sagittarius costume. They are all ready to go.”

Pandora rushed in. “No way. This is amazing. I came in early to work on it.”

“Well, the event is tomorrow, so it is best that it is done. You have your models lined up?”

“Oh, yeah. I have been asking around. A few of the ladies are pregnant. The costumes can compensate?”

“Absolutely. Do you want me to help fit them?”

“Can you? You are shorter, and you can get to the hems easier.”

“Funny. Sure.”

Pandora looked at her. “Do you want some coffee? A pastry?”

“Either sounds good right now.”

“Do you want a break, or are you good?”

“I am good. Off you pop.”

Pandora smiled and nodded. “Cream and sugar?”

“Black, you floating column of fluff.” Kay smiled and waved her off.

“I couldn’t have pulled this together without you.”

“I know. Gimme coffee.” Kay chuckled.

Pandora nodded, grabbed her wallet, headed out the door, and walked down the street to get some coffee.

She sighed in relief that Kay had gotten the embroidery done. She didn’t know what she had done to get so lucky as to have Kay apply for the assistant position. The woman had magical fingers.

Pandora popped into Regis’s bakery and grinned. “How are you today?”

“Suddenly remembering that I am doing desserts for the fashion show tomorrow.”

“Well, Kay has me done, so I can help if you need it.”

Regis slumped in relief. “Please. I am a little flustered after our weekend.”

“The guys have been freaked out as well. They have been wearing me out.”

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:17 am*

“Good thing that Kay is picking up the slack.”

“Yeah. I need to get her something nice. Have you heard from SIRRUSH?”

“No. It’s driving me nuts. I know he’s out there somewhere but no idea where to look.”

“How are the placements coming?”

“Easier than I thought. The kids have gone to alpha homes that have ties to Elite omegas. The ladies who were taken are trying to return home, and those who didn’t are being enrolled in school. The new palace will be back to normal in no time with minimal occupants.”

Pandora smiled. “You miss me.”

“Yes, I do.”

“Well, Kay is waiting for coffee and pastries, so get me six of anything that looks good.”

Regis nodded. “Got it.” She moved around and made a number of selections, then started closing the box up and grinned. “She works hard. I gave her a dozen.”

“Great. I am off to Odette’s, and then I will call you to tell you when I can help.”

“Okay. Have fun asking Mom if you can come play.” Regis laughed.

Pandora made a face, took the box out the door, and trotted off to the café to get some coffee for her hard-working assistant.

Odette had a happy glow and got the coffee as a red car stopped in front of her café. Pandora grinned. “One of yours?”

“Yeah, we are still in courtship for now. Our third just showed up this week.” Odette got the coffees. “I have high hopes for the weekend.”

Pandora chuckled. “If they leave it to the weekend.”

“They have to. There is a huge case that Arc is getting ready for. No distractions.”

“I see. Well, his loss. Are you coming to the fashion show tomorrow?”

“I have my ticket already.”

“Excellent. It’s for a good cause.”

“All for the kids, right?”

“Absolutely.”

“Good. I want to have a few, and I need a place to educate them.” Odette grinned.

“It’s rather nice that there is an elf baby boom on the way.”

“It will be a shock for the city, but I think they will adapt.” Pandora smiled.

She got the coffees, and Odette’s Elite alpha walked in and leaned forward for a kiss over the counter. Pandora got out before the smoke alarms went off.

She returned to the shop and saw Kay with some new designs that Pandora had left on the drawing pad. “When did you have time to do this?”

“Oh, I made time. Beauty shouldn’t wait.” Kay grinned and walked over. “So, what did you bring me?”

The coffee was acquired, and the pastry box was opened. Pandora asked, “Kay, are you an omega?”

Kay paused. “What kind of omega? You need to be specific.”

“An Elite omega?”

“Oh, no, Pandora. I am not an Elite omega.”

## Page 25

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:17 am*

“But you are some kind of omega.”

Kay munched into a cream puff. “Some kind.”

“Can I guess?”

“Go nuts.” Kay laughed.

Pandora started guessing, and Kay ate and laughed. It looked like she was having a pretty good time.

### Chapter Five

Regis held Ira’s hand as they watched the afternoon rehearsal. “The costumes are so pretty.”

Ira was bouncing. “They are. Yemeen’s are very pretty. When are Pandora’s coming up?”

“Soon. Are you excited?”

“Yes!” Ira burst into giggles.

The crew was putting the rows and rows of chairs out. It looked to be a large event. The desserts were in the hands of the serving staff, who were arranging the buffet for the break, and now it was time to get ready for the actual show. It started in ninety minutes.

Yemeen came out and mimicked his bow while Haley screamed and cheered.

Kay stuck her head out from behind the curtains, spotted them, and gave Regis a thumbs-up.

Regis smiled and held her breath as Rex slid in next to her. Ira was just about vibrating in place, and then... Keres and Dante walked the catwalk dressed as a zodiac sign that Regis couldn't place. The flowing silk and elaborate designs drew the eye, and the makeup was simply a black line over Keres' eyes and a white one across Dante's.

Ira was clapping wildly, and as Regis looked around, she saw that the others were all staring. Regis covered her mouth. Okay, so zodiac-wearing elves were not a thing on the ground, especially when the female was visibly pregnant.

The stellar silks flowed around Keres as she moved, and Dante twirled her at the end of the runway before they headed back to the main stage. Honey and Alen did the next walk, followed by Poppy and Myro, Win and Wellyn, Myrtle and Teyval, Honey and Alen, Gia and Ornof. Ira was clapping for all of them and super excited when Keres and Achilles appeared wearing a different sign. They moved differently. They glided; they danced and swirled together as if they knew what the other was thinking.

Regis watched the show and saw Yemeen talking to one of the others, pointing at the stage. The organizer pointed at her, and she focused on the stage.

"Ma'am?"

"Yes?"

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:17 am*

“Where did you find those models?”

She smiled slowly and took on her Elite form. “Oh, they are family.”

Yemeen blinked and looked past her. It seemed Rex was doing the same. “Where can I hire you?”

“Well, I am a pastry chef; she’s a stuntwoman.”

“I am willing to beg.”

She snorted, reached into her pocket, and pulled out a card. “If you need one of us, we are available; you just have to ask at the right time.”

Ira was watching the rehearsal with wide eyes, and when Asel came out with Vemel, she squealed and cheered.

Yemeen looked at the two. “Good god. Ford is going to shit himself. I haven’t ever seen someone bluer than he is. They are gorgeous.”

Regis smiled. “And they are both dancers.”

Yemeen groaned. “You are kidding.”

“Nope. Mind you, when he’s standard colours, he’s a model. His name is Vemel.”

“Oh, man.”

Regis chuckled.

When Pandora came out, they rose and clapped wildly, and Ira was hooting her approval. Pandora paused, grabbed Kay, and hauled her out while Kay looked pale.

Pandora hauled her to the end of the runway, took a bow, and the other six guys came out from the back, as well as all the other males who hadn't had a turn with their mates. It was a very crowded runway.

Yemeen walked up to Pandora, and she grinned, introducing him to Vemel and Asel. Themak was nearby, grinning.

The crowd was going to be the last display of the night, and Pandora quickly ushered them to the back so they could wrap up in silky robes so as not to blow the surprise for the audience.

Pandora had done a wonderful job. Each design identified the zodiac and highlighted characteristics in cut and movement.

Regis watched the robed models moving around and smiling. The quick changes for the ladies were safe in the back. Pandora had wrapped enough energy around them to deter a tank.

The models were congratulating Pandora on her designs, and Ira ran up to hug her.

Pandora hugged her and lifted her high, introducing her to the dark elves that she hadn't met yet. Ira smiled and shook hands, greeting them by name. Regis smiled. Her little girl had her talent for knowing the elves around her. The golden princess was going to have a large court to keep her safe as she grew.

Rex smiled. "This is her first time meeting them."

Regis nodded and saw Denith and Toros approaching. “Yes, and she is making quite an impression.”

Ira’s hand pointed toward Regis, and she got to her feet. Rex got up next to her and muttered, “Showtime.”

They joined the crowd as the venue completed the setup around them.

Denith smiled as he joined them. “So, this is your daughter?”

“Yes. This is Ira. Now that her dad is loose, I hope to introduce them.”

Denith paused. “Who is her father?”

Regis said softly, “Sirrush.”

The softly spoken name froze all the alphas in their tracks.

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:17 am*

Denith blinked. "So, you were serious."

"I don't fuck giant chained-up dragons often, so yes." She murmured it softly.

Denith spoke softly, "How did you get past the guards?"

Rex cleared her throat. "I volunteered as tribute."

He looked at her, started to grin, and then burst into giggles. "Both of them?"

"Both of them." Rex was grim.

Denith looked around. "Where are they?"

Regis sighed. "No idea. Don't know what they are calling themselves now either."

He looked at her seriously. "He's around. He will be here."

She looked at him and sighed as Myrtle held Ira, chatting about inviting her for lunch to Denith's restaurant.

Regis grinned. "If Myrtle keeps going, you are going to have a restaurant full of elf omegas."

He grinned. "It will freak out my staff, but I am not complaining."

She laughed. "Being the omega hotspot isn't a bad thing, I suppose."

“It definitely is not.” His eyes flickered, and he smiled softly.

“What was that?”

“Oh, nothing. Just a private note.”

Regis spoke softly. “Ira, you have to do your homework.”

Elaheh appeared and said, “And I am summoned. Come on, squirt. Let’s slam through those equations so you can watch all the prancing with a clear conscience.”

Ira squirmed to get down and took her tutor’s hand. They walked to the back of the stage, where a desk and chair were waiting for her.

Denith blinked. “You make her do homework on nights like this?”

“She’s the first of her kind, and she’s a princess; plus, she loves Ela, and they get along.”

“And she likes homework?”

“Surprisingly, yes. When Ela is there to fire questions at, she has so much fun.”

Pandora asked, “Has anyone seen Kay?”

Regis looked around and saw Kay walking off with two tall men, taking animatedly. She didn’t think anything of it until Vemel looked over, and his eyes widened. “What the hell are they doing here?”

“Who?”

“Those two men are djinn, and they are talking to that beta like they know her.”

Regis looked at the three talking and occasionally gesturing to the nearby woods. Kay slapped a hand over her face. “I can’t fucking go until he’s here!”

The shout carried, and Kay looked toward them, where a sea of black and white faces were staring at her. She stalked back and said, “Fine. It’s now then. Teyval, Myrtle, come with me. I need to tell a story.”

Myrtle blinked and took Teyval’s hand. “I love a good story.”

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:17 am*

Achilles looked at them. “I think I need to hear this.”

Kay hauled them off to the woods, chairs and the two djinn just appeared, and everyone sat for a chat.

Regis looked to Vemel. “Do you know what this is about?”

He frowned. “No, I don’t. I am intensely curious, though. Teyval looks like he’s laying an egg, and if Achilles covers his mouth any harder, he’s going to cave his skull in. Myrtle looks like she’s having fun.”

Regis looked to Myrtle. Her eyes were wide and sparkling, and her fingers itched as if she wanted to be writing or typing. “Yeah, she’s nearly humming with energy.”

Regis watched until Pandora said, “We need to get Achilles and Teyval back. The show is about to start.”

Achilles reached out to touch Kay, but she smiled, and he didn’t make contact. All three of them bowed to Kay and slowly returned to the stage area. Achilles, Teyval, and Myrtle all looked like they had a shock.

Regis asked, “Myrtle, are you okay?”

“Oh, it explains so much. She said I could write it. I don’t know where to start.” Myrtle looked around blindly, and Denith came to take her to their seats.

Regis looked at the filling venue. Ira came to her and said, “We have to sit. It’s

important.”

Regis nodded, and Elaheh sat with them as the fashion show for donations for the school expansion started.

Each designer had a theme. Horror, circus, science fiction, and the zodiac. Pandora’s offering would have gotten a lot more attention if there hadn’t been over seventy elves in the audience.

When Pandora grabbed Kay and hugged her for the final bow, there was applause, cheering from the children, then there was a light in the sky, and it was rapidly getting larger.

Regis got to her feet and pushed Ira behind her. She was going to take a step toward the incoming light, but a warm hand grabbed her wrist.

She looked up and saw a familiar smile. “Hello, love. Just wait here. This isn’t your fight.”

Regis looked into his eyes and lunged into a hug. He wrapped his arms around her and stroked her back. “It is good to see you, love.”

She looked up, and her tears covered her cheeks. “What’s your name?”

“Avor. Avor Rush.” He cupped her cheeks and kissed her.

There was a gentle tugging at her arm, and she suddenly remembered where she was. She reluctantly leaned away. “Oh, Avor, this is our daughter. Amiraith. We call her Ira.”

He kept his hand on her waist as he crouched and smiled at Ira, eye to eye. “Hello,

Ira.”

Ira smiled. “You’re my dad. Do you have wings?”

“Yes. Four shapes and three have wings.”

Ira stuck her small hand out. “Pleased to meet you.”

Regis swallowed as his hand wrapped around Ira’s entire wrist to shake her hand. He smiled and blinked away tears. “Pleased to meet you. I dreamed about you and your mom.”

“And my sister?”

Regis froze. “What?”

“My sister. I had a sister the first time.” Ira smiled. “I knew her when I saw her the first time. She glows the same.”

Regis said, “You never had a sister. We died the night you were born, baby.”

Ira sighed. “Yes, I did. She just never came out of your tummy.”

Regis froze. “Baby, you haven’t mentioned it.”

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:17 am*

“She has a spell like our house. We can’t remember her.”

Avor said, “Why can you remember her now?”

“Because you two finally are together. She doesn’t have to hide anymore.”

Regis swallowed. “Honey, where is she?”

Ira pointed, and Regis turned to see Kay striding toward the glowing light. It stopped, and she went down on her knees, arms stretched out in front of her.

Avor whispered, “The emperor is here.”

He looked around and nodded to Vemel. He kept his arm around Regis, and she kept her arm around Ira. They walked across the open field and toward the light.

Regis stared, and the light slowly faded. Five djinn were there, and the one wearing armour studded with gemstones was staring down at Kay.

Regis took in the image of tiny beta Kay in front of the warrior djinn. She started to stride toward them while her blood began to rise. Kay’s features were Ira’s features, all grown up. How had she not seen it?

Regis muttered, “Why are we not running?”

“Because charging him would be a mistake,” Avor said softly.

\* \* \* \*

Kay kept her full-courtbow going as she felt the fury directed at the back of her neck.

She heard the soft rumble of his voice. “Eight hundred years, Kaido. You have locked me out of this world for eight hundred years.”

She didn’t look up. “I am a lowly worm. I do not deserve speech, but may you destroy me somewhere else? There are too many witnesses.”

A hand threaded in her hair and pulled it back as he crouched next to her. “How many of them are there, Kaido?”

She swallowed. “In total?”

“Yes.”

“Fifty turned into four hundred thousand around the globe.” She whispered it as his white-hot eyes pierced her soul.

There was a gasp behind her.

Without looking away from her, her captor said, “Vemel, it seems you survived the insurrection.”

“Yes, Emperor Vaayu. How long have you enjoyed the throne?”

“Seven hundred and eighty years.” He spoke softly and then used his grip on her hair to lift her. “It would have been enjoyable if my bride had remained within my grasp.”

Kay reached up to grab her hair. “I was a concubine to the previous emperor. I am not

now, nor have I ever been, a bride.” She was hanging by her hair in front of the man she had known as General Vaayu.

He looked down at her. “What are you wearing?”

Her jeans and sweatshirt dissolved in glitter, and she was in a backless gown with delicate slippers and jewels on every inch of her.

Vaayu looked at her and nodded, setting her on her feet. “Better. Oh, look, your family.”

She couldn’t move her head. “I will take your word for it, Your Imperial Majesty.”

He chuckled, “Very polite. How scared are you?”

“Pretty scared. Why are you here, Your Imperial Majesty?”

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:17 am*

“Because the veils between worlds thinned enough for us to walk through them.”

Vemel said, “I don’t think she can move her head, cousin.”

Vaayu smiled. “I am not letting go of her until she’s restrained.”

Kay looked at him, and glittering tears began to flow.

He snorted. “I do not trust your tears, Kaido.”

Vaayu reached to his belt and pulled off a cuff, snapping the gold onto her wrist. She felt the restriction and fought him when he did the second.

Regis’s voice snapped out, “What are you doing? Let her go.”

Vaayu looked to the man with Regis and said, “Sirrush, control your mate.”

“Emperor Vaayu, we have just been told that this is our child. We are conflicted, and my mate is going into a defensive mode.”

Vaayu looked at her and said, “You actually did not tell anyone who you were?”

“No, Your Imperial Majesty. One or two figured it out along the way, but not a whisper from my lips. That was the spell. I had to keep my mouth shut and keep myself away from them, or it would crack. They are back together and safe. My life doesn’t matter.” She winced as the second cuff clicked into place.

“One more, Kaido.”

He lifted the last band from his belt, and she closed her eyes as the slim band clicked around her neck. Her beast howled, but she remained calm.

Vemel murmured, “Those are shifter bands.”

Regis said, “So, she’s a shapeshifter. So what? She’s harmless.”

Vaayu laughed. “Sirrush, what being is bound this way?”

Her mate said, “That is a restraint system for a dragon, but there aren’t any female dragons.”

Vaayu pulled her next to him and murmured to her, “Show them.”

Kay looked at him and nodded, letting her gold wings flare wide. She couldn’t take dragon form with the heavily enchanted cuffs and collar.

Vemel blinked. “Kaido. Holy crap.”

Sirrush asked, “What?”

“Kaido. It means looks like a dragon.”

Kay’s wings slowly opened and closed. She couldn’t look at her family.

Ira’s voice sounded from in front of her. “You are a pretty dragon, princess. Will I look like you when I grow up?”

“Yeah. We were twins that first time.”

“You stayed to bring us back?”

“Yeah. I am bad at manipulation, but I managed to get everyone where they were supposed to be, though so many were hurt in the process.” Kay was miserable.

Vaayu stroked between her wings, and she gasped. “You are lovely with wings, Kaido. I only caught a glimpse that time.”

She swallowed.

Sirrush asked, “Emperor, why are you holding her? What is her punishment for?”

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:17 am*

“Ah, she didn’t tell you, of course.” His hand slid to the back of her neck. “This one was offered to me by the previous emperor. Eventually, I took advantage of his offer when her heat was high. Eight days later, I woke from our bed to hear her footfalls and the crashing of glass as a female dragon was seen at the imperial court.”

Kay blushed furiously.

Vaayu tugged on her hair. “Why did you do that, Kaido?”

She swallowed. “I needed to shift fully to do what I needed to do.”

“And what was that?”

“I needed to have enough material to lay eggs so that my people would hatch and cover the world.” She smiled. “It worked. Our bloodlines spread across the world.”

Vaayu murmured, “And no prince or princess for me.”

A calm voice said, “Well, there was one, but let’s take this somewhere private.”

Kay looked over and saw the speaker, and her heart warmed as she recognized the woman who worked at the local diner. It was a face she saw several times per week.

The woman raised her hand, and a moment later, they were all at the new palace.

Chapter Six

Kay was released, and she edged away from Vaayu and looked at the woman who had a well-worn beta look. “You are very familiar.”

The woman smiled and inclined her head. “I have been close but not interfering for quite some time. Well, there was Wren. I had to help her. So much power and no focus. Her alpha was concerned with defensive magic. She needed attack spells, so I helped you two out of the dark mage realm and then tutored her immediately after. It was hard for her. She couldn’t tell anyone, but she got through it and out the other side.”

Regis looked at her. “You own the company that built this building.”

The woman grinned. “Of course I do. Mother could not be everywhere.”

Vaayu looked at her and said, “That is not your normal-seeming.”

She chuckled. “Well-spotted. I will resume my actual appearance if I am allowed to hug her.”

Vaayu nodded. “You may have contact.”

Kay stepped toward the woman, and when they made contact, she felt the burn of power through the woman.

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:17 am*

The woman whispered, “My name is Vega.”

Kay leaned back, and the blue features with glowing eyes made her look just like her father. Swaths of midnight hair with stars in the locks hung to her ankles, and the simple black dress ended above her toes. “You didn’t hatch.”

“I did. Took a few hundred years. I hatched four hundred years ago and learned the world.” Vega smiled. “You moved in the world like a shadow, but I found you and helped when I could.”

“You didn’t find a mate?”

“Nope. Lived free and single.”

Vaayu snapped, “Come here, girl.”

Kay whispered, “He means you. That’s your father.”

Vega turned to him and walked toward him. As she approached, Kay saw his eyes widen in shock. There was a surge of magic, and he gasped.

Kay looked and saw the markings that were all over Vega. They were the markings of the highborn djinn women who were at court. The difference here was that instead of them being the glittering white of Vemel’s mate Asel, these were gold and dimensional.

Vega looked at her hands and flexed the digits covered with the gold designs and the

two vambraces that were etched in patterns.

Vaayu said softly, “You wield a sword?”

“Sword, spell, rock, cupcake. Whatever it takes.” She remained looking straight at him. No bowing, no genuflecting.

He smiled. “You know you can’t stay here, right?”

“Yes. I gathered as much.”

“You are the sole daughter to the empress, so far. You will be educated and used in a political marriage.”

Vega blinked. “That is rather bold. Don’t I have options?”

Vaayu nodded. “I will give you a choice out of five once you complete your training.”

Vega shrugged. “Whatever. I can use a change of scenery, but Kay is going to need to explain things to your descendants. She has begun the explanation with the archive, but the elves can’t explain it to everyone, so it needs a larger audience to explain how these betas transform into omegas and how the omegas grow far above species standard.” She smiled. “You have tall genetics.”

He looked at her and blinked. “How can this be accomplished?”

She looked at Kay and grinned. “Ford? He can get the word out.”

Regis was there and said, “I will send the invitation out. Um, Your Majesty, can you remain for one day? We have plenty of room here.”

“Yes. We will stay for a day.”

Ira said, “Do I get to skip school?”

Regis sighed. “For a day.”

Elaheh appeared and looked around. “Where did you go?”

Regis smiled. “Back home for family privacy. When did you learn to do that?”

“Uh, just now.” She looked at the djinn guards and said, “I am going to go to my room. I think that’s safest.”

She crossed the lawn a few feet, and Vaayu said, “Stop.”

Elaheh whirled and said, “What?”

“Come back here.”

“I would rather not.”

He looked at her. “Now.”

Elaheh stalked back to him. “Yes, your blueness?”

He smiled softly. “You are injured.”

“Yup.”

“It hurts you to move.”

“You are not shedding any wisdom I am not privy to.”

“How were you injured?”

Elaheh turned her head and said, “Cover her ears.”

Ira covered her own ears, Regis covered them as well, and Sirrush put his hands over that, covering her head and making her giggle while Elaheh explained her arrival at the new palace.

Vaayu scowled. “This is common?”

“It is not unheard of but not common. Our physiology makes the light elves crazy. Like cat grass.”

“But the dark mages...”

“They set the power links to provide energy to the Stronghold. Uh, the old palace.”

“I see. You are very close to djinn.”

“I know. I have spoken to one of the two who were here. Not Vega.”

He nodded. “I know them. They raised Kaido. The emperor at the time gave them leave to leave court. I am guessing they came here.”

Kaido had managed to inch a few feet away, her wings dismissed. She was about thirty feet away when Vaayu said, “Excuse me.”

He went after her with long strides, and she bolted but couldn’t outrun him. He grabbed her around the waist and carried her back to the grouping.

Avor was chuckling. “I am sorry, daughter, that I never taught you not to run.”

Ira squirmed and yelled. “Put her down. She’s scared.”

Kay had to admit, she was terrified. She had left him after her heat, and the next day, she was scheduled to be married off to one of the local nobles. She wasn’t sure what was going to happen when she returned to the imperial house.

Vaayu murmured, “Are you really frightened?”

She looked up at him and nodded. “What’s going to happen to me?”

“I am taking you home. Your throne is ready, and you will settle as my empress. Weren’t you listening earlier?”

“There was a roaring in my ears.”

His arm tightened on her midsection. “The next time you are carrying, it will be at my side so that I can help you.”

“The dragon helped.” She sighed.

He swung her up and held her so she was facing him. “I do not care. Do you know how dangerous you are?”

She nodded. “I know.”

He looked to the sky. “Do they?”

She looked up and saw all of the dragons who were in the area, flying in and descending to the grass around them. “I know some of them hope for a daughter who is a dragon, but it isn’t really a good idea.”

“You only birthed once?”

“One clutch.”

He came in close, and she was shocked by the kiss. Memories of hundreds of kisses over eight days swarmed her, and she clutched at his head. He smiled against her mouth. “What did you do with your heats?”

“They are in bottles. I figured out how to bottle them, and I have been trading them over the centuries for favours for our children.”

“So many children. Have you had the time you needed with your family?”

“No. They didn’t know who I was, and I couldn’t even touch them for fear of starting a signal.”

He chuckled. “One must have held you for a while. The beacon was clear.”

Kay sighed. “Pandora. She was hanging on to me at the fashion show. She was really excited.”

“What was the event?”

“It was a creative display of costumes on a theme. It was a fundraiser for Ira’s school. In a few years, there will be a lot of the elves around. They will need a school so they can be with their peers.”

“Peers?”

“Uh, monster-based alphas and omegas and betas.”

He chuckled. “So, we have a varied legacy.”

“You can say that. There are a few djinn who bred fairly true.”

Ira called out. “Ford’s family!”

Kay smiled. “The omega, Ford, has a family with very specific markings. And you will see him soon; the cars are filling the parking lot.”

Regis turned and smiled. “Well, this is what this place was created for.”

Kay murmured, “You can put me down. I won’t run.”

“You wish to help with the newcomers?”

“Um, yes.”

“Wings out. They need to know what you are.”

She nodded, and her wings emerged. She felt better with them, but her dragon was pouting because now a full shift was out of the question. The cuffs and collar had

enough power to make her look like a supernova to her other senses.

He sighed and set her on her feet. “I need to speak to SIRRUSH and VEMEL.”

She nodded and began to move across the green.

Regis and Ira were at her sides in a moment, and they each took a hand. Kay sniffled, and Vega laughed from behind them. Vega moved up and took Ira’s hand. “Nice to finally meet you, Auntie.”

Ira beamed. “I am, aren’t I?”

Rex and her mates pulled up, and she charged toward them. “What the hell happened?”

Ira grinned. “Kay is my sister. The big blue man is hers, and he put cuffs on her so she can’t be a dragon again.”

## Page 35

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:17 am*

Rex stared, and the drakes halted in their tracks, staring at her. Kael said, “No fucking way.”

Rex snorted. “What, are they rare or something?”

Ignis said, “They are world destroyers. A mated pair can flood a world with dragons in twenty heats.”

Kay shrugged. “Everybody wants females until there is one, and then...” She held up her cuffs.

Regis asked, “What do the cuffs do?”

Kay smiled. “It keeps me in this form. No giant dragon, no huge clutches of eggs, no dragonageddon.”

Regis smiled softly. “How many eggs did you have?”

“Fifty. The results are in the Elite omegas, the transforming betas, and all the enhanced alphas. They are all mine. Your grandchildren.”

Regis stopped in her tracks. “Grandchildren. Holy—”

Ira grinned. “I am an auntie. Oh, I am Pandora’s auntie.”

Kay smiled. “Don’t be too enthusiastic. The auntie has to buy nice birthday and holiday presents.”

“Oh, that could be expensive.”

“I am sure your dad will help you,” Vega said.

Kay smiled. “Or you can make something, but you have alotof nieces and nephews.”

Ira paused as they got close to the gathering crowd. “How many?”

“All of your school buddies and all their parents and grandparents. A few hundred thousand around the world.”

Regis murmured, “Female dragons are dangerous.”

Kay nodded. “Now you are getting it. They normally kill us as soon as we manifest.”

Ira clutched her hand tight. “That is why you were so scared.”

Regis said softly, “Why didn’t you shift and fly?”

“He knows I am here. He can follow me. He’s killed dragons before.” Kay spoke softly.

Regis and Ira immediately snapped to her side. Regis said, “He isn’t getting you.”

“He doesn’t mean to kill me. He’s mumbled something about me being his empress, so that means a bit. He also wants to have more kids with me, but only one at a time.”

Regis turned and looked behind them. “I think I see why. There is just one of you and what looks like twenty of them.”

“There are more around the world. Dragons of all types.”

Kay smiled at Regis. “They are coming. You may want to welcome them to your home.”

Regis sighed. “This is a busy night.”

“Hang on to your butt. It isn’t over,” Kay whispered. “Oh, can I take Ira flying?”

Ira’s eyes got wide. “Can she, Mom?”

Regis and Kay looked at each other. Kay said, “I have helped you get through this life; I am not going to stop now. I just have some things I need to tell Ira, and I would like to do that in the air.”

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:17 am*

“Fine. Don’t drop her.”

Kay smiled, winked at Vega, and reached for Ira. “I would never drop my big sister.”

Ira wrapped her arms around Kay’s neck, and Kay muttered, “Now I just have to remember how to do this.” She stepped away, flapped her wings, looked at Ira, and said, “Here we go.”

She propelled herself skyward, and Ira let out a “Woohoo!” and they were on their way to the city, laughing together and flying low over the manors and residences. At one point, a phoenix was flying next to them, an Asian dragon and thunder beast caught up, and then more dragons in their human-sized form joined them.

Kay whispered to Ira, “The first dragon parade this world has seen, and the last with me in it.” She did a loop-the-loop to Ira’s excited squeals, and then her cuffs started humming. “Okay. Gotta go back now.”

Ira said, “Awe, look at them all.”

Kay looked around and grinned. “That’s your dad. Our dad.”

A glittering dragon about seventeen feet from nose to tail.

Ira whispered, “Wow.”

“That’s his small form. His big form is really big and not necessary for this.” Her bands throbbed, and she muttered, “He wants me down fast; we are going to go fast.

Hang on again.”

Ira nodded, and they angled for the ground with a focus being on the dark blue face Kay knew so well. She passed over him so close that his hair ruffled, swooped up, and landed daintily. She set Ira down. “Thanks for flying with me, big sis.”

Ira hugged her and then growled. “You had better be nice to her and let her come to visit.”

Vaayu murmured right behind them, “We will negotiate for time. Perhaps once every twenty years.”

“Five.”

There was a soft laugh. “Ten. She can come back every ten years for ten days. I will be with her during those visits.”

Kay exhaled and slowly straightened. She pulled her wings in and turned, curtsying deeply.

“I had no idea you could bank so quickly.” He touched her jaw and made her look up at him. “The golden dragon. The seers have been going mad trying to figure out who you were. An infection on a new colony.”

She blushed. “I’m sorry. They needed help.”

“They did. You could have asked me.”

“You simply would have recalled your men. You had spoken of it several times in the court.” She remained in the curtsy. “You said you would have recalled the dark elves and destroyed the light ones who had risen against them. That would have stopped

my parents from being able to reunite. It would have stopped Ira from returning. They had to come back.” She blinked away the tears.

He smiled and gripped her shoulders, making her stand on her own feet again before he folded her into his arms. “I hope you are as fierce for our other children.”

She stared at him and whispered, “Why?”

“Because your heat burned for eight days, and you begged me to cool you. You gave me energy to keep me going, which was thoughtful.” He feathered a kiss over her lips. “I feel the need to repay you.”

Kay blurted, “Why are you being nice? Why are you the emperor?”

“My great-uncle abdicated, and the generals fought it out. It took ten years of endless challenges, but I was the winner.”

She swallowed. “How many dead?”

“No one that will be missed.” His hand circled her neck.

Images of him holding her that way against the wall flooded her mind. Her body started to wake. It had been a while.

“Look at me, golden dove.”

She flicked her gaze to him, and his pale gaze caught her and held her. “Why? You never wanted to be emperor. He would have named you heir if you had whispered it.”

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:17 am*

“I know, but now it is my position, and as long as you come with me, I will be a good emperor and take care of my people.”

She licked her lips. “If I don’t?”

He pulled her in close. “If you run again, dove, I will pull worlds apart to find you.”

She nodded and pressed one hand to his jewelled breastplate. “I am done running. I just need to see them every now and then. I have an interest in their survival.”

“You are proud of them.”

“I am so proud of them. The omegas fought so hard for survival and independence. One of the elves is about to start to push for a change in policy so that the omegas can be their own people or at least own their own assets.”

“That really bothered you, dove?”

“It is frustrating. I can smell gemstones beneath the soil; I can carve them out of rock with my bare hands, but I don’t own anything that I have. I can’t grow my hoard, and it is so frustrating.”

He leaned in and whispered in her ear. “You will have your treasures. I am changing the laws.”

Kay rubbed her cheek along his. “You are?”

“I am removing the death sentence from golden dragonesses as long as they register and are restricted. If there is an instance of them seeding a world not designated for it, they will be punished.”

“Got it. I did the one, and I am done.”

He paused. “I think I found the family you have been taking care of. It seems to have been curated.”

She smiled. “You found the Rathmussens. I missed your face, so I took care of them. No one here thinks it is weird that they are dark blue.”

He stroked her neck slowly. “You missed me?”

“I did, Vaayu. Oh, can I use your name?”

He chuckled. “You and only you can speak my name. The women’s quarters are empty, and my chamber has been renovated to accommodate room for a little dove that needs a nest.”

“I am afraid I gave my tendency to need a safe space to our female descendants, but since the males are also branches of our tree, they understood on a basic level and compensated for them.”

He moved his hand from around her throat and hugged her. “You took good care of our children.”

She sniffled and said, “I tried.”

He held her as the tears coursed down her cheeks, and she felt him watching the steady influx of the local detachment of their lineage. His presence had pulled them

together.

### Chapter Seven

Regis stood with Avor, and he wrapped his arm around her and lifted Ira in his other.

She grinned when Ira said, “Daddy, you flew with us!”

He laughed. “Kaido’s wings called to us, so we flew.”

“Kay is a good flyer. Did you have fun, Dad?”

He nodded. “It was nice to see the city as well. She knew what she was doing.”

She giggled. “Kay knows everything.”

“She does. She certainly seems to be happy with your brother-in-law,” Regis said softly.

Ira immediately flailed and got to the ground. “I have a brother?”

Regis laughed as Ira made a beeline for Kay and Vaayu. “Did you know him before?”

“He was a bloodthirsty general who had the emperor’s favour. If what I gleaned is correct, Kaido was in the imperial court and assigned to the general for her heat. When the heat was over, she bolted, shifted, and made a portal to come here.”

“Why did she have to shift?”

He chuckled and filled her in on what made female dragons so dangerous. Eggs. Human-sized eggs. From five to a hundred.

“Oh, so she...”

“Gave us reinforcements in the only way she could. Steered generations to this moment.”

“And we broke the Stronghold.”

“What did you do with the elves?”

“Oh, they were depowered. Un-elfed. Turned into normal alphas. I think they are still walking to get to the nearest town.”

“How?”

“You have some very talented granddaughters.”

“That is terrifying.”

“Wait until you meet them. They are so sweet.”

He held her and said, “I think another kiss is in order.”

She smiled and went up on her toes. “Meet me.”

Avor leaned down, and Regis sighed as the kiss went on and on. “So, I have an excellent babysitter. And I have been learning sound-deadening spells. I am fairly sure that when we do head to bed, we can enjoy the reunion.”

Avor sighed. "I will be content just to hold you in my arms. Anything else is a bonus."

"You have been here for a while."

He chuckled. "Enough time to understand how things work, and you and yours were right to toss us back so that we could learn to walk in step with our mates. All of the males who haven't located their match are eager to start the search."

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:17 am*

“Well, the ladies who are local are coming in. I always thought we would be the draw, but it’s Kay.”

He chuckled. “For many, but for the dragons, it is both of us. I can’t believe she did all this. I can’t believe she was even born.”

Regis sighed. “She wasn’t. Her dragon pulled her out of my body and flew to the djinn, who were about to leave. They took her to safety, and then they followed her back here when it was time.”

“How do you know that?”

“She told Teyval the whole story, and what the archive knows, I know. Of course, I am not pleased that she faked my diary and bound it in her blood to make it toxic to the Stronghold, but to make it an artifact that only the archive’s mate could read was a stroke of genius. She loves a good story.”

Avor murmured, “How did she know all of it?”

“Oh, honey, she was there.”

“When did you and Tawney become one?”

“When I had Ira. She hadn’t been a mother; I hadn’t been a mother; we learned it together. That was the point we became one.” She looked around. “Where’s Rex and the guys?”

“I believe they have sought some privacy.”

“Oh. Oh.” Regis chuckled. “I guess they are working on the niece or nephew.”

“They have talked of nothing but your sister since we were together.”

She smiled. “Good. Rex has been a little frustrated herself.”

He looked at the bonded groupings and blinked. “What happened there?”

“Oh, that is Myrtle and her pack. The Elite fooled Toros, and they were draining the bond energy out of him using a bait beta. They used illusions to confuse him. So he pulled on Denith’s energy, and both were draining Myrtle. She nearly died before Achilles, Dante, and Keres got Teyval and Byron to step in until they could find Toros.”

“Teyval? Wow.”

“Yup. He’s her primary. They share books together.” Regis smiled.

“Unexpected. I know about the mages and Iris. They have two boys?”

“The boys were adopted by her primary, Brexel. They are dark Elite descendants as well. Their parents passed.”

“Ah. How did everyone get here so fast?”

“They live less than ten minutes away. Well, most of them.” She smiled. “When we started building the new palace, the properties nearby were purchased, and manor houses were built, but only the Elite and their partners stayed. Well, there were a few others.”

Ira was grilling Vaayu if his surprised expression was anything to go by.

Ford was staring at the djinn and eased over to Regis as the less terrifying option. “Reg, can you tell me why me and my siblings suddenly don’t look that out of place?”

“I am guessing that Kay chose to have some pure djinn children. You would be descended from them.”

Avor said idly, “That makes us your great-grandparents, several times removed.”

Regis smiled. “Sorry for missing your milestones. I can offer you two weird aunties at this point, and that is your grandfather, by the way.” She pointed to Vaayu. She spotted Vemel and beckoned to him. “He can make introductions. Vemel is also a djinn omega, and he can introduce you to Vaayu.”

She watched as Vemel approached and grinned at Ford. “Hello, little cousin.”

Ford blinked. “You’re an omega?”

Vemel inclined his head. “And I have my own omega and an alpha to watch my back. It seems to run in the family.”

Ford blinked. “I know your face. You model.”

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:17 am*

“I do. I am very popular in certain markets. Come. Let’s meet your great, great infinitum grandfather.”

Vemel looked to Avor. “I am assuming that that is what you wanted?”

“Yes, Vemel. Thank you. I am still dazed at the variety of power that I can sense in this space.”

“Oh, your guys?”

“No, the females. They are astonishing. The alphas are impressive, but the women are warriors.”

“A lot of them have had to be. Hunted by the Stronghold, rejected by their families, many of them have found peace and companionship in the book club and just being with those who have developed the same way. If you want scary, look at Win and Poppy, Keres as well. Vemel’s mate Asel can wield Themak’s fire.”

Food trucks began pulling up, along with motorcycles and cars, families who were drawn to this moment for the impromptu family gathering.

Regis said softly, “I never imagined this. I just hoped that they would be able to get out of the shadows and see each other.”

Avor hugged her. “I am stunned. Is that chocolate?”

“Ruby owns a chocolate shop. Apparently, she was motivated to bring some.”

“Can we?”

“Of course. This isn’t my show; it’s ours.”

He lifted her, kissed her, then set her down and walked toward the food that was assembling under the watchful eyes of dozens of elves.

The crowd stepped aside as they approached, and Ruby smiled. “Regis, I have been wanting to do a collab with your shop. I love your cream puffs.”

They hugged face-to-face for the first time. “Ira loves Patchwork Pixie. We are hoping the movie won’t be too scary. I hear Teyval is the troll prince, and Myrtle ended up being the pixie.”

Ruby laughed. “Yeah. I was starting to show, and there was no way I was going to spend that much time on set. Myrtle wrote the screenplay, so it was right that she be in there instead of me. It gave a lot of the ladies a boost. They were able to work in the public world, and the dark elves got to get their flirt on.”

Regis smiled. “I can hardly wait to see it.”

“I think they are starting to run the ads now that all of the special effects are accounted for.” Ruby smiled and rubbed her belly. “It is a guess as to what is going to make its debut first.”

Marshall walked up, and Regis grinned as he cuddled his mate and touched her belly.

Avor sighed. “That is a memory I still have.”

Regis smiled. “Floral crowns every morning. I felt bloated and pretty.”

He looked at her wistfully. “I remember.”

Regis looked over to where Ford and his siblings had gathered to talk to Kay and Vaayu.

Ruby asked, “Who is that?”

“It’s the golden dragon and the emperor of the djinn. Myrtle has the story. Teyval has the details. It is a lovely story with many children and a fight for freedom that exposed a family so big no backyard barbeque can hold them all.”

Ruby smiled. “Can I invite my uncle, my mom, and Dad? Emmy’s around here somewhere.”

Regis grinned. “This place is an open house for now. Anyone can come and go.”

“Cool.” She pulled out her phone and started dialling. She paused and said into the phone, “They say you can come. See ya.” She smiled and looked at Regis. “My dad is a light elf. Just letting you know.”

Regis nodded. “Win has a light elf in her grouping; of course, he’s grey.” Something struck her, and she looked around. “Where are Win and Alexi?”

Ruby looked around, and Avor turned his head. “There. Why?”

## Page 41

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:17 am*

Regis told her, “Because Niko’s dragon wants Alexi to have a dragon that can have daughters.”

Avor murmured, “Fucking hell.”

They walked quickly to the spot where the dragons were standing and conversing with Alexi in their midst.

Regis walked up and said to Win, “Have you made him a dragon yet?”

Win blinked and blushed. “No. Not yet. Why?”

“Don’t do it. Don’t give him a dragon that can have girls.”

Avor sighed. “A female dragon will bring the djinn and their army here en masse to stamp them out. This gathering that you see here is due to one single dragoness and one single heat. If she had a mate here, this world would have been lost under wings and fangs.”

Niko froze. “Why are the dragons asking for it?”

Avor chuckled. “It is ridiculously simple. Mating flights. There is a heady rush from mating in your actual form, but dragons can never accomplish it. A mating flight clutch could produce over a hundred eggs at one laying. If there are female dragons in the clutch, they can start laying in twenty years.”

Niko’s eyes widened in horror. “Even one out of a hundred with their mother still

laying.”

Avor said, “The reason we are born with the dragons as part of us is to temper them. A female in the mix would destroy things.”

Rikkart asked, “Why didn’t the original female keep laying?”

“Her mate was a djinn, and I think she loves him.” Regis figured it out and smiled at Avor. “I wasn’t aware of her emergence, but her life has brought you all here today.”

Avor said, “If we had still been together when she appeared, she would have been bound, much as the emperor has done it now. No full form, no mating flights.”

Regis looked to Win. “That is why they developed the smaller form.”

Win blinked. “Oh. So, it was a compulsion that I had. What was pushing it?”

Avor looked at her and grinned. “You could have been a dragon. The children you have will need to be watched. The restriction will need to happen, and if they want open flight, you can go to the moon to do it. Somewhere horny males can’t get them.”

Win stared. “The moon?”

“Dragons are space flyers. Atmosphere is not required.”

Win swallowed. “What would happen to a female dragon where you come from?”

“She would have a few flights, and when she had signs of her first heat, her wrists and neck would be bound so that a full shift wasn’t possible, but her wings would still be at her disposal.”

“If she got loose?”

“Destruction. A female dragon with a mate can destroy a world in five generations.”

Win swallowed. “Understood. I will focus on passing the magic along.”

Avor smiled. “Sensible.”

Alexi chuckled. “Niko, you are going to have to choose something else.”

Avor cocked his head. “You are a beta?”

Alexi nodded. “He has altered me a little with dragon fire, but Win is under a compulsion.”

Avor blinked. “A moment please.”

He flexed his wings and flew over to Vaayu. He spoke for a moment, and then Regis blinked as her son-in-law appeared next to her.

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:17 am*

He smiled kindly at Win and spoke softly. Win's other mates were nearby, and they watched as Vaayu took her hands, and his eyes glowed bright. Win glowed in turn, and they both stood silently as power flowed between them.

Win's face broke into a smile, and she took a deep breath. "Thank you."

Her mates stepped forward, and Wellyn said, "Are you all right?"

She beamed and looked at Alexi. "I am going to offer you a better option."

Vaayu released Win's hands, and she nodded thanks to him as he stepped back.

Win and Alexi stepped away and had a conversation.

Niko asked, "What is she offering him?"

Vaayu smiled. "She can change him into a lesser djinn. Pewter skin, hair gold and silver. They are very pretty and have more power than the average being born to this world."

Niko paused and closed his eyes. Alita smiled.

Avor said, "He is discussing it with the dragon."

Alita nodded. "The dragon is in favour, but Niko has to break out of the fantasy images."

Vaayu nodded. “Avor, I need to discuss something with you. Regis, you as well.”

Avor and Regis walked with Vaayu, and when they were a solid distance away from the others, he put a barrier up around them. Vaayu looked to Avor. “She was a timebomb.”

Regis blinked. “What?”

“She was programmed to make a dragon. The Stronghold put it in her. If they ceased to provide a signal, she would make a dragon who could make females.”

Regis looked around the area. “There are enough males here to make that a disaster.”

“And they would overtake the population and leave the elves as the magical species in control.”

Regis raised her brows. “Really?”

Vaayu said, “There are no djinn born to this world, aside from my descendants. We can control dragons if we must, but it is a bloody mess.”

Regis winced. “So, you mean destroy.”

“Yes. When their population surges, there is only the dragon form and the consumption of all living beings around it. Locusts.”

Regis swallowed. “The size of military planes. Oh god.”

Avor wrapped an arm around her. “Without enough elves to pin the dragon energy to, they would consume this planet.”

Vaayu said, “You need to be aware of the behaviour of those who the Stronghold confined for any extended period of time.”

Regis nodded, thinking. Her eyes went wide. “Elaheh.”

She looked around and saw the woman hanging back to the side and out of the crowd. “Can you tell by looking?”

“Now that I know what I am looking for. Yes.” She pointed toward the newest elf to cross her threshold.

Vaayu’s eyes widened. “This is going to be an exhausting night.”

He walked toward Elaheh, and Regis went with him. Kay saw where they were going and joined them.

Elaheh looked resigned as they surrounded her. “So, what did they put under my skin?”

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:17 am*

Vaayu looked at her closely. “A curse. Win was a kill switch. Elaheh is a bomb.”

Kay reached for her, and Vaayu held her back. “We need to plan this.”

Elaheh looked at him. “Can I just let it go?”

“What?”

“Let all the energy in my body go. I can do that, and it should purge the curse, right?”

“You are going to kill yourself,” Kay stated baldly.

“Well, my second question was, can anyone jump-start me after that energy is gone? I don’t want to live with any part of them in me.”

Vaayu frowned. “Will you explain?”

“Only if I have to, so if I wake up, I will explain.”

Kay was about to reach for her, but a huge gout of energy shot skyward, and Elaheh slowly fell back with the light draining from her eyes.

Vaayu said, “It’s gone. She’s empty.”

Kay nodded and reached out but found Vaayu next to her, and they both poured energy into Elaheh rhythmically until she coughed and wheezed. Kay lunged in and lifted her in her arms. “Oh, sweetheart. Why did you do that? How did you do that?”

“I did it all the time in the parlour. They kept bringing me back.” She muttered, “It’s easy to let it go. Energy doesn’t want to stick to me.”

Vaayu nodded. “There are specialists at the palace that can help you.”

“So, I get fixed, and I come home?”

“No. You will remain with us for ten years until the next visit.”

Elaheh swallowed. “What happens if I don’t go?”

“You continue to have unstable energy that you can’t properly focus. Your life will not be long.” Vaayu looked at her, and he was grim.

Kay swallowed. “I don’t want to force you into any situation, but the court is amazing, and the libraries are astonishing. You can easily spend the rest of your life learning something new every day.”

Elaheh smiled. “Can I still help Ira with her homework?”

Vaayu sighed. “There are methods of communication. If she needs help with her studies, we can assist her.”

Kay smiled. “We?”

“She is my sister-in-law.”

Elaheh looked over and smiled. “She’s also right behind you.”

They turned around, and Ira had tears in her eyes. “You are leaving?”

“Not quite yet, Ira.” Elaheh opened her arms, and Ira darted to her.

Regis smiled and thought that this was going to be the first separation for Ira on the same night she met her father.

Ira looked up at Elaheh. “You feel different.”

Elaheh chuckled. “I am the only person here wearing day casual. The denim is probably messing with you.”

Ira giggled.

## Page 44

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:17 am*

Vaayu lifted his fingers, and Kay grabbed his hand. “Let her have those clothes for tonight. Court stuff is very pretty but very drafty.”

Regis laughed and leaned on Avor, feeling him behind her without looking.

The party was continuing, and more people were arriving. The party continued until sunset the following night when the emperor and his guards and the ladies who were leaving left in the same wave of light that had graced the area the previous day.

### Chapter Eight

Regis smiled at Irain her father’s arms. Avor had this expression of wonder on his features every time he looked at her. After the rolling party, Ira hadn’t gotten enough sleep, but she was smiling happily.

Elaheh, Kay, and Vega had gone with Vaayu and his guards. The younger dragons were sober as their urge for a female of their kind was understood.

The ladies from the Stronghold who were still there were safely at one end of the palace.

Rex was going to be on monitoring duty with her mates. Rex’s cheeks were still pink every time they looked at her, so she wasn’t going to get much sleep. Kael and Ignis would take turns listening for the little princess. They were her uncles now, after all.

Avor smiled. “You didn’t ask me what I do?”

“Oh. It didn’t seem important at the time. You are here with us. That was all I was after.”

“I own land and let developers bid on it. The nearby neighbourhood is one. There are two more in the works.”

“How did you manage to get started?”

“Other elves were still loose, and the dragons knew who I was. They helped me start, but their alphas didn’t know what had happened.”

“Oh, you were sneaky.” She smiled.

“I was.”

They entered the new palace, and she directed him toward Ira’s room. They were met in the wide hallway by Rex and her mates, who smiled. Avor inclined his head. “I’ve got her.”

When Regis directed him to Ira’s room, he carried her in and set her gently on her bed.

Regis kissed her daughter’s forehead and used a little energy to change her into pyjamas. Avor tucked her in and kissed Ira’s head. “Night, my princess.”

Regis sighed and took the arm that Avor offered her. Outside her daughter’s room, Rex said, “I’ve got this. Have a good night. Take another day. If she is up, she goes to school tomorrow.”

Regis nodded. “Thanks.”

“You let me have my time; I can let you have yours, but I have to ask, how did the food trucks show up?”

“Emerald.”

“Ah, that would explain the petit fours.” Rex smiled. “Go on and have a night together. You must be exhausted. We will watch over Ira.”

Avor chuckled and said, “Lead the way, my lady.”

She felt a blush on her cheeks as she took him by the arm to lead him to the third floor.

“You have made the halls wide and tall.”

“Yeah, well, I have met you. I factored the wings in.” Regis smiled.

They walked to the large double doors, and he chuckled. “Invite me in?”

“I did that last time, and the result is downstairs.”

He chuckled. “I could only dream of getting that lucky a second time.”

Regis smiled. “That wasn’t luck; that was research. I had the test and was ready to start her before Rex and I got into that vehicle.”

“So generous.” He frowned as she opened the doors. “I am surprised you were able to bear her so easily.”

She walked inside, and he entered the room after her, closing the doors behind him.

“It wasn’t easy. I had all the energy I had taken from you, every drop of fire I could hold. After that started to wear out, I got wobbly, but then... oh... I met Kay.”

He paused. “That would explain it.”

“Yeah, she held my hand, baked me treats, and gave me a cookbook of her specialties that I used to open my bakery.” Regis blinked. “And I didn’t know who she was.”

Avor pulled her into his arms and held her. They stood like that for minutes or hours, Regis couldn’t have said.

When she lifted her head to his, he was there, and their kiss woke memories for her that Tawney had kept for herself. Clothing rustled, he kissed her tears, and eventually, they moved together on the bed, whispering words of relief and joy until dawn broke.

Regis groaned, and Avor kissed her shoulder, chuckling. “Sore?”

“Out of practice. The last thing that was in there was Ira.”

Avor laughed.

Regis smiled and stroked his cheek. “I remember the laugh.”

“I smiled a lot the first time and grinned for a decade the second, knowing that our time together was getting closer. Now that I can actually learn the kind of person our

daughter is, I can see the future as a whole getting brighter.”

“What did the dark elves want here to start with?”

He chuckled. “To set up an outpost to stop incursions from other dimensional forces.”

“Like djinn?”

“Like any number of forces who had already been picking at human populations like popcorn. Entire early cities simply disappeared.”

Regis blinked. “You are serious.”

“I am serious.” He kissed her shoulder again, slowly working his way to her neck.

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:17 am*

Regis shivered. “So, where have you been living?”

“A few streets over. Close enough to keep an eye on you but not so close that it was creepy.”

She giggled at the modern usage.

Avor slid his fingers between her thighs and stroked gently. “Aw, was it too much?”

She laughed. “I think you made up for Ira’s lifetime. I feel a little swollen.”

He smiled and kissed her, her neck, breasts, belly, and nuzzled her navel. When he made himself comfortable between her thighs and opened his mouth, the controlled blast of fire coursed over her and then inside her.

Her sensitive skin took the fire and turned it to pleasure. She moaned and gasped, screaming as the fire took her higher. Avor stopped the flames and moved up, sliding into her. He chuckled. “There, all better.”

Regis looked at him, stunned. “That was... I forgot about that.”

He smiled. “You got me through my rut, and I got you through it in turn. That is how Kay came to be. How did she get her name?”

“She said the djinn she flew to named her. They saw her coming and said, it looks like a dragon.”

He withdrew slowly and then slid deep. “Vaayu will take care of her. I believe that brutal bastard is actually in love.”

She looked at him with concern. “Brutal? How can you tell?”

He nuzzled her neck as his hips moved slowly. “Because he didn’t kill her. Female dragons have a death sentence under normal circumstances, and he showed up with the cuffs and collar. He knew what she was and wanted her anyway.”

She was going to speak, but he rocked in hard, and her body bucked and clenched around him. She sighed softly as her sex tried to milk him, and then he obliged.

Regis groaned and held onto his shoulders as he locked into her, his scales flaring to hold him inside her.

Avor was still and panting. “That still takes getting used to.”

“What does your dragon think of this?”

“He thinks he was wise to keep me alive when I would have destroyed myself. He takes credit for Kay and is horribly impressed with himself. Vaayu has now made it impossible for him to make another female dragon. He also provided the other dragons with the same treatment, just in case there was a throwback.”

Regis looked up at his dark features and glowing eyes. “I am glad you are still here.”

“I will never leave your side again.” He kissed her softly and smiled. “Well, I will never be out of cellphone range and will be at your side in under a minute.”

She laughed. “A vow for the modern age.”

He smiled. “A new vow that I will keep to.”

“Well, the ladies around me now will not scream and run. They are fighters and willing to kill.”

“And you?”

“I know all of them, all of the elves. That’s my dubious skill.”

“Did they all arrive last night?”

“No, some don’t know what they are. Some are in the islands or around the world.” She chuckled. “The ladies will wonder where their mates are if we run out of guys.”

He smiled. “You remember Vaayu’s promised visit in ten years?”

“Yes.”

“He will not be arriving alone. If we tell him what we need, he will bring it. We were never supposed to be the last wave.”

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:17 am*

She blinked. “Oh. That will be... oh. Wait. Colony.”

He smiled. “Yes. We will restrict our numbers, but we are here now and have already contacted local governments to weave ourselves into the fabric of the modern age.”

“Which is why we wanted you back in time before we took down the Stronghold.”

He stroked tendrils of hair from her forehead. “And it worked. We are all integrated into the society that spawned you, and while it has been challenging, I have been watching and waiting for this moment.”

“That is rather embarrassingly specific.”

Avor grinned. “You were and are the treasure of my life, but Ira is the jewel. What do you think she wants for over a decade of missed presents?”

Regis sighed as the scales on his erection folded again so he could slide. “She’s into horses, in the worst way, but I don’t have time to take her, and while we have a lot of space, I don’t know anything about horses.”

He slid free of her and dropped to her side, curling her against him. “Funnily enough, my people are very familiar with horses. Until we get zoned for a stable in the area, I think I know where we can take her.”

She smiled. “Alita?”

“Or Olly. But Alita’s horses are more used to riding.”

“How do you know that?”

“I have been watching the explosion of betas into omegas and some of them turning into light elves.” He chuckled. “My company has been creating houses, building businesses, and working on the expansion that this city is undergoing on the flood of alphas from around the world. The ladies were hiding, but more alphas just kept coming.”

Regis sighed and licked his chest. “I know. It was so perplexing, but I talked to Keres recently, and she explained what happened. She turned this place into a sanctuary right around the time that Ruby put all of her energy into the soil itself. Throughout the years, the ladies all blessed the area one by one in different ways.”

He stroked her spine. “Watching the changes, my people have come to a decision.”

“What is that?”

“The laws governing omegas here are strangely confining. Marshall and Dante, along with their firm, are getting ready to start pushing a repeal of the laws.”

Regis chuckled. “That’s cute. We are going a little more direct. The ladies are going to take over the Omega Centres, one by one. What they have been doing is horrific. Omega suicides have increased in the last seven years. Yes, some good matches have been made when the alphas have brought the omega in for medical care, but they are few and far between.”

“I hadn’t realized it was that bad.” He frowned and kissed her temple.

“They don’t publicize it, but one of the women taken from the Stronghold had a sister who was handed over to a pack of seven alphas, and after her first heat, she killed herself.”

“That’s horrific. What was done about it?”

Regis shrugged, “By the authorities? Nothing.”

Avor leaned back and asked, “What did she do?”

“I don’t know. She hasn’t gotten back here yet.”

“You let her go alone?”

Regis sighed and rubbed her forehead. “It isn’t really a matter of letting these ladies. Now that she isn’t pinned to a wall and her wounds have been healed, North is scary as hell. Even worse than Rex without coffee.”

“What is her full name?”

“Ibella North.”

“Her skillset?”

Regis blinked. “How would I know that?”

“The same way I know all of my men. It came with the crown.” He grimaced. “Who was her sister?”

“Leticia.”

“Right. Stay here. She’s not going into a pack of seven alphas without backup.”

As he moved back, Regis sat up. “It’s going to be a fair fight, and she is furious, so it will be fast.”

He got his phone from his trousers and looked at her. “You have a lot of faith in her abilities.”

“Ira does. When Ira was five, she was on a school trip, and they went to the zoo. There was a young keeper on work experience there, and when a known angry camel got loose, she herded the beast away from the children before it killed for a second time. She was smiling and gentle, walking the beast back using cold air to move it back into its enclosure. I was stunned. It was the first time I had seen someone activate skills so early. When the camel was back behind its gates and the zookeeper who had forgotten to lock it up was off to be reprimanded, North bought us all some cotton candy and praised Ira and the others for being calm.” Regis rubbed her forehead. “The next time I saw her, she was bleeding on Honey and being helped through the portal. Her arms, ribs, and shoulders shredded; they had pinned her to the wall in six places.”

“Upper body, not her—” He looked at her with horror. “Oh.”

“Yeah. She had only been there a few days, thankfully. Of course, even a moment like that is too much.” She sat and ran a hand over her hair.

He looked at the phone and smiled. “Good, the winds did not catch their match at the party.”

She looked at him. “Are you sure you want wind on wind?”

Avor smiled. “Four of them together are calm. Take one away, and they go wild. They were also in the restrained area of the Stronghold. They were the power supply.”

“Oh. Well, that might not be such a bad idea.”

Avor looked at her with a narrowed gaze. “Where did she go?”

“How would I know?”

“You have them all.”

“Oh. That. Toss me my phone.”

He did, and she opened the maps and located her position. He checked the GPS coordinates and sent them to someone, slumping in relief when he got an answer.

“You know, you really can’t mother hen the ladies, Avor. If she had wanted help, she had dozens of us to choose from. She chose to go alone.”

“She sought revenge. That clouds thinking.” He set his phone at the bedside and plucked hers from her hand. Avor took a position against the headboard and pulled her up, allowing her to rest against him.

“Now, what colour horse do you think Ira would like?”

She laughed. “She’s going to try and bring it home so it can sleep in her room.”

“I believe she is more sensible than that.”

“You are right. That is just what she tried when she was six. We had a petting zoo for her birthday, and suddenly, she and the pony were missing. Guess where they were?”

“In her bedroom?”

“Nope. In mine. It was bigger. She had hay and water and was hauling a bag of rolled oats from the pantry.”

Avor chuckled. “I am both impressed and appalled.”

“It was wearing my bathrobe so it didn’t get cold. I have no idea how she got it on.”

He couldn’t hold it back; he burst out laughing.

She looked at him, and something suddenly struck her. “Something similar was done by you, tall, dark, and flappy.”

He grinned. “It was. A batch of viper kittens. I dressed them in a tunic and told the house guards that it was a little friend that I was taking for medical care. I managed for three days until the housekeeper came in and got stung. She wasn’t injured badly, but my parents were not impressed, and I had to take the babies back where I found them. They were stronger now, so it was a little more difficult, but I managed it. Their mother was not happy with me, but she was so busy greeting her lost ones that I could make my escape.”

“She hasn’t brought home anything deadly, yet. She’s more interested in robotics, so I guess she might be building a horse. Your plan could save me money.”

He laughed again.

Regis looked at his delighted expression. She realized that she had never seen that look before. There had been wonder when Tawney was pregnant. Contained joy as it advanced and hope as she got close to term. Fury and protective rage the night of the attack. She had seen lust and indulgence but never this impish delight. His soul was happy, and she could see it.

He saw her staring at him and caressed her cheek. “What is that intent look for?”

“I think I saw you for the first time just now.”

He smiled. “I look forward to seeing all the facets of you as well. You have had all this weight on your shoulders for quite some time. I am ready to take on what you will surrender.”

“Great. You are responsible for getting us up and washed and dressed. None of that dragon fire. I want to feel clean.”

He snorted. “Fire is faster.”

“Yes, but there is nothing like rubbing soap all over you and getting your body nice and slippery, and then you returning the favour.”

His eyes glowed, and he picked her up and hauled her to the standing shower. The bathroom had been designed with him in mind, and she had put in a huge soaking tub suitable for both of them as well. For now, the slippery shower awaited.

Clean, dressed, and wrapped in Avor's smugness, they headed down to the kitchens to scavenge for a meal.

Regis froze when she saw six of the dark elves moving around, cooking, baking, and sautéing.

Avor chuckled. "They were energized after the party and asked if they could visit today. Well, aside from Kael and Ignis."

"Yeah, they live here."

Her brothers-in-law grinned and kept working. Ignis said, "Rex is picking Ira up from school."

Avor murmured, "We may have missed morning and noon by a bit."

Regis snorted, and the elves grinned. She was sat at the long table while Avor got her some coffee and a pastry from her own bakery. It was fresh, so Amber had opened on time, and someone had stopped by to pick things up.

She ate the Danish and sipped her coffee while Avor got four pastries and his coffee.

Regis was on her last bite when she felt them in the drive. She finished her coffee and set her mug down. It was whisked away to be washed before she was more than two steps away. Avor followed her and took the hand she was reaching toward him.

They walked out to the entryway, where the car approached them. Rex pulled up, and Ira bolted out the moment that the car halted. "Mom! Dad! You won't believe who I met at school today!"

Ira launched herself at them, and a stunned Avor held his daughter after a day at school. Regis looked at his expression and memorized that one as well. It was going

to be several lifetimes with him, so she needed to collect all the nuances of his emotions. She wanted to see them all.

Fortunately, she had all the time in the world.