



Rescuing Krampus

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Category: Romance, Paranormal

Description: Naomi has always had a soft spot for others, including her big family and chaotic friends, but often feels like her city life is lonely and uneventful.

Krampus is used to mindlessly following orders from his superiors in Hell, a fate that he has inevitably accepted, and has resigned himself to never expect more from his own life.

When Naomi's neighbor passes and unexpectedly includes Naomi in her will, she takes a holiday to explore her newly-inherited chalet in the mountains. But when she finds the beast unconscious in the snowy woods, she takes him back to the house to save his life.

The Krampus becomes her guest as Naomi nurses him back to health, and as they stay in the chalet together, they form an unlikely relationship that begins to get steamy and... complicated.

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CHAPTER 1

Rescuing Krampus

NAOMI

“Naomi Thompson” was the only name written in her elderly neighbor’s will, and she really couldn’t figure out why.

Two years before, Naomi had moved into her first apartment by herself. It was a flat just barely big enough for one person, but she had been happy with it. Her closest neighbor had been Felicity, an old Black lady living in the same building as her.

On the day Naomi had first met her, she had just come back from work to find Felicity dragging heavy bags of groceries up the stairs, as the building’s elevator was once again out of order. Naomi had run to help, taking the weight from her and lending Felicity an arm to hold as they took the steps together.

“Finally, some young soul with good manners,” Felicity had mumbled.

From that moment, Naomi kept visiting her any time she was free—sometimes to just keep her company, sometimes to help with house chores or to drive her places.

Felicity didn’t have any family left, and in the end the fact that Felicity was alone meant that she didn’t have anyone to pass her possessions to.

Well... no family to pass them to.

That's how, at twenty-four, Naomi became the owner of a small chalet in the mountains, an old property Felicity had never even spoken about before. Naomi hadn't even realized she had meant so much to Felicity for her to do something like that, yet there she was, with a property now in her name.

She was set on selling it, despite the guilt of knowing that Felicity had entrusted it to her. But Naomi really had no use for a house in the middle of nowhere, and she couldn't imagine how spending time and money for its upkeep could benefit her.

Before getting a real estate agent, however, she needed to see the place for herself. Since she owned it already, she thought, why not take a brief vacation and spend a few days there? It was a once in a lifetime opportunity, after all.

When she had been younger, Naomi had spent a lot of time in the wild, on camping trips with her family and with youth groups, so she was confident she could travel there and have a little vacation on her own without problems.

The two-story chalet stood in the valley of a mountain, right in the clearing of a forest. It was early December, so everything around it was already covered in white, the scenery looking like it was straight out of a postcard.

Naomi was surprised to find the interior of the chalet completely clean and organized, and couldn't help but wonder if Felicity had hired someone to take care of the place when she was away. Maybe this house had a sentimental value to her, even more than it already seemed.

The electricity still worked, and so did the hot water. There was no house router, but Naomi couldn't really complain about that. She'd have to use her phone's internet—which seemed to be just barely decent there—but she could live with it.

Two big, old couches occupied most of the space in the living room—one facing the

fireplace, while the other was positioned toward a wall decorated with photos and memories. From the many people included in the pictures, it seemed that Felicity had a big family.

Naomi's heart ached, sad about her late friend, who was seemingly surrounded by so many people, yet was still completely alone at the end of her life. Naomi had never pressured her about it, seeing how hard it had always been for Felicity to mention anything even remotely related to her family. What she would give, now, to ask Felicity what had really happened...

She sighed sadly, passing a door that connected the living room and kitchen, so large that it made the area look like an open space. All the appliances and furniture looked in good condition, and the space was fairly big. In the years Naomi had known her, Felicity hadn't been able to cook much on her own, but she must have been a dedicated cook back in the day.

Naomi eventually lit the fire in the living room and cozily read a book on the couch. Many sofas hurt her body after staying on it for too long, but this one was perfectly soft and comfortable. It was so pleasant that she chose to give up the bed, grabbing her silk bonnet from her bag and spending the night on the couch in front of the sizzling fire.

Naomi blissfully slept in the following morning, then after lunch, she decided to take a walk around the woods, to take in the scenery and see if there were other chalets hidden around. With such a pretty view, it seemed strange that there was only one property.

Not having been to the mountains in a while, Naomi had spoiled herself by buying a maroon, tight winter jumpsuit that had a scoop in the front. She paired it over a thick, black turtleneck sweater, only to reluctantly cover the cute combination with a down jacket because it was, unfortunately, very cold.

After checking herself out in her mirror and approving the outfit choice, she set out for her adventure.

The ground was a blanket of white with fresh snow still untouched, crunching under the soles of her boots. Whenever it snowed in the city, it was always quick to turn brown, stained by the cars and the general dirt of the city. Seeing fresh snow like this always made her smile, almost making her feel as if she was in a fairytale.

A few feet into the forest, however, the clean snow was suddenly stained by lurid patches of blood. Naomi gasped, her surprise immediately turning into worry about where it came from, and why it was there in the first place.

Smears of blood connected larger puddles, accidentally forming a macabre path, and Naomi quickly followed the trail. The stains grew bigger and bigger, and the more she followed them, the more she worried.

Was all that blood from an injured animal? It seemed like too much, though, but maybe it was a big animal. But what if it was a person? She absolutely needed to check.

The blood trail ended right where hooves poked from behind a bush. The limbs looked like goat legs, but they were abnormally large. Naomi stepped around for a better view. At the sight of the full creature, the gasp that tore out of her echoed through the trees in the silence of the empty forest.

The beast was huge, tall and muscular, and round in the belly. Despite the goat legs, the curved horns, and the overall beastly features, the build still looked oddly humanoid. Its face, too, still looked mostly human, with only the long-pointed ears and sharp teeth to portray its monstrous nature.

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It was completely naked but covered in thick, black fur, which was longer around the face like a mane—or a beard. A long and thin tail with a tufted point came out from its lower back.

It wasn't fully unconscious; its odd face scrunched up in pain occasionally, but it didn't seem lucid enough to even notice she was there. Naomi wasn't sure what it was, or who it was, but it was clearly dying and she couldn't just leave it for the wolves to prey on.

It was too enormous and likely too heavy for her to pick up and bring home by herself, but maybe she could drag it back if she could put it on something.

Naomi rushed back to the chalet, searching through the small shed in the backyard, and found a wooden board she could use. She quickly drilled a few holes and looped ropes through them, then ran back to the beast.

It was still there in the same position, its chest rising so slowly that Naomi wondered if she had been too late. Grabbing its shoulders, she used all of her strength to slide the plank under it, far enough that its body would come along with her if she pulled.

“Muscles, don't fail me now,” she mumbled to herself as she started pulling the ropes.

The journey back was slow. She had to take many breaks to regain strength, stealing glances at the beast from time to time to ensure it was still breathing.

She dragged the creature into the shed, knowing she wouldn't be able to get it inside

the house on her own due to the front porch steps. After dropping it off she rushed inside the chalet, grabbing every towel and med kit she could find, then came back to tend to the beast.

Naomi struggled to find its injuries with all the thick fur covering its body, but she took deep breaths and chanted to herself quietly, “don’t panic, don’t panic.”

Naomi inspected under the wettest patches of coat, doing her best to stitch the cuts and wounds on its body. All the nights spent watching medical TV shows and listening to her doctor cousin—who complained about all the procedures and inaccuracies—gifted her with enough basic knowledge to do a good job. Hands now covered in its blood, she covered the injuries with bandages wherever she could. After giving it an injection to avoid infections, Naomi fell back on her ass, staring at the giant beast in front of her.

She wasn’t sure what it was, and trying to blindly administer more medicine would have been more dangerous. It had lost so much of its blood during the journey and on the shed’s floor, that Naomi worried about how much was even left, but she couldn’t donate hers, either. All she could do now was let it rest and hope it regained its strength.

Something so big and tough should be able to do that, right?

Before leaving, Naomi covered its body with a blanket. It felt silly considering it was already covered in thick fur, but with the blood loss and the lack of heating in the shed, it was better to keep it as warm as possible.

Naomi locked the shed and stumbled back inside the chalet, her arms and legs like jelly. Her hot shower lasted longer than it should have, all spent scrubbing the blood from her hands and letting the water wash over her aching muscles, attempting to soothe the pain.

Naomi was so exhausted, physically and mentally, that she fell asleep as soon as her head hit the pillow.

The next morning, Naomi startled awake to loud thumping.

What the hell is happening? Is someone trying to get into the house?

Naomi jumped from the bed, quickly putting a coat over her pajamas. Grabbing a hatchet, she looked outside the window.

There was no one at the door. There was no one around at all, not even an animal, yet the rhythmic sound was still present. It took Naomi a couple seconds to shake off the sleepiness and remember what had happened the day before.

The beast!

She rushed to the back of the house, and there it was. The door of the shed trembled with each thud.

If the beast was awake and had enough strength to bump against the door, then she had succeeded in keeping it alive. However, it was locked inside and clearly didn't like it, which was not a good sign. Naomi didn't even know if it was more than just an animal. Was it just a beast, or did it have intelligent thoughts? Could she have an actual conversation with it?

Her throat was fully dry and she couldn't bring herself to speak, to call the beast and tell it to calm down. Instead, she chose another approach. If she quickly opened the door wide and hid herself behind it, maybe the beast would rush out and run back into the woods without looking back.

She tightened her grip on her hatchet then swung the door open. There was silence for

a moment, then the door was ripped away from her and a clawed hand grabbed her by the arm, shoving her to the ground.

The impact wrenched the hatchet out of her grasp, tumbling away in the snow. She gasped but the scream died in her throat. The beast crouched over her with its huge body caging her in. Its hands pinned down her arms and its sharp mouth was just a few inches from her face, snarling down at her. Naomi was frozen in fear, tears burning behind her eyes.

“Who. Are. You,” the beast growled, enunciating every word.

It was more of an order than a question. Naomi fought to find her voice.

“I-I’m no one. I-I just found y-you in t-the—” she bit her lips in between stutters. “I’m sorry. I’m s-sorry.”

It sniffed her, its gaze gradually following her arm until it reached the sleeves of her coat. Its blood was still there, dry now—she hadn’t had time to wash it the evening before.

“What did you do?”

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Again, its question was barely more than a growl.

“You w-were dying,” she rushed to say. “I tried to help.”

A tear slid down her cheek, and the beast leaned back just enough to watch its journey down her face, fascinated.

“Why did you trap me in there?”

“I didn’t want animals following the blood trail and attacking you when you couldn’t defend yourself.”

That choice had made sense to her the night before, but she understood why it could be hard for the beast to believe her. It leaned down and sniffed her again, its face and fur brushing against her neck. Naomi shivered, cold and fear overtaking her as she pressed her eyes shut, praying it wouldn’t rip her throat out. It must have been content with what it discovered because it loosened its grip on her.

“I don’t mean any harm,” she whispered, too scared to speak loudly as she opened her eyes slightly. “I’m sorry.”

It stared at her, and Naomi really looked into its eyes for the first time. They looked generally normal, like a human’s, but the irises were a deep, dark red, with speckles of golden brown in the light. Its eyes gradually lost ferocity and eventually, the beast let her go, stepping back. The creature sat in the snow by her feet, one of its arms going to its bandages. When her eyes followed its movement, she noticed how bloodied some of them looked.

“You pulled the stitches,” she exclaimed, worried.

“I’ll survive,” it grunted.

On instinct, she wanted to reach out, to look under the bandages and fix the problem, but she forced her arms to stay by her side.

“But you lost so much blood, and you had so many wounds!”

Its eyes narrowed at her, as if trying to understand why she was worried in the first place.

“I heal faster than humans. The bleeding just needed to be stopped.”

It gave her a stern look, probably be the closest thing to a “thank you” she would ever receive, but it was more than what she thought she’d receive.

Naomi replayed its words in her head, wondering if asking would be a good choice or not. If it hadn’t killed her already, maybe that was a good sign? Maybe it would not be offended.

“What... what are you?”

It hesitated for a moment, but then seemed to decide it was safe to speak. “I’m a krampus.”

Naomi’s eyes widened. She had heard of krampuses before; though she didn’t know much about them, she knew that they were demons and that their role was to punish people. How did a krampus even end up here, in the middle of nowhere where there was no one around? It hadn’t come to punish her, right?

She felt confused, and in shock, and still a bit scared—despite not feeling directly threatened anymore.

They looked at each other in an awkward silence, its gaze so intense that she shivered. Naomi's eyes fell to the bloodied bandages and her heart ached. Its face still looked pained by the injuries, and while it said it would be fine, part of her still worried about the wounds.

“Do you... do you want to come inside?” she asked, pointing at the chalet with a shaky finger. “While you fully recover.”

It studied the house, and the silence stretched for so long that Naomi wondered if she should just leave without a response. It was a silly proposal, after all, so maybe it would be better if the beast declined. It was likely very dangerous and foolish, and?—

“Okay.” The beast agreed.

Attempting to keep her composure, Naomi pressed her lips together, stood up, and brushed the snow off her clothes and bonnet. When she turned around to look at the krampus, it was already standing, and it took her breath away.

Naomi wasn't short at all, standing at five foot eleven, but the demon truly towered over her. It looked even scarier like this. Comparing it with the size of the shed behind it, she did a quick calculation and guessed it was around seven foot eight, although the horns gave even more height.

She found it hard to swallow but instead of commenting on her frightened look, the krampus gestured for her to start walking. Her legs shook as she guided it inside her house, a voice in her head screaming that it was a terrible idea.

She thought about the krampus as they walked inside, her confused brain forming

even more questions. Should she be calling this beast “it”? The krampus clearly showed they were more than just an animal, but she wasn’t sure she could apply human rules to them, either.

Was there etiquette on what to call supernatural beings?

In the warmth of the chalet, Naomi quickly took off her bloodied coat and bonnet. She could really do with a cup of hot tea and a very long nap... the peculiarity of the situation was giving her a headache.

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“There’s a fire if you want to keep warm.” She awkwardly gestured to the fireplace in the living room.

The demon simply nodded and sat in front of it. Naomi looked at them in distress and bit her lip, unsure what to do with herself now.

What have I gotten myself into?

CHAPTER 2

Knowing Krampus

KRAMPUS

The human woman was acting weird.

She fidgeted by the door of the living room, and she looked terrified at the idea of stepping into the same room as him. She was the one who invited him in, so why was she still terrified? Had her invite not been genuine? If that was the case, then why would she have said it?

He frowned, studying her. The sun rays from the window illuminated her light brown skin, enhancing the warm tones even more. A thick head of coils, darker than her skin tone by a couple shades, framed her head like a halo, coppery undertones glowing in the light. Her big brown eyes were wide and alert, staying on him as if worried he would attack if she looked away for a second.

Was there no one else in the house? It wasn't safe for her to be alone out here, so far from the rest of human society.

"Do you live here alone?"

When she stiffened further, he realized that must have been the wrong question.

"It's not my house. I'm only visiting," she quickly said. An answer, but also not.

He moved his gaze to the flames in front of him, soaking in their light and warmth.

He had been close to death—way too close. When the krampuses had been released into the human world a few days prior, all he had wanted was to complete his mission as slowly as possible, then eventually return home to more unavoidable, mindless work.

Taking humans for punishment wasn't the best, but it had its nice moments, too. It was better than the work they had them do for the rest of the year, since at least during this time, they let the krampuses roam free through this world.

He thought this would be a mission like all his past ones: punishing bad humans, exploring more of an unfamiliar world, then going home after a job well done. What he hadn't accounted for was being ambushed.

Another krampus, a youngster with gray fur, had held a grudge against him for a while, although he never understood the reason. They hadn't interacted much in the past, and any time they had to talk—always strictly about work—the other demon had always been rude.

He, instead, had always been civil, but clearly that gray demon still had a problem with him, given that he tried to kill him at the first chance he got. He was still

confused about what happened, or even why it happened—and no matter what excuse he thought of for the assault, nothing made sense.

The gray krampus had attacked him so unexpectedly that he had managed to overpower him at first, inflicting the worst of his wounds. But he had fought back, and he cut deep, too. That demon should be dead now. At least he should be, since he had left the gray demon for dead when he dragged himself away to take care of his own wounds. He thought he would be fine, but the injuries had been deeper than he originally assessed, and he eventually dropped from the blood loss.

He imagined that's how the human found him. He had been exposed so it shouldn't have been a surprise. Yet he didn't expect a human to approach even when he was unconscious, let alone nurse him back to health.

He could still hear the quick, shuddering breaths coming from her, and the constant reminder that she feared him was slowly wrapping itself around him like a choking hand. Somehow, it felt wrong to see such a pretty and seemingly kind creature in a distraught state.

He hadn't known what happened after he fell unconscious, so when he had been freed from the shed, he had attacked. He wished she wouldn't blame him for that. After all, it was instinct.

"I will not hurt you," he announced. "I will not touch you or make you bleed. You have my word."

That seemed to calm her and she hesitantly walked into the living room. Still keeping her distance, she sat on the couch to his left and he watched her curiously, trying to understand her. From her stiff shoulders and tense expression, she still seemed scared, but had still believed him when he said he wouldn't hurt her. Maybe it was just the shock of the situation but she seemed too trusting of him—and while he

wasn't going to hurt her, he still worried about her general safety.

He wished he could know what she was thinking. There were too many emotions flashing through her eyes and he couldn't decipher any of them.

"My name is Naomi," she cautiously offered. "Do you have a name?"

Names... those were for demons with identities, and he had none. He was one of many, part of a bigger picture, an easily dispensable and replaceable cog.

"I don't."

His answer clearly shocked her. Her face suddenly cleared of tension, eyes widening almost comically. She quickly opened her mouth as if to ask him more, but immediately forced it back shut. She watched him quietly for a few moments, then eventually decided to change the subject.

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“What happened to you?”

“I had a fight with one like me.”

She tilted her head, frowning. “Is... that common? For demons to fight between themselves?”

“Depends. Not usually this violently, though.” He scratched around one of the bandages, and he didn’t miss her curious eyes following the motion, fixating again on the bloodied fabric. “The one that attacked had some pent up frustrations about me.”

An understatement, really, but he wasn’t able to provide a better explanation. He was lost, too.

She kept fidgeting in her seat, her eyes wandering around the room as she purposely tried not to focus on him. It looked like she was holding herself back from something. Eventually, she sighed in defeat.

“Can I ask you what you do? I don’t know much about krampuses,” she said, her voice hesitant but full of curiosity.

“We punish bad people.”

She scooted forward in her seat, gaze curious. “People in general? The stories about you always talk about children.”

“People in general,” he confirmed. “We find all types of people, of all ages, and

depending on the offense, we hurt them, kill them, or bring them to Hell.”

Again, he said the wrong thing. She stiffened at the word “kill” and completely froze at “Hell”, curiosity draining from her face. Were all humans this easily impressionable or was it just her?

He was already bad at interactions in his own world, but figuring out how to speak to a human was a new level of difficult. Over the years, he had managed to learn the social rules of demons—albeit barely—but he would have to improvise here.... one of his least favorite things.

He had met many humans, but it wasn’t like he ever had an actual conversation with them. Every conversation was just him reciting a list of their bad deeds, and all they did in return was scream or plead for mercy.

That realization made him stiffen, too. In all his centuries as a krampus, had he truly never spoken to a human in a normal manner? How could he have not changed even a little bit in all these years? Was he truly so comfortable in his ways that he never altered his habits—even accidentally?

“Why were you around this area?” she quietly asked, concerned. “There’s no other people here.”

She wanted to know whether he had come for her, he realized.

“There is no target here,” he assured her. “We just ended up here by accident during the fight.”

Her body visibly relaxed, and a corner of his lip tugged upwards. He frowned, turning his face back to the fire. She was a curious human, this woman...

“Can I take a look at your injuries?”

He shook his head, not looking away from the flames. “There’s no need.”

“Are you sure? I know you said you heal faster than humans, but you did lose a lot of blood. Your bandages are bloodied again, too.”

It was almost funny, seeing such a tiny and defenseless creature worried about his well-being. But she was a human, and it made sense that she wasn’t aware how strong his kind could be.

“I will be fine. The wounds have almost closed completely. There is no need to worry, human.”

“Naomi,” she corrected him on instinct.

“No need to worry, Naomi.”

Saying her name out loud felt odd, intimate. He wasn’t used to names, to this type of familiarity. Something moved inside his chest, like a parasite, and his whole body tensed. He stood up, heading to the front door.

“Once I fully recover my strength, I will have enough magic to go back to Hell.”

From the corner of his eye, he saw her jump up from her seat.

“You want to recover outside?” Naomi asked, confused. “It’s cold out. And you’re still covered in blood and dirt.”

“I’ll be okay. I don’t feel the cold.”

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“You can stay here,” she blurted. For a moment, she sounded nervous about him leaving. He immediately discarded that thought—it was too ridiculous. “Just while you recover. You can stay warm, and you can use my tub to wash up.”

He froze with his hand on the doorknob. She really wanted him to stay? Even when she was still clearly scared of him? This human must have lost her mind. He had promised he wouldn’t hurt her, but still, did this woman have no survival instinct? Had he not shown her how threatening he could be? He hoped she didn’t make it a habit to let dangerous beings into her home. Hopefully this was her first and last time doing something so reckless.

The hair at the back of his head rose from the image of her stumbling into some other creature instead—someone with a temperament like the gray demon who had attacked him. Something tugged at his chest, a need to approach her and wrap his arms around her small form.

His face scrunched into a deep frown, confused by the wild emotions and thoughts quickly passing through him.

“Well, the bath might be a little small for you.” She continued, a nervous, quiet laugh leaving her. “But there’s a shower in the main bathroom.”

He studied her, confused. She was still fidgeting a bit, but mostly seemed sure of her proposal—definitely more determined than during her previous invitation to come inside her house.

Considering how quickly his body was healing, he might only need one day to

recover his magic. One day should be fine. He could behave for a day.

And maybe... maybe experiencing this type of interaction would be good for him. Like an exercise in socialization, and a chance at learning more about another species.

“Okay,” he gave in. “I’ll stay.”

CHAPTER 3

Understanding Krampus

NAOMI

She must have lost her mind, there was no other explanation.

“This bottle is the soap you should use,” Naomi told the demon as she showed them how to work the shower. “Make sure you scrub all the dry blood off.”

She left them to do their thing and waited outside of the bathroom. The entire conversation in its mundanity had felt entirely too surreal, plus the fact that she had asked a demon to stay in her house was still a shock for Naomi.

Strangely, there was something about the demon that assured Naomi she was safe with them, despite their terrifying form and the great strength they possessed even with injuries. They hadn’t talked much, but Naomi truly believed she had the wild luck of finding a truthful monster. And with the fear settling in the background, her interest had come forward.

She became more curious about krampuses in general, and wanted to know more about this krampus specifically. The demon was a big question mark that she wanted

to uncover. Everything about them seemed mysterious and intriguing, and she had never been good at resisting her curiosity. Apparently, not even a clearly deadly-looking monster could stop her interest. On the contrary, all their beastly traits made them even more fascinating.

Naomi had never believed in magic but there was no denying it now. She wasn't sure she was processing the information properly, to be honest. Naomi wondered if she'd have a breakdown about the whole situation in a few days, when everything would have passed and her brain caught up with the facts.

In addition to their demonic nature, there was the curious fact that the krampus had fought with one of their own—almost to the point of death—and the mystery of them not having a name. Naomi couldn't help getting stuck on that last point, specifically. How could they not have a name? Everyone had one.

She jumped when the bathroom door opened, so focused on her thoughts that she hadn't even heard the water stop. She jerked to look at them. The demon stood in the middle of the entryway, looking like an overgrown puppy that had spent too much time in the rain, and Naomi had to hold back her laughter at the sight of them standing there so stiffly, fully soaked.

“You should dry yourself,” she said.

“I don't have my magic yet.”

Their magic could dry them? Interesting... what else could their magic do?

“No need for magic.”

She grinned and slipped into the bathroom, then rummaged through drawer and threw them a towel.

“To start, rub this on your fur. It’ll take away some of the water.”

Naomi made it a point to look away while they dried themselves. Even though she hadn’t seen any genitals, probably all covered by the fur, the krampus was still technically naked by human standards and it felt weird to stare at them. Sure, they had already been naked before, but when they were wet it seemed more intimate, vulnerable.

She took out the hair dryer and waited for them, then showed them the buttons and explained to them how to use it.

“I’ll wait downstairs,” she told them, handing them the device.

Restless, she went to the kitchen, distracting herself by making a meal. Her stomach began growling as she began cooking, as if only now noticing that she hadn’t eaten anything since yesterday’s lunch.

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“I guess you were too busy worrying,” she told her stomach.

Naomi didn't know how long the demon would take to dry themselves, and not wanting to dedicate too much time cooking, she made some quick pasta. Right as she was putting it on the plate, the krampus walked into the kitchen.

“Do you want to eat?” she asked them, but then worried she asked the wrong question. Did krampuses even eat? Did they eat human food?

They simply nodded to her, so she made a plate for them too. The demon waited to eat—watching the way she picked up her fork, then imitating her. They had probably never done this before, and it was a bit funny watching them try. Naomi wasn't sure how to tell the age of a demon, but for human standards, they probably looked like they were in their late forties—seeming like a weirdly good-looking, middle-aged, monstrous man. Either way, they were definitely older than her.

“Are you... feeling better?” she asked, hesitantly.

“I am.”

Their replies were always curt, but she wasn't sure whether it was because they didn't want to talk, because they couldn't reveal too much, or simply because they weren't used to small talk or conversations.

As she watched them eat with slow and tentative bites, a new question popped into her head.

“I was wondering, how can I refer to you? When I found you, I thought you were an animal so I thought of you as an it.”

Her cheeks heated up and she hoped they wouldn't be able to see her embarrassment.

“I'm not human, so I can't be a man,” he explained. “But I'm the closest thing to it, I guess.”

She sighed in relief, happy to clear part of the confusion in her mind.

“Are you not scared of me anymore?” he asked out of the blue, a deep frown appearing on his face.

His appearance still made him look frightening, but Naomi's heart had settled a bit—especially after seeing him post-shower, looking comically small despite his huge size. And apart from the first attack, when he had been too confused to understand the situation, he hadn't made her feel in danger.

“I'm less scared,” she eventually replied.

He nodded, thoughtful.

“You're not very fond of chatting, are you?” she tried, carefully watching his expression.

He frowned, confused. “We are talking now, are we not?”

“We are, but... I don't know how to explain it. You don't sound like you do this a lot.”

“I don't,” he confirmed. “I'm not good with small talk.”

She couldn't hold back her bright smile. "This isn't really small talk. I'm trying to get to know you better."

"I don't speak much with people," he offered.

She watched him carefully, trying to read his expression, but he just looked confused, like a fish out of water.

"Not even in Hell?"

"My kind might be famous among humans, but it's seen as lesser in Hell," he explained, eyes focusing on his food. "We only exist to follow orders, not to mingle or talk."

Her heart ached. That seemed like a miserable existence. Actually, it didn't feel like an existence at all. It sounded like he was only a marionette, with no life or thoughts of his own. The distant look in his eyes only confirmed her thoughts.

"Is that why you also don't have a name?"

Again, he nodded quietly.

Seeing such a big creature so sad was destabilizing. It was a completely different sight from the ferocious image of their encounter earlier today, almost like a switch had been flipped and his krampus persona had vanished—leaving an unfinished being in his stead, entirely too confused about what to do with himself.

She felt the need to take that frown off his face.

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“Would you like to have a name?”

His eyes jerked to her, unsure. “I’m not allowed to have one.”

“No one has to know. It can be our secret.”

There was a war behind his eyes, thoughts fighting against each other. Naomi didn’t know much about his culture, so she let the proposal hang in the air without insisting, lest she overstepped a boundary she didn’t know existed.

“You would give me a name?” he asked, unsure.

“Yes. It’d be an honor.”

The frown deepened a little more, but instead of rejecting he said, “I’d like a name.”

Naomi thought carefully, trying to think of what name would give the same vibe as him. Common names came to mind first, but they sounded too silly for him. Bobby the krampus, James the krampus, Henry the krampus... they were too unserious. Then, she tried to think of keeping the initial K, and went through all the names starting with that letter.

“I have it!” she exclaimed, jumping on her seat. “Kilean!”

“Kilean?”

“Yes! It’s with a K, to connect it to krampus,” she explained. “And when I hear

Kilean I imagine a mysterious, attractive man, for some reason. So it feels perfect.”

His eyes widened a little. “Attractive?”

Naomi’s mouth fell open. The thought hadn’t occurred to her, but now that she said it, she realized it wasn’t a complete lie. Yes, he was strange and unfamiliar and not completely human, but there was handsomeness behind the monstrous features. It felt weird to confess that to herself, but there was no going back now.

She cleared her throat. “I mean... yeah.”

“Oh.”

He sounded, and looked, genuinely surprised. He scratched his hooked nose with one of his long nails, eyes darting away.

“You are pretty,” he conceded, awkwardly. “For a human.”

In any other instance she might have felt offended by the comment, but instead it felt endearing. She fought the smile pulling at her lips.

“Thank you.”

Meal finished, he looked around the space, studying every inch with genuinely curious eyes. Not sure how to proceed, Naomi took the dishes and brought them to the sink. What were they supposed to do now? She had told him he could stay until he was fully healed, but other than talking, she didn’t know how to entertain him. He was clearly trying his best to have a conversation with her, but Naomi guessed there was a limit to how much he could speak before it exhausted him entirely.

“Healing is faster when I rest,” he told her.

She turned around to him standing by the kitchen door.

“You can sleep in one of the spare rooms,” she offered.

He shook his head. “The bed would be too small for me. I can sleep on the floor here.”

He pointed at the living room, in the space between the two couches and the fireplace. It was a big enough space to fit him, indeed, but the floor must be uncomfortable. And he was still injured, too.

Before she could protest, he said, “That would be the most comfortable option for me.”

Sighing, she nodded. “Okay, I’ll let you rest, then. If you need me, I’ll be in my room.”

Naomi watched as he settled in front of the fire, partially curled up into himself, then left him alone and wandered to her room.

She felt unsettled leaving him alone, as if she was letting a guest fend for himself in an unknown environment. In a way, he was a guest in her house, but also wasn’t, and it felt very disorienting.

To distract herself, she picked up her e-reader and dipped into a fantasy romance book, now curious to look at magic with a different approach. She read for a couple hours but when her eyelids felt heavy, she decided to take a nap, too.

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A dream accompanied her slumber, of horns and fur and snow, and hands intertwining and moans and naked bodies. The dream became so horny that it jolted her awake, her legs pressing together before she fully came to.

Naomi groaned, pressing her palms against her eyes. The memories of the dream were already fading, but the feeling of the krampus touching her was still ingrained in her body memory.

Her pussy ached, and Naomi knew that if she didn't listen to its needs, it would not let her focus on anything else.

Her hand slipped under her pants and into her underwear, touching her already wet cunt. Slowly, she circled her fingers on it, spreading the wetness.

The demon was hot, there was no denying it anymore. The realization left her slightly confused, when he looked so odd and different from what she was used to, but from his thick and broad build mixing with his surprisingly polite personality, there was something both physically attractive and charming about him.

Naomi slipped two fingers inside and thought about his big hands. She imagined what they would feel like on her skin, with his fur tickling her body as he touched her. His claws disappeared in her fantasy and she imagined it was his thick long fingers inside her, getting her to orgasm as he watched her with his intense gaze.

She came around her fingers, biting down onto her other hand, trying not to make too much noise. Naomi wasn't sure what kind of hearing demons had, but she couldn't risk him hearing her masturbate. That would be too embarrassing.

When she eventually took her hand out of her panties and the post-nut clarity hit her, her face heated.

What the hell am I doing...

CHAPTER 4

Tempting Krampus

KRAMPUS

He managed to rest for a couple hours before his magic returned. Not all of it was back yet—he still couldn't reach out to other demons through his bond—but he had almost fully recovered his strength.

He always healed quickly, but it still surprised him how fast he had regained his forces now. It was all thanks to Naomi, he knew. Maybe he might not have died if she had left him in the woods, but if she hadn't helped him, it would have taken him days to even get to this stage.

Almost back to his healthy state, he felt restless now. He didn't want to leave, not without saying anything, especially when Naomi had been hospitable and kind despite his initial violence. He also didn't feel good about going to her room and demanding she kept him busy.

He stood up from his makeshift nest and paced around the room, studying the furniture and decorations to waste some time. The right side of the space, the one without a couch, had a long wooden cabinet, its top shelf full of frames and little ceramic statuettes. He studied the photos, curious. Some of them were old, in black and white or sepia colors. There were some in colors too, but those looked somewhat old as well. They all showed a big Black family, with lots of kids. None of the faces,

however, shared similarities with Naomi's, so he assumed this wasn't her family. She had, indeed, said it wasn't really her house.

When he stepped back, intent on continuing his tour of the room, he accidentally bumped into a statuette of an angel which fell to the ground, the crash breaking the silence of the house. He stared at the shattered pieces, frozen, unsure what to do.

Naomi must have been awake, because less than a minute later she rushed into the living room, concerned.

"What happened?"

He felt embarrassed, which was new for him and it was mortifying. He really hoped it wasn't anything important... he didn't want to upset her.

"I accidentally bumped into it, I'm sorry."

When her eyes found the broken statuette, her shoulders relaxed a bit.

"It's okay, don't worry," she reassured him. "Did you get hurt?"

It surprised him that she was asking, but then again, she had literally saved his life, so maybe he shouldn't be so shocked that she showed care for his well-being.

"I'm not hurt."

Naomi let out a relieved breath. "That's good."

She walked towards him, clearly intent on picking up the broken pieces, but his senses picked up on something strange when she came close. He sniffed the air and frowned. There was a strong, pungent scent he couldn't place. He had never smelled

it before and couldn't figure out what it was. The only thing he knew was that it came from her.

“What's wrong?” Naomi asked, concerned.

“I can smell something on you.”

There was a moment of silence, then he saw the embarrassment taking over her.

“A smell on me?” she asked, cautious.

He nodded. “It’s pungent, and I never smelled it before.”

The skin on her light brown cheeks flushed and she tried to cover herself with her hands.

“What is it?” he asked, confused and intrigued. Her embarrassment made him assume she knew the source of the smell, but he couldn’t understand why it made her react like that. Was it something bad?

“It’s... arousal.”

“Ah.”

He nodded slowly in understanding. So that was what arousal in a human woman smelt like? What an interesting scent.

“Why are you aroused?”

He simply asked out of curiosity, but it seemed to make her even more mortified. She was half turned away from him now, as if hiding.

“You can’t just ask something like that,” she mumbled.

“Why not?”

“Because it’s personal!”

Was it? For demons, it was common to share those things. When he was young, he hadn’t been used to talking about it either. But after years of receiving judgmental looks for not being straightforward about sex, it had forced an openness in him. Maybe humans were more private. He couldn’t understand why she would look so ashamed, though. There was nothing shameful about pleasure.

“I don’t judge,” was his simple reply.

She eyed him suspiciously, as if expecting him to make fun of her. When he didn’t add anything, her shoulders gradually relaxed. Her eyes traveled up and down his body, studying him.

“Do demons get aroused too?”

He nodded. “Most of us do.”

“You seem very open about it,” she commented.

“Demons tend to be open about lots of things. Sex and pleasure are some of them.”

He sensed her holding back more questions, interest growing behind her eyes. For some reason, he was pleased by the idea of her asking him more about this topic.

“Ask,” he simply said.

“Are you sure? I can be a bit invasive when I get curious.”

He crossed his arms on his chest and nodded. He was more than ready, almost excited to talk about it. “I’m sure.”

“Okay, well... how does sex work for you?” she asked, looking him up and down with a look on her face that he couldn’t really place.

Without missing a beat, he said, “Do you want to see?”

Naomi choked on her own saliva, which immediately put her in a coughing fit.

“What?”

“Do you want to see?” he repeated, not seeing anything wrong with the question.

Sighing, Naomi put a hand over her hip, one on her forehead. “This keeps getting wilder and wilder,” she whispered to herself, eyes wide.

He frowned, concerned. “Are you okay?”

“Yes, just... taken by surprise.”

The way her face scrunched up and her hesitation told him she was measuring her words for him.

“Am I making you uncomfortable?”

Immediately, her hands and head shook. “No!”

With demons, he had to learn to speak his mind without filters. Yet the uneasy woman in front of him served as a reminder that whatever habit he forced himself to learn wouldn't work here. Demons and humans seemed to have enough cultural differences to destabilize him.

“Then, what is it?” he questioned, perplexed.

Another sigh, this time more exasperated.

“It's not that common for humans to openly talk about this, especially between strangers, and then you just say what you think without a problem and you're so eager to answer my questions without shame, and even show me, and I'm just over here trying not to think about the fact that I was just masturbating to you?—”

Her hand flew to cover her mouth, but it was already too late: she said it, and now there was no way for him to forget about it.

“I'm an idiot,” Naomi mumbled, eyes wide. She let herself slip onto the couch,

resting her head against the backrest. “I’m a fool. I finally lost it.”

She touched herself to thoughts of me.

He felt his cock twitch inside its pocket, and it surprised him, too. Never before had he felt any attraction towards a human, but somehow, knowing this woman was physically attracted to him made him feel tingles all over his body, as if electrically charged.

Naomi picked up a pillow and covered her face with it. “Please don’t look at me,” she whispered.

“Why?”

“Because it’s embarrassing.”

“I don’t mind that you touched yourself to me.”

Her whole body visibly shivered at his words, and she peeked at him from the side of the pillow.

“You don’t know what you’re saying.”

“I do know,” he debated. “It pleased me to hear that.”

She threw the pillow away in shock, her voice getting louder. “It pleased you?”

His eyes traveled over her, starting at her pretty round face, then down to the curves of her body, stopping at her thick thighs before returning to her eyes. Not a beauty he was used to—lacking all the beastly features he saw daily—but yes, she was definitely attractive. More than simply attractive, actually.

The new knowledge that she felt desire for him gave him confidence.

“So, do you want to see?” he asked again.

Naomi opened her mouth, then closed it again. She hesitated a few moments, clearly torn and disoriented, then eventually nodded. “Yes. Sure, why not? I’d like to see.”

He stood still while he willed his body to do its thing. A slit opened in his crotch and a thick, long cock emerged from the fur, partially erect and charcoal black. It was long and cylindrical with a tip, and a knot at the base.

“Oh my god.”

Naomi swallowed thickly, eyes wide. Her body leaned forward to look closer, likely not realizing she was doing it, but now the image of her face next to his cock wouldn’t leave his mind.

“We don’t use clothes like humans do,” he explained. “So our parts stay hidden, to stay protected.”

“It’s...” Her voice trailed off, unable to come up with an adjective.

His cock twitched at the pure fascination in her expression, and she flinched at the movement. She looked up at him, surprised and... turned on? He studied her face carefully and yes, there seemed to be lust in her gaze.

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“If you want, you can touch it.”

She didn't make him tell her twice. Her hand looked so small compared to his cock, her fingers unable to wrap around his full girth. She squeezed slightly, as if to test its strength and solidity. The curious and excited look in her eyes as she looked at his cock sent shivers down his spine.

“Move your hand,” he instructed her.

Naomi obeyed and almost immediately, his cock became fully erect. Pleased by the result, she spit on her hand and spread it around his cock to facilitate her stroking.

He grunted lowly, trying his best not to buck his hips into her hand. He was much bigger than her, and he didn't want to overpower her and scare her away—or worse, hurt her. Her delicate hand felt too good on him, so warm and soft, that it was messing with his brain.

He shivered when she placed her other hand on his fat belly, letting the fur pass between her fingers as she slid her hand up to his chest.

“You feel good,” she whispered, a hint of glee in her voice.

He let out another low growl. “You do, too.”

She tightened her grip on his cock, and picked up the pace, her face scrunching up from the effort. He dug his long nails into his thighs to make sure he wouldn't grab her, his tail whipping wildly behind him.

A loud growl echoed around the room and copious amounts of seed released from his cock, straight onto Naomi's clothes and the floor. In another situation, he might have felt self-conscious about how quickly he had come, but with how good her human hand felt, embarrassment hadn't even crossed his mind.

But no... he knew it wasn't because she was human. She felt good because she was her.

Naomi let out a surprised chuckle, stepping back to look at the mess.

"Well, that was interesting for sure," she said, still laughing.

He grimaced at the sight. "Sorry for the mess."

"It's fine."

Before he could say anything more, she stripped all of her clothes off, pajamas thrown to the side of the room. She stood naked in all her curvy glory in front of him, and the words died in his throat.

She smiled cheekily. "See? No more stains."

Another growl tore out of him, this time more animalistic, more urgent. The scent of her arousal was much more intense now, and all the thoughts dissipated from his head. All he could think about was tasting her.

"Want to reciprocate?"

As soon as the words slipped out of her mouth, he picked her up by her soft waist, earning a screech of surprise. He kneeled in front of the couch, laying Naomi down with her back partially on the seat, keeping her backside lifted by wrapping her legs

around his shoulders.

He stared at the pussy in front of him, shaved and exposed, glistening with wetness already. He wanted to take his time, to touch all of her and pleasure her the way she had pleased him, but he was too hungry.

Naomi gasped when his mouth wrapped around her warm cunt, tongue lapping at her wetness. He sloppily licked and sucked, trying to take in as much of her as he could, desperate.

She tasted delicious, like a forbidden fruit, but it wasn't enough. His tongue was longer than a human's, and could expand to the length of his arm. He had never found a use for it before, other than scaring the humans he hunted, but now he knew what to do with it.

He burrowed his tongue into her hole and inserted as deeply as her body would let him. Her hands wrapped over his and she moaned loudly, body twitching in his grip.

"Fuuuck," she screeched.

He never imagined a human would feel and taste this good. His brain turned off at the smell and flavor of her arousal, and the softness of her body ignited an urge to dig his nails into her, to claim her as his.

He fucked her with his tongue, eating her cream of pleasure. When she came, she shook so violently he tightened his grip to ensure she wouldn't slip away from him. Slowly, he pulled his tongue out, then licked her puffy lips one more time.

"Oh my..." Naomi whispered, breathing heavily. "Fuck."

His mind slowly cleared and when his vision finally focused on her, he realized she

was sprawled wildly on the couch, his hands still holding her bottom part up in front of him. He hurriedly apologized, laying her down properly on the cushioned surface.

“No need to apologize, that was amazing,” she said, chuckling to herself. “Likely the best orgasm I’ve ever had.”

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“I let my hunger take over,” he explained, ashamed. “I was rough.”

“I happen to like it rough,” she reassured him. “But maybe next time a heads up would be useful. At least to prepare myself for what’s to come.”

Next time... she wanted to do it again? With him?

Her eyes slid down his body.

“I would help you relieve that again,” she started, “but that really took me by surprise. I might need some time to regain some strength first.”

He was hard again after tasting her, but he didn’t feel the need to touch himself. Having the privilege of touching her had been pleasurable enough.

“I don’t need it,” he assured her. “I’m okay.”

“Good. Then I’ll catch my breath and then clear this mess.”

He looked around. Her clothes and broken pieces of the statuette were all over the floor, plus stains of his come and strewn pillows that had been pushed away in her frenzied orgasm.

A mess, indeed.

CHAPTER 5

Longing for Krampus

NAOMI

To her surprise, Kilean started cleaning for her.

He was a bit clumsy, picking up the pieces of the statuette one by one and then looking around, unsure where to throw them away.

“There’s a bin in the cabinet under the sink,” Naomi said.

He silently followed her instructions, heading to the kitchen. She took a big stretch and stood up to put the pillows back on the couch. Naomi was picking up her stained pajamas when he came back into the living room, noticing that he had retracted his cock into whatever part kept it hidden. He did say he didn’t need to come again, but the fact he put it aside still surprised her. Sometimes men said that and still expected something. But Kilean was no man, and he also seemed to mean what he said in general.

“You can go get dressed,” he told her. “I can clean the floor.”

Thankfully he had spilled his come on the wooden floor and not the carpet, and since he seemed confident about how to clean that, she nodded and left him alone.

As she took a quick shower, she thought about everything that happened. In one day, she experienced so many different things that it felt like a whole month had passed since she had brought the krampus to the shed. How had she managed to end up here?

It still felt surreal any time she thought about it. And now that she had sex with him? It felt even more ridiculous.

Oh god...

She had sex with a demon.

Her eyes widened, cheeks heating up. If her mother knew, she would be horrified. Her grandmother, however, would probably approve. Naomi had a feeling that Felicity would somehow approve, too. She eventually decided to focus on the women who would support her wild decisions, putting off responsibility for another time.

A smile came back to her lips as her thoughts returned to what they had just done. The chance to be so close to Kilean almost made her feel giddy, special. It was validating to know he found her attractive, too—and adding the fact that he wasn't even human certainly did wonders for her ego.

Naomi walked back into the living room—washed and with a clearer head—finding him sitting on the couch. But the smile on her lips immediately died when she noticed his eyes. Instead of their normal red, a white film covered them, his gaze vacant.

“Kilean?” she called, but it was like he couldn't hear her.

Was he okay? Why was he not moving? Was it a side effect of his injuries?

When she took a step forward to shake him out of it, the white film slipped from his eyes and he blinked rapidly, a frown appearing on his face.

“Are you okay?”

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Finally, he noticed her, his eyes softening at her concern.

“My magic is all back,” he said. “Or at least, I have enough of it to be able to be reachable again for my superior.”

Then, had that been a state of communication?

“Do you have to go already?”

The regret on his expression was more than evident.

“I don’t have freedom, I can’t choose where to go or what to do,” he explained. “I have a bit more room when I’m in the human realm because they need us to act our own according to specific situations. But my time here is limited, and I don’t have the ability to move between worlds at my will. When they call us back, we have to go.”

She was almost scared to ask, but she needed to.

“And if you don’t go?”

“They hunt us down. Kill us as defective.”

Her stomach dropped.

She had known him for a day, she shouldn’t be this sad to hear he had to go, and yet she felt a strange connection to him. At first, it was fascination because he was new, a creature she had never encountered before and wanted to know more about. But she

had been captivated by his genuine and blunt way of speaking, as well as his awkward but kind nature.

Sometimes you'd meet a person you clicked so well with, that they'd already feel like a close friend in little time. She felt like that with Kilean, now, and the intimacy they had just shared had only been the nail in the coffin that sealed her connection to him.

Kilean looked around the space, as if cataloging everything in his memory. Eventually his eyes fell on the fire, still sizzling and bright.

"I was starting to like this place," he confessed, quietly.

"Only the place?"

There was hope in her voice, and she knew he hadn't missed it. He glanced at her, her own sadness reflected in his eyes.

He shook his head. "Not only the place."

"Wouldn't you be able to come back?" she asked, desperate to find a solution. "Krampuses come back at the same time every year, don't they?"

She knew from the legends it was on a very specific day, but considering how he had been here for longer, and he didn't seem concerned about his kind coming to kill him for disobeying orders, Naomi guessed they had a bit more time at their disposal.

"I have no control over where they send me, or if they send me at all. Sometimes they don't unleash all of us."

Unleash.

Most of the time when he spoke about himself, it seemed like Kilean thought of himself as an animal. Naomi didn't think he was purposefully being self-degrading, but that he spoke that way because that's how he was considered in Hell: no more than a nameless, faceless beast in an army of demons just like him.

It looked like he wanted to stay, which didn't surprise Naomi. He must long for being known for himself, as himself, too.

"Do you have to go now?"

She was ashamed at how small her voice sounded. It was ridiculous that she was so sad about this, so attached to this demon after only one day.

"Not now, but very soon."

He didn't specify how soon, but Naomi felt like it would be too soon either way.

"I'd like to spend my remaining time in this human world with you," Kilean continued.

Hearing him say it outright felt nice, but bitter at the same time. Her heart fluttered just to ache right after.

Naomi had no idea what they could do. She thought that an activity like watching TV would be entertaining for Kilean who had probably never done it before, but it would result in her spending the whole time inside her own head. She needed something to keep her busy, too.

“Do you want to bake with me?”

Kilean looked confused, but he still nodded.

Naomi had known that hot chocolate with some cookies or a cake would have been ideal in this cold weather, so she had already planned on baking on her own while at the chalet and had brought all the ingredients she needed. At least, now with Kilean cooking by her side, she could keep both her body and mind busy.

He quietly helped her bake, a bit lost but following her instructions carefully. He didn't talk, apart from occasionally asking her to repeat instructions, but the silence was comfortable between them. And under his serious and collected expression, Kilean seemed to be enjoying himself.

“My mom cooks to destress, and I picked up the habit from her,” Naomi told him. “However, I personally prefer baking. I have a thing for sweets.”

“Do you cook with others often?” he asked, rolling the dough into balls.

“Not really. While my mother loves cooking, she wants to do things her way. If we cook together, we always end up arguing,” she explained. “The only person I get along with in the kitchen is my brother. He's a great sous chef. You are, too.”

Kilean gave her a small smile, almost embarrassed, and she couldn't help smiling back, amused.

Later, Naomi laughed at the silly sight of the big krampus, holding a funny Christmas

mug of hot chocolate in one hand and a cookie in the other. Kilean looked so confused by her amusement that she took a photo to show him.

“Okay, yeah, I see it,” he said, staring at her phone, as a corner of his lips twitched upward.

“By the way, I wanted to ask,” she started, putting her phone away. “You already ate my food more than once, so does that mean demons are fine with human food?”

He shrugged. “We don’t need to eat or drink at all, but I wanted to try.”

“Are you liking it so far?”

“Eating seems more complex than I imagined. Many flavors and textures,” he said, frowning as if he was thinking of words to express his thoughts. “It was okay. I think.”

Everything he said was always interesting, and Naomi was ecstatic knowing that his first experiences were thanks to her.

“Well, now I’m excited for you to try as many things as possible.”

“I’m curious,” he continued, feeding her excitement. “Making the food seems fun, too. I enjoyed doing it with you.”

Eventually, Kilean also helped her cook dinner, and they ate on the floor in front of the fire. Naomi could almost hear the voice of her mother nagging as she sat on the ground with the plate in her hand, but she and Kilean wanted to be cozy rather than formal, and her mother wasn’t there to see it. What she didn’t know couldn’t hurt her, could it?

“How did you end up here? You mentioned earlier that this is not your house.”

“It was a friend’s. She died recently and left it to me,” Naomi explained. “I came to check it out. I didn’t even know she owned this place, so I wasn’t sure what to expect.”

Kilean looked around, nodding to himself. “It’s a beautiful house.”

Naomi smiled. “It is.”

She felt guilty for purposely omitting that she had thought about selling it, but she wasn’t sure if that guilt was towards herself for doubting her initial decision, or towards Kilean for not telling him the whole truth. Maybe not all her stays there would be this interesting, but now Naomi couldn’t help but wonder if she could really part with a house that made her experience something magic.

It was such a beautiful place, too—much more stunning than what Naomi had imagined. Now she desired to show this place to her friends and family, and have them share this beautiful scenery with her. Her mother hadn’t been happy about her inheriting this place, knowing she would be alone and far from everyone else. But if Naomi brought her here, she had a feeling her mother would change her mind.

Naomi likely wouldn’t be able to share about her unique encounter, however.

She eyed Kilean cautiously, eating quietly and looking at the fire. He appeared to truly enjoy the sight of the sizzling flames, which seemed to have a calming effect on him.

“Are humans allowed to know about you?” Naomi asked, too curious to resist.

“They already know, but they believe we’re just legends. It’s better that way, if I’m

honest. If they all truly believed in us, they would try to fight us. While they wouldn't be able to, it would still make our jobs more bothersome."

She nodded, imagining that version of the world. "That sounds about right."

He turned to her, his eyes apologetic. "It would be better if you kept my existence a secret. It's for your safety, too."

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“No one would believe me anyway.” Naomi chuckled. “For beings that continuously grasp at inexplicable higher powers, we are also very skeptical.”

“You’re a weird group,” Kilean mumbled, and Naomi couldn’t help agreeing. Humans were, indeed, very odd.

“Speaking of legends,” Naomi started, “I know krampuses visit our world every year at the start of December, but what do you do when you’re not here?”

It’s always been a huge curiosity for her. For legendary entities that only had one day of the year dedicated to them, what did they do for the rest of the year? Did they cease to exist when it wasn’t their moment? Did they do something else? Did they turn into humans and live normal lives? So many possibilities and no true answer.

“The humans we bring to Hell, or the bad people who die on their own and find their way there, still need punishing,” Kilean explained. “We continue the torture and oversee their suffering.”

“That’s interesting.” She nodded, pensive. “You know, for the type of job that you do—and the fact that you’re a literal demon—I would have expected you to be evil, yet you seem like a genuinely kind person,” Naomi said, surprise in her voice. She wasn’t sure whether calling him a person was accurate, but he didn’t correct her. Her eyes widened, realizing how that must have sounded. “I’m sorry, that might have come out wrong. I don’t mean to be offensive, it’s just that for humans ‘demon’ usually equates to ‘bad’ and ‘evil’.”

“I didn’t take offense,” Kilean reassured her, giving her a small smile. “There are evil

demons, like there's bad beings everywhere. But generally, the words are not synonyms. We are not so different from humans regarding personalities, actually. Our real differences come with appearances, the ability to use magic, and some habits and traditions—but that's the kind of cultural difference you can see between different types of humans, too."

"It feels weird to think about," she confessed. "We are so conditioned to think of others as something bad. While we have started to unpack that about other humans, I doubt many have ever thought to unpack that nuance about non-human beings. But I guess that's also related with whether you believe in their existence enough to question the words you use."

Kilean's attention returned to the flames, as if he needed the wavy movements of the fire to help him focus on his thoughts. He tilted his head, a frown appearing on his face.

"I wonder," he slowly started, "do demons have human qualities, or have humans taken credit for widespread qualities—believing they are the only owners of them?"

"Likely the latter. Humans do have a long history of believing themselves to be the center of the universe."

"Probably."

Meals finished, Kilean offered to bring the plates into the kitchen, then came back to sit on the floor, closer to her than before, enough that she could feel the warmth from his body.

"Are all other entities from legends real? Cupid, angels in general, Santa, the Tooth Fairy, and everyone else?"

“My kind is not allowed to wander into many other worlds, and we are mostly focused on our own community, so I’m not aware of all the entities that exist,” he explained. “But I’d say most, if not all of them, are real. The human world is just one side of the universe. Us magic beings live in many different planes of existence, some completely different from yours—like Hell—, some in-between, and even some existing in your world hidden in plain sight. Each creature has their own realm.”

“Well... that’s another piece of big news that will take me the next year or two to process.”

When she looked up at him, she found him staring at the photo frames on the wall and cabin behind her.

“Something caught your eye?” she asked, curious to know what his faraway expression was hiding.

“Do you have photos of your own family?”

Grinning, Naomi pulled out her phone and opened her “family” folder from the photo app, where she regularly kept pictures of both family and close friends to look at when she felt lonely.

She showed him a picture of her full close family, from a few Christmases ago. Crowding a couch, Naomi was on the far right side, accompanied by her younger brother, older sister, her grandma, and her mother.

“But this grandma is not my mom’s mother,” Naomi explained. “Her mother died from an illness when we were still young. This is my father’s mom.”

“Your father isn’t in the photo,” Kilean noted, cleverly not asking anything directly.

“My parents divorced two years after Carter was born. My father immediately made himself another family, but his mother never forgave him for messing up our family, so she cut contact with him and has been supporting my mother through the years.”

Kilean nodded to himself. “I like that woman.”

Naomi showed him other photos—of her aunt, uncles and cousins, and even some of her friends. She hoped Kilean hadn’t noticed when she quickly had to skip one specific photo, having forgotten to delete a group picture where her latest ex-girlfriend was also present. She hadn’t realized she had forgotten one picture when deleting all her traces after the breakup a year before.

Kilean asked her about her loved ones, about their personalities, and about happy moments they had shared. There was longing in his eyes as she spoke, and Naomi was aware that assuming things about other people was risky, but she doubted demons had families like humans had. From his expression and eagerness to hear her stories, Naomi sensed Kilean’s sadness about not having that type of connection.

She happily kept talking his ears off, hoping it would help him feel less lonely, but when she felt her eyes getting heavy, Kilean encouraged her to lay on the couch and get some sleep. While she settled on the comfort of the sofa, she refused to fall asleep, not wanting to waste the little time she had with him.

Naomi tried to keep talking, her words slurring, but she was so tired that she nodded off a few times—only to immediately jerk awake a few seconds later, scolding herself. At some point, her brain shut off on its own without her realizing it.

Her eyes jerked open again when a loud noise shook her awake, orange light pouring in from the windows. Naomi, however, had no time to appreciate the dawn, because Kilean stood next to the couch, growling at the entrance door behind her.

CHAPTER 6

Fighting for Krampus

NAOMI

Kilean's angry expression shook Naomi like a bucket of cold water. She threw her blanket off and stood up quickly, running to his side.

"What's wrong? What's going on?"

"He's here," he growled.

All the worst scenarios passed through her mind. Was it one of his kind? Were they here to take him? Oh god... did they find out about her? Were they going to kill her?

Before Naomi could even ask, Kilean rushed outside.

"This is bad," she whispered, nervous, flinching at the door slamming against the wall. "This is so bad."

She couldn't let him go off alone, he had been recently injured! But she also likely couldn't fend for herself if the being outside was a demon. Quickly, she reached for her faithful hatchet and peeked outside to gauge the situation.

Kilean was standing a few feet from the entrance, still growling at whatever he sensed in the woods. Naomi was too scared to ask any more questions, so she stood

and waited, her grip tightening on the hatchet as more seconds passed.

Finally, something moved from between the far trees.

A krampus—his fur all gray with stains of red—stalked slowly out of the woods, growling back at Kilean. He had a muscular but slim body, and despite the color of his fur, his face looked younger than Kilean's.

Naomi's eyes focused on the blood stains. Perhaps this was the demon that had attacked Kilean before she found him. Rage immediately took over her body. How dare he come back?

"I see you've found yourself a pet," the krampus spat with a wicked grin, glancing at her.

Kilean's growl deepened further, and Naomi felt its rumbling in her bones.

"I've beaten you once, I can do it again," Kilean replied, taking a step forward.

The demon chuckled. "Does it count as beating me when I'm still here?"

He was still alive, yes, but didn't look like he fully recovered yet like Kilean had. No one had helped him, apparently, and that made Naomi feel a bit better. Since Kilean was in better condition, he would probably do better in a fight. At least, Naomi hoped.

"You should have let yourself die," Kilean spat.

"Why die when I can become something more?"

Kilean tensed, brows furrowing. He seemed lost in thought for a few moments before

he asked, “Is that why you attacked me? You were looking for power?”

“Are you not tired of this life? Being nothing, always following orders.” The demon laughed maniacally, the sound sending shivers down Naomi’s spine. “There is a way to absorb others, you know? If I can get enough power, they won’t be able to control me anymore.”

“But why me?” Kilean asked, a hint of curiosity in his tone. “I’m not special, and I’ve never offended you.”

The demon’s face scrunched up in a disgusted grimace, and Naomi’s rage increased at the sight. Somehow, she knew what he was about to say.

“Because you’re an outcast. Always by yourself.”

Before Kilean could reply, the demon jumped at him, hands forward. The demon slashed his claws down on him, but Kilean dodged to the side, bringing his own claws down onto the other demon’s back.

The gray demon roared, shaking the air around them. In such a silent valley, every sound echoed, and it was terrifying.

“You always keep to yourself, not talking to anyone as if you think yourself royalty,” he spat. “You think you’re so superior, don’t you? Looking down on us from your self-made pedestal. But you’re really just pathetic.”

“I don’t understand,” Kilean replied, confusion clear in his tone.

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The demon took advantage of his bewilderment and attacked again, this time tearing a gash in Kilean's arm. Kilean growled at him, his expression turning back to anger.

"Quit acting oblivious, you know what you do. You're so annoying, pretending to be polite but you're just a stuck-up ass."

He swung again but Kilean dodged and pushed him away. The demon stumbled to the ground but rolled over and immediately pulled himself up.

"Oh, look at me," the gray demon mocked. "I do my job so well and follow orders like a dog. I don't have friends because no one is good enough, and don't talk to anyone because everyone is scum."

Now Naomi truly wished she had some kind of magic or supernatural strength as well, because she really wanted to smack that krampus on the back of the head. He couldn't have been more wrong about Kilean's character. But, really, she shouldn't have been so surprised. Men exactly like this krampus existed, and she had seen such self-centered, ableist and oblivious behaviors many times before in her life.

"Not liking me is one thing. That's your opinion and you can feel however you want. I don't care about it," Kilean started, voice strained. "But going around attacking demons is not a light offense."

The gray demon's lips turned into a chilling grin. "The other three I killed didn't mind."

Kilean's growl rumbled through the clearing, but the demon's smirk only grew wider.

“The higher-ups don’t care,” he continued. “I can kill you and they won’t even bat an eye.”

They sprung forward and reached out to each other at the same time, claws out and growls following every action, until they started moving so quickly that Naomi found it hard to see them—only able to capture the colors of their bodies mixing in a whirlwind of motions.

What she could see were the blood stains in the snow, and her heart was stuck in her throat.

Please, let it not be Kilean’s blood.

The frenetic motions were interrupted when Kilean threw the gray demon, his back hitting a tree a few feet away. He let out a pained groan but his red eyes immediately sharpened and glared back at Kilean, who was snarling quietly at him.

“You should have surrendered when I attacked you the other day,” the gray demon told him. “Now you’ll regret this twice.”

A moment later, he stood up and started sprinting, this time towards the chalet. Naomi watched it in slow motion. She didn’t have time to rush back inside the house, only to swing the hatchet with all of her strength.

The blade struck his arm, and he grunted in annoyance, but it didn’t do much to stop him. He tore it from the muscle without a second glance, blood spraying everywhere, and threw the weapon away. Snarling in her face, he wrapped his clawed hand around her throat. His grip tightened, the points of his claws digging into her flesh. She dug her own nails into his hand, scratching him desperately, but it did nothing to fight him off.

Just as flickering stars appeared at the corner of her eye, the gray demon was torn away from her.

Naomi fell to her knees, hands on her neck as she wheezed and tried to catch her breath.

“You should not have done that,” Kilean’s voice barely sounded like him, so low and rough and angry.

Naomi looked up quickly enough to see him wrap his teeth around the other demon’s throat. He ripped it open, jets of blood painting everything around them. Between the brief lack of oxygen and the sudden sight of all that blood, Naomi’s head started spinning. She dropped to the side, holding herself up with her hands.

Kilean stood over the gray demon, staring down at him until he stopped breathing. After his last breath, the body crumbled until it was nothing but ashes, then magically flew up into the air, disappearing from sight in the clear sky.

She choked on her own breath when Kilean turned around. His mouth and fur were drenched in blood, and so were his sharp teeth, still bared in fury. His red eyes were frenzied, a look she had never seen before, not even when he had considered her a threat the day before.

Silence stretched between them as Naomi wondered if Kilean had lost all control, and if this would be the last thing she saw. She tensed as he took one step toward her, then Kilean froze too. His eyes widened, roaming over her body as if seeing her for the first time. His mouth opened to speak, but he immediately closed it again, pressing his lips together.

Before Naomi could say anything, he turned around and ran into the woods.

She stared at the now empty courtyard in front of her, puddles of blood staining the white of the fresh snow. The forest around her was dead quiet, as if it, too, were wounded and scared.

When she regained the strength to prop herself up, she locked the front door and dragged herself to the bathroom, her mind blank from the shock. Naomi stood under the shower, letting the hot water wash over her until her skin burned and her muscles started relaxing. Her legs were shaky and heavy when she got out, and she sat on a stool in front of the mirror to check on the small, claw-shaped indents on her neck.

Thankfully, while they had released some blood, they hadn't been deep enough to do real damage. Still, she took care of all the little cuts, hoping they'd close soon without leaving scars. The bruises would probably stay a while, though.

She changed into the warmest clothes she had and curled up with a blanket in front of the fire, staring into the flames. Eventually, her brain let her process everything that had happened, and her heart immediately squeezed in her chest.

How silly she had been. She knew Kilean wouldn't have hurt her. But seeing him like that... it had been terrifying. Scary enough to make her temporarily forget who she had in front of her.

Kilean was gone now. Would he come back or had he ran away for good? Had that disastrous moment been their goodbye? Naomi hated that thought. She wanted to see him again, ask him about what happened and check on his injuries. The other demon had hit him a few times, too, and she needed to know if Kilean was okay.

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Hours passed as she stared into the flames. Naomi worried about him, asking herself whether Kilean had already gone back to Hell or not, and wondered if there would be a way for her to find him if he hadn't?—

A knock on the door shook her from her thoughts.

Naomi's heart skipped a beat when Kilean's silhouette appeared in the window, surprised he had come back. She opened the door and found him staring down at the floor, looking like a giant, defeated puppy.

She wordlessly gestured for him to come in, and he passed her with his shoulders hunched, trying to make himself smaller. Snow was caught in his fur, as if he had tried to wash himself with it, but some blood stains still remained.

Kilean sat on a couch. Unsure, Naomi sat on the other one, giving him space.

"I... don't know what to say," Kilean spoke, sounding distraught. "I'm so sorry for scaring you. I let my anger overtake me. I wish you hadn't seen me like that."

"I was just surprised."

It was the truth, but he wasn't convinced. He shook his head.

"I frightened you."

Naomi sighed, defeated. "Yes, you scared me, but it was just the violent nature of the situation, and the fact that you do look kind of scary on a daily basis. It's just that

you've been so calm and kind around me that I had momentarily forgotten you're indeed a demon."

He eyed her neck, such deep concern in his eyes that it made her heart ache.

"Are you deeply hurt?"

"Just a few cuts and bruises. I'll be okay." She waved it away. "What about you?"

"I'm okay. The injuries are healing already."

She nodded, finally feeling like she could breathe again.

"You should take a shower, clean yourself properly. We can continue this later."

He stared at her, eyes wide. "You're still okay with me being in your house?"

"I'm not worried about you hurting me, and I'm not scared of you anymore," she told him confidently. "Please go take care of yourself. We'll talk more later."

She sat comfortably on the couch as he left to clean himself, her head leaning against the backrest. She sighed deeply and closed her eyes, the exhaustion catching up to her. Naomi was glad that he had returned, that he hadn't disappeared without a word. If she really wouldn't have seen him again after that, she might have lost it.

She forced herself to stay awake when she heard his footsteps coming in the living room, all clean once more. She patted the space next to her. "Come here."

He hesitated. "Are you sure?"

"Yes."

His steps were tentative as he approached her, and while he did sit next to her, he still kept some distance. Naomi looked at him from head to toe to check if he was okay, but his gaze moved away when her eyes returned to his face.

Her body felt even heavier now when she moved—the emotional chaos and constant surprises completely tiring her. Kilean tensed when she reached her hand out to him. Eyes full of confusion, he frowned and refused to look at her.

“Kilean,” she called quietly, but it did nothing. “Kilean, look at me.”

Again, he didn’t move, so Naomi cupped his cheek with her hand and gently moved his face towards her.

“I’m sorry,” Kilean whispered, defeated. “I brought him to you.”

“I’m the one that took you to my house, so technically that’s my fault,” she replied, a hint of humor in her voice.

He shook his head. “I’m sorry.”

“Listen, I won’t lie and tell you that I’m happy with how things went, but I’m not mad. As scary as you looked in your demon mode, you saved my life. You were violent, yes, but you did it to help me, and I’m grateful for that.”

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“If it hadn’t been for me, you wouldn’t have been in danger in the first place.”

“You took care of it. You kept me safe.”

His eyes lowered to her neck again, and he reached out with his hand, tentative, stopping a few times as if trying to hold himself back. Eventually, his fingers touched her bruised skin, gently brushing against her injuries.

“I’ll be okay. We’ll be okay.”

“I didn’t want to stay,” he blurted out.

That shut her up for a second, taking her by surprise. Naomi dropped her hand from his face as if burned.

“What do you mean?”

“After you saved my life, I didn’t want to stay here.”

Her heart fell. Had she somehow pressured him into staying with her? She had just wanted to make sure he was okay, she hadn’t realized he didn’t want to be there.

“I knew it would put you in danger,” he explained. “I thought one of my superiors would be tracking me down, but it was him instead. He was way less powerful than them, yet look how much damage he did.”

Oh.

That was what he meant. He was just worried about her.

“Am I scared about the prospect of someone even worse showing up at my doorstep? Yes, I am,” she said, watching as his shoulders tensed. “Does that make me want to kick you out and treat you terribly to avoid that scenario? No, it doesn’t. I feel like we’re becoming friends, Kilean, and I care for my friends. I like having you around and I wanted to take care of you. If that makes me foolish, then so be it.”

“I’m very grateful for your help and hospitality,” he quietly admitted. “I don’t want you to think I didn’t enjoy being here. I just don’t like that my presence puts you in danger.”

“We have dealt with it just fine, haven’t we? There’s no need to sour the good memories with one bad moment.”

Kilean seemed to really think about it, the deep frown on his face never leaving, and eventually, he nodded.

“Now, would you be okay with cuddling with me?”

He might have been okay with it in a normal situation, but shaken as he was after that fight, she had a feeling he might not want to. He silently watched her with confused eyes, as if he couldn’t understand why she still felt safe with him.

“You want to cuddle with me?”

Naomi nodded. “I’m still shaken from what happened. I might feel better if you hold me for a while, and maybe it’ll help you feel better, too?”

Thousands of emotions passed through his eyes, so mixed with each other that they were impossible to decipher. When he realized Naomi was serious—and

confident—about her proposal, he nodded.

She sat sideways on his lap, pressing against his plump belly, and leaned her head on his shoulder, her body finally relaxing. Kilean was still tense, but he wrapped his arms around her.

“I’m sorry for what he said to you,” she whispered, suddenly feeling extremely vulnerable.

“It doesn’t bother me.”

“I hate that characters like that exist between demons, too. As if humans weren’t already bad enough.”

His big hand took her smaller one, brushing his thumb over it. “Unfortunately, rotten apples can be found in any group.”

“He mentioned absorbing magic,” she asked, too curious to let it pass. “Did you absorb his when you killed him?”

“No, I think there’s a specific spell for that.” Kilean’s tone was almost defeated, as if part of him had wished it were so easy. “I’m not sure that what he said would even be possible. Even with more power, our higher-ups would still be hard to beat. It feels like more of a death sentence than anything else.”

Naomi sighed, her little bit of hope crumbling. She pulled herself closer, brushing her face against his fur, trying to lose herself in the feel of him. He felt so warm and solid—safe.

“Thank you again for saving me.”

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“You’ve done the same for me,” he immediately replied.

She chuckled quietly. “It wasn’t really the same.”

“You saved my life. It’s the same.”

She smiled sadly at the conviction in his statement. Currently, both of them were a mess, neither having expected such a violent encounter, but it helped to be with each other. Naomi hoped they’d both feel better soon.

Kilean started playing with her fingers, and it seemed to slowly calm him down, his tension slipping. Eventually, she was lulled to sleep by the rhythmic movement of his chest.

When she woke up later that evening, there was no trace of Kilean anywhere. Not in the house, not in the shed, not in the woods.

CHAPTER 7

Wishing for Krampus

NAOMI

two years later

In the end, Naomi never sold the chalet as she had planned. She kept telling herself she didn’t want to get rid of something that Felicity valued dearly and had entrusted

to her, but really, she wanted to keep it for purely selfish reasons.

The following winter, she took another trip to the chalet. She was more prepared this time, bringing enough food and supplies to spend a few weeks there. Naomi would wander the woods every day—and at first, she told herself she was exploring the nature, but in reality, she was looking for him.

Kilean had been clear about not being able to meet again, but she still hoped. Maybe if she wished hard enough, it would come true. They hadn't said goodbye that night—now a full year before—and she couldn't accept that day as their last.

Every day, Naomi hoped he was okay, that he didn't get into trouble for killing that demon, that he was still alive and healthy. Every day, she hoped he'd hold on just long enough for them to somehow find each other again.

There was one certain way to meet a krampus, but Naomi wasn't stupid enough to try. Being a real bad person would bring one of them to her, but there was no guarantee that it would be Kilean. Even if it was, he would probably be forced to punish her anyway. He had told her that he didn't have much control over his work or life, and she didn't want to test it.

The more days that passed with no sign of him, the more miserable she felt. She needed to be realistic, understand he wasn't coming back. She had a nice day with a demon, and that was it. It was an experience she would never be able to replicate, and she had to be okay with that.

Naomi tried, she really did try, but she came back again the following winter. There was a voice in the back of her head nagging her, asking, "What if this is the right time? What if he comes back this time, but I'm not there to greet him?"

So she ended up in the mountains again, lonely in front of the fire. She was reading a

book and sipping on hot chocolate when a noise broke the quiet of the valley. It was a faint rhythmic crunch.

Curious, Naomi peeked out the window, thinking it was an animal, but saw a big black figure instead. Her brain took a few seconds to process the image, not believing her eyes.

She threw the door open without thinking—not even stopping to put on a coat—and rushed outside, running to him. Kilean caught her when she jumped, pulling her up and letting her wrap her arms around his neck.

“It’s you,” he whispered, sounding as surprised as she felt. “I only wanted to check if the house was still here. I wasn’t expecting you’d be here, too.”

“I was hoping,” she whispered, digging her face into his fur.

He gently placed her back on the ground but before he had the chance to let her go, Naomi grabbed the fur of his face and pulled him until their lips smashed together.

He seemed surprised, but quickly gave in and kissed her back, cupping her cheek with his big hand, his knuckles bumping against her newly-made braids. She broke the kiss but his face followed her, as if he didn’t want to stop.

“Sorry, I regretted not doing it that year,” she whispered, embarrassed. “I thought I wouldn’t have the chance to ever do it.”

“That was really nice,” he told her, smiling slightly.

The happy moment, however, was short-lived as Naomi remembered the situation they were in. She leaned back and slapped him hard on his arm.

“What’s wrong?” he asked, worried. “What did I do?”

“You left without saying goodbye!”

Realization washed over his face, as if he had forgotten. He brushed his thumb over her cheek, trying to soothe her.

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“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to.”

“Do you have any idea what that felt like, waking up like that? For months, I even wondered if I had imagined you!”

“I’m sorry,” he repeated, quiet but full of sincerity. “They urgently called me through the bond, and I couldn’t risk them getting me themselves. I had to go immediately.”

Naomi would have been in danger if the other demons had caught them together. Knowing he had put her safety first calmed her a little, but it still didn’t cancel out the distress of waking up and finding out he was gone, or the months—well, years—she had spent questioning her own mind and memories.

“Did you get in trouble? For killing that krampus?”

He shook his head. “They still don’t know I did it, but they didn’t care about him enough to want to find out what happened to him.”

Well, it was good because that meant it wouldn’t bite him in the ass, but it was also a reminder of how little his kind was respected or cared for in Hell.

His eyes softened, thumb still caressing her cheek. “I missed you.”

Oh, my poor heart is going to explode.

Naomi smiled, relaxing against his hold.

“Do you have time to stay? Or do you need to leave right away?”

“I have some time.”

They walked back to the chalet together, and she caught the small smile that appeared on his face when he stepped in. He looked at his surroundings, as if cataloging everything that had changed since his previous visit.

“You have a tree,” he said, pointing at the naked tree sitting in a corner of the living room.

That first year when they had met, the chalet hadn’t had Christmas decorations. She had only gone there for a brief holiday, and hadn’t planned on keeping it or making it feel like a home.

The year before, however, she brought a tree and decorations to keep herself busy and make the space cozier. She had brought the same stuff this year too, but hadn’t felt like decorating it yet. Maybe it had been a sign.

“Do you want to decorate it with me?”

He nodded, a small smile stretching his lips. The sight was comical: a huge beast, taller than the tree itself, picking up small decorations and carefully placing them on the tree, occasionally stepping back and tilting his head to check the composition. Kilean seemed to really enjoy the manual task, so much that Naomi stepped back, letting him decorate and happily watched him as she passed him the pieces.

The decorations she’d brought contained a mix of old family pieces and things she bought herself, making it a combination of odd items.

“We bought this group of decorations from a tiny shop in London, during a trip when

I was young,” Naomi said, pointing to a colorful group of sparkly spirals with bells at the end. “They’re big, and heavy, and don’t really give the idea of Christmas with their neon colors or shapes. But they were from London, so my mom treated them like holy items anyway.”

Naomi hated the sight of those things, but they had been a constant since her mother got them years before. When Naomi and her siblings went to live on their own, their mother had even divided her collection and gave each of them one from the group, to make sure they could still use them. Naomi’s siblings didn’t care about the decorations and had given her some of theirs, so Naomi had ended up with more than she should have.

“This group is from gifts my late grandma made for my grandpa.” She pointed to an assortment of fabric decorations—some of which had Christmas themes, and some of which had nothing to do with it. “Each year she’d make one for him. She started with Christmas things like reindeers and candy-canes, and when the list ended, she started making fabric decorations of stuff he liked in general.”

She rummaged through the box, taking out a decoration of a T-Rex wearing a Christmas hat, riding a decorated tree.

She smiled cheekily at Kilean. “I got myself this one because it was funny.”

Naomi kept telling him the story of each decoration—and sometimes he’d curiously ask questions, but listened in silence for the most part. His silence, however, wasn’t uncomfortable. There was something about it that made her feel that he was really listening, and he often encouraged her to continue with his gaze, letting her ramble on and on for hours.

Once the tree decorating was done, Naomi dropped on the couch—tired from the talking more than the task—and admired their work. Kilean joined her, and as soon as

he sat next to her, she pulled her legs up, pressing her knees against his leg, and leaned against him, enjoying the closeness and contact.

Instinctually, he rested his hand on her thigh, and she held back a smile.

“I like it,” he said, still staring at the tree. “That was fun. Humans really do that every year?”

“Many do, yes. Christmas is originally connected to a religion. Not everyone follows the same beliefs, but it’s become a commercial holiday too, so regardless, lots of people celebrate it.”

“Fascinating.”

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Longing flashed behind his eyes, but he was quick to hide it. From what he had shared before, his existence has been plain. Naomi loved sharing small moments like these with him, to give him the chance to experience new things, but her heart still ached to know he had never felt such small joys before.

She pressed further against him, brushing her face against his fur. Finally, his head turned to her, gazing down at her curled-up form.

“Are you cold?” he asked, confused by her behavior.

“No, I just like feeling close to you.”

His grip on her leg tightened, purposeful this time.

“I have a question, but I don’t want to be invasive.”

She perked up, curious. “You can ask anything.”

“Do you have a partner?”

Naomi’s first instinct was to get angry about the question subtly implying she could be a cheater, but she realized Kilean didn’t know much about humans, and for all she knew, demons might not be monogamous—or even fond of commitment at all.

“I don’t have a partner,” she eventually said. “Most humans are monogamous, but even the ones with multiple partners never do it without having a conversation with the people they’re involved with. Going behind someone’s back to be with someone

else is considered cheating, and that's a very sensitive topic for many."

"I had no idea."

Naomi went on dates from time to time, but it was usually for short-term adventures. She hadn't had a serious relationship in a few years. Not because she couldn't find a man or a woman worth committing to, but because she didn't feel the need for that type of thing. For the everyday type of commitment, at least. This thing with Kilean, however... it could be different.

"Do you have a partner?"

It was probably a bit late to ask that, but she figured better late than never.

He shook his head. "Lack of freedom, remember?"

Kilean had seemed very confident and experienced from the intimacy they had shared, so she had assumed he must have had sex before. He did mention that demons were a lot more open about sexuality, but relationships seemed to be a step too far. For his kind, at least.

His hand slowly brushed against the length of her thigh, stopping right at her knee and then going back up. He did it a few times, and while his expression was comfortable and not sensual, his touch was still turning her on.

Despite the quick sexual encounter they had, Naomi could not get his cock out of her mind, still remembering his confidence and dedication. She had gotten off at the memory of him for two full years—only to feel immediately guilty post-orgasm, then sad at the reminder she wouldn't see him again.

Groaning in frustration, she moved and straddled his hips, keeping herself up just

enough to not sit on him. His eyes widened, surprised, but he didn't complain or push her away. Naomi wrapped her arms around his shoulders, hands digging into the fur at the back of his head. As a reply, Kilean grabbed her soft hips, squeezing them gently.

"I have thought about you," he quietly admitted. "While I was in Hell, I thought about you often. About your pretty eyes, about your constant questions, about your chalet, about how soft you felt." He hesitated a moment, then added, "About how I didn't touch you as much as I wanted to back then, because there was no time."

His confession filled her with pride and glee. It made her pussy ache, too.

"Do you want to touch me now?"

"Yes," he immediately answered, almost breathy, desperate.

"Do it, then."

Without needing to be told twice, Kilean slipped his hands under her sweater, caressing her back. He leaned forward, his nose and lips brushing against her neck. He settled Naomi in his lap and pulled her closer, squishing her plump body against his own, her chubby belly and full tits pressing against his round stomach. Naomi loved the way his body felt, so strong and big and soft at the same time. He was so hot, and he probably didn't even realize it.

She groaned. His touch felt amazing, and he was taking his time to fully enjoy her, but she was horny and frustrated, and could not wait any longer—she had two years of fantasies and solo masturbation to make up for. He watched, confused, as she pulled back and stood up, quickly getting rid of all her clothes. He seemed almost disappointed, as if he had wanted to take them off himself, but she told herself he could do it another time. She needed him now.

His cock emerged from his hiding place, already hard. Finally naked, she straddled his lap again, brushing her pussy against it. Kilean closed his eyes and groaned at the light contact.

Grinning, she took his dick and held it at the right angle, then moved her hips forward to brush her clit against it. He helped her move with a hand on her round ass, his other hand digging into a pillow, fabric tearing. Her smile grew, confidence growing with it.

When Naomi felt like she was wet enough, she stopped her movements, earning a strained grunt from Kilean. He opened his eyes again then, looking at her with a mix of frustration and lust in his eyes.

Naomi had prepared for this, buying thicker and longer dildos just to be ready for him, in case she ever managed to succeed in finding him again. She was ready to take him like she had imagined in so many different fantasies.

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She angled his cock to her entrance and wasted no time putting it in, gradually taking inch by inch. A muffled growl rumbled in his chest, his body trembling. When her lips touched the top of his knot she stopped, taking a second to adjust, mouth open in a silent gasp. Now that she could feel him inside, she knew none of her dildos compared. None of them could ever make her feel this full.

Kilean let out a low and rough groan, and Naomi felt his cock twitch inside her. Moving as if it physically pained him, he brought his hand to her belly. She watched as he traced along her skin with his finger, drawing a symbol she couldn't decipher.

“What are you doing?”

“Making sure my seed won't take.”

Oh... Handy.

Once he was done with his invisible spell, he nodded lightly as a signal she could continue. Naomi smiled at his contained eagerness.

She had imagined riding him many times, but fantasies never compared to reality. Naomi leaned forward, wrapping her arms around his shoulders and began moving up and down his length.

“Fuck,” she whispered. “You feel so good.”

Kilean groaned in reply. His hands moved around her thick thighs, going up her hips and to her waist, then traveled back down. He continued this motion as she moved,

his touch light, talons grazing her silky skin.

She didn't know why he was doing it—maybe he just wasn't used to someone without fur?—but she wasn't complaining. The tickling of his touch and his fur brushing against her body only enhanced the pleasure.

As her moans grew louder, Kilean's breath became shaky. His occasional low growls sent shivers down her spine, adding to the lewd sound of her soaking pussy jumping on his cock. His long tail was whipping wildly, faintly thumping when hitting the backrest.

Right as Naomi was on the edge of climax—her walls starting to clench around him—he grabbed her hips and pushed her down further, until his knot went inside her. She gasped and immediately screamed as her orgasm hit, and he joined her a moment later, shooting his seed inside her.

His hands slid up her body until they cupped her heavy breasts.

“You won't be able to move for a while,” Kilean said, eyes fixated on her chest.

He squeezed her tits, traced the stretch marks on them with his fingers, and admired them with an awe that surprised her. It took her a moment to realize that even though he had seen her naked before, he had been too eager back then and rushed into pleasuring her, and maybe he hadn't had time to really look at her. From his expression, he really liked what he saw, and that only fed her confidence.

Naomi wondered what female demons looked like. If Kilean seemed so fascinated by the way her body looked, maybe demons were very different from human women.

Her breath was heavy as he kept playing with her chest, entranced, without hint of ever wanting to stop. Eventually, one hand left her tit and traveled down her body

once more. His thumb brushed over her clit, while his mouth found her breast. The feeling of being so full and hot, with his hands and mouth all over her, immediately gave her another orgasm, her body trembling in his embrace.

Kilean held her against him, pushing her braids behind her, and hid his face in the crook of her neck.

“Soft,” he whispered—though Naomi guessed he was talking to himself and not to her. She smiled to herself, satisfied in all possible ways.

When his knot eventually shrunk enough to slip out of her, it opened the dam of their mixed releases.

“I need to start investing in some top-notch cleaning products,” Naomi said, a chuckle in her voice.

“I can clean it with magic.”

Her mouth dropped open. “You can?”

“Yes. I can clean us, too,” he said. “Last time, I couldn’t because I didn’t have all my magic, but I can now.”

“If you want to, then, you can clean the space. But not us.” At his confused frown, she smiled. “One of the best parts of sex is what comes after, the taking care of your partner. Oftentimes that includes cleaning each other.”

“Oh.” His eyes were distant for a moment, as if busy looking through his memory. “Demons don’t usually stay or interact once we’re done.”

That sounded... sad. Sure, the sex itself was great, but if it was so impersonal that

you didn't even talk to each other after coming, that would take away half of the enjoyment from it. At least, it would for Naomi. Apparently, demons didn't seem that bothered by it.

"Well, you're not running away from me any time soon." Naomi slowly stood up, her legs shaking slightly. "So get rid of this mess and come to the shower with me."

Kilean did as instructed. After a gesture of his hand and a whisper in a language she'd never heard, the puddle disappeared. Once she had recovered from the momentary surprise of seeing magic in action, Naomi wrapped her hand around his wrist and brought him to the bathroom. She pulled her long braids in a bun, then entered the shower with him.

Now that they were in the shower together, she observed how the space was just big enough to contain both of them, and she sent a silent "thank you" to Felicity. For all Naomi knew, she could have been a wild woman when young, too, and might have gotten freaky in here. She hadn't been a quiet or meek old woman to begin with, so that could easily have been possible.

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Naomi, however, didn't start anything sensual with Kilean, choosing to soap his fur instead. He carefully watched, holding an intense look that she couldn't decipher. Kilean let her touch him everywhere without comment and let her silently manhandle him.

"Your turn," she told him, grinning.

When he put his soap-filled hands on her, he was oh so careful, so gentle, as he slowly cleaned every part of her. She hadn't expected his touch to be so light and reverent, and her chest only ached more. The post-orgasm clarity was hitting her, and the more time passed, the more she remembered that this was only temporary, and that the clock was ticking very quickly.

Once they'd washed their bodies, Naomi took the task of drying him, happy to show her affection in some way. She thought she could only afford small gestures like these, scared to say too much or seem eager. Kilean seemed to have some affection for her, but she couldn't risk scaring him away.

They ended up in the kitchen after Kilean asked to cook together, preparing dinner and the cookies Kilean had loved so much before. He asked her about herself, her job, how her life had changed in the time they spent apart.

"Last time I saw you, your hair was like a beautiful coppery halo," Kilean said, voice full of awe. "But now it falls in dark braids with soft, curly ends. You look so you and so different at the same time. Both styles suit you very much."

Naomi moved her knotless braids to the side, flaunting them around.

“I like to change it up from time to time,” she replied, smiling.

“I wish I could see how you change in the future, too,” he said, his hopeless tone so quiet that her heart ached.

“Couldn’t you?”

His eyes snapped to hers, a frown appearing on his face.

“Do you think we can make this a habit?” she asked him, very carefully. “You said that you had no control over where they sent you, but I still hoped you’d find your way back here somehow. And you did.”

Naomi looked down, biting her lower lip. Imagining the air was courage, she took a deep breath to muster some, and continued.

“If I keep coming back here around this time every year, would you try to come back as well?”

He was quiet for a moment—a moment that felt like eternity.

“What if I can’t?”

“It doesn’t matter,” she immediately said. “I’ll keep coming back every year anyway. Even if I can only see you again in three or ten years, it doesn’t matter.”

“Would you really waste your life for me?”

“I don’t see it as a waste.” Her hope slowly snuffed out, her shoulders slumping. “Unless you don’t want to come back.”

“That’s not it,” he said without hesitation. “That has never been it. I just don’t think I’ll be able to take care of you the way you’d need, or see you as much as we’d both want.”

Kilean looked physically pained, his broad shoulders slumping as he closed in on himself. Knowing that he, too, was suffering from the precarity of their situation, gave Naomi some comfort.

“Could we try it anyway? If it doesn’t work, we’ll tell each other to give up and move on,” she tried. If it was already hard enough to communicate now, Naomi wasn’t sure how they’d contact each other in that case, but she hoped they’d never have to figure that out. “I just don’t want to give up so soon without even trying first.”

“It could be dangerous, too,” he continued. “If they find us out... I might not be able to protect you.”

She spoke without hesitation. “I’m okay with taking that risk.”

He busied himself with cutting the vegetables, his eyes avoiding hers.

“I don’t have anything of value in my life. I exist only to be a mindless follower, an obedient worker. Life for creatures like me is not a life the way humans intended.” His tone carried sadness and resignation, and for a moment he sounded so old, like a man who had lived past his capacity and was now so, so tired. “If I can have something to look forward to—if I can have you, even just for a day every year, that would be my honor.”

The back of her eyes burned, but Naomi did her best to hold back the tears. She waited a moment to speak, to make sure her voice wouldn’t come out wobbly.

“It would be my honor, too.”

She gently pressed her side to his—a silent comfort—and eventually, his lips pulled into a small smile.

They kept cooking in silence, then each sat on opposite sides of the counter with their plates.

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As they started eating, a gagging-like noise made Naomi jump, wide eyes jerking to Kilean in concern. He quickly spit something into his hand, his whole body shaking once as if electrified.

He mumbled something in his language, face all scrunched up.

Naomi eyed the mushed remains, recognizing a tomato. “What’s wrong?”

“It feels wrong on my tongue,” he said. He stood and went to dump the chewed food into the bin, scowling.

“The taste?” Naomi asked, trying to understand.

He shook his head.

“The texture?”

Kilean sat back down and glared at the plate. He nodded. “It feels wrong.”

“I can take them off your plate.”

Naomi moved all the pieces of tomatoes from his plate to hers, looking at him as he tentatively tried eating again. When he realized the rest of the food felt normal, his shoulders relaxed again. She smiled at him, making a mental note to not use tomato in his food again.

Understanding Kilean and his preferences would be trial and error, and Naomi

realized that he still wasn't used to humans and their cultures enough to know what he liked and what he didn't. She didn't mind, though. Naomi liked the idea of both of them slowly discovering new things about the other and themselves.

Later that night, they cuddled together in front of the fire—building a nest on the floor with furs, blankets and pillows. Kilean let her cuddle against his big, soft body, and they chatted about silly things until they both fell asleep.

Kilean waited for her to wake this time, and when the morning came, they had slow and gentle sex as a goodbye, taking their time exploring each other's bodies and committing every inch to memory.

When he walked out the door, Naomi felt like a piece of her heart was being ripped from her, but then hope immediately filled the empty space.

CHAPTER 8

Missing Krampus

NAOMI

one year later

The official promise for them to try meeting each other again—other than giving Naomi hope for a happy joined future—made the wait harder for her. With the fantasy of that future right out of reach, she only missed Kilean more.

When she returned home last time, his absence immediately made itself known. While she was still in the chalet, she could pretend he was still around due to all the memories they now had in that house. There, she could still hold onto his lingering presence.

At home in the city, however, it was much harder. The change of environment always felt like a harsh snap to reality, and Naomi would be lying if she said she didn't question whether she had imagined everything or not—again.

With the mundanity of her daily life, memories of Kilean slowly faded. Every day, she wished she had something of him. No one was supposed to know of his existence, so she couldn't ask him to take a photo together, no matter how much she wanted to. And he never wore anything, so it wasn't like she could “steal” some of his clothes, the way girlfriends usually did with boyfriend's hoodies.

Boyfriend... it felt so odd to think of Kilean like that—because the word itself didn't fit his not-so-human nature, and because despite the sweet words they exchanged, they never defined their relationship.

Kilean was a very straightforward type, never beating around the bush or hiding things purposely. He needed clear words and instructions to figure out things properly, so the fact that he never brought up the topic himself made Naomi think that demons weren't used to the same types of relationships as humans. Maybe demons didn't need to speak about it. Or maybe the two of them already did something which, for Kilean, was a clear sign that they were fully committed. For all she knew about demon culture and habits, Naomi might have even married him already.

Frustrated by his absence and worried about memories of him fading, Naomi decided to pick up drawing. Since she was a newbie, her drawings weren't good at first. But Naomi practiced every day—first learning human anatomy, then trying her hand with more monstrous features, hoping that she'll be able to draw Kilean properly someday, and have something to look at whenever she missed him.

When the time finally came to go back to the chalet, Naomi packed all her usual bags and boxes, then set off.

Her heart raced when she saw the house from afar, as if something inside her chest was tugging her closer and closer. She wished she could control her expectations, but her hopeful heart betrayed her every time, causing her mind to wander further away than it should.

Naomi did her best to act normal, like she would on any other trip, and not as if she was waiting for something. During her stay, she rewatched all the movies and shows that had krampus in it, just to feel closer to Kilean somehow. However, they were all horror stories, and none of the krampuses looked like him, so they never completely filled the hole in her chest.

Eventually, she spent her whole days reading, having recently found that romance books where people fall in love—and bang—monsters and other fantasy creatures were a real (and very popular) thing. However, the more that she read about scary-looking monsters being lovely with their humans, the sadder she became.

Those books made her horny, too, since any time she read a sex scene, she was unable to stop thinking of Kilean and the intimacy they shared. And then that, too, made her sad, as she remembered they may not share such intimacy any time soon—or maybe ever again.

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She busied herself with decorating the house with fairy lights and Christmas decorations, but she waited to decorate the tree. Kilean had liked doing it with her, so she wanted to wait in case he showed up again.

And wait she did, but days passed, and no one knocked on her door.

As mid-December approached, Naomi gave up hope seeing him that year. She knew he had some wiggle room to be out in this world, but by now, the time window was more than closed.

Sighing in defeat, Naomi decorated the tree alone, loudly singing along to sad music as she did. She felt a bit a silly—and dramatic—but at least she felt a bit better about the missed encounter.

To not feel lonely, all she could do now was think about the approaching Christmas. Naomi's close family and her best friend Hayley were going to stay at the chalet with her from the 24th till New Year, so the place would soon be chaotic and lively again. All she had to do was wait—she was getting good at that.

A week before Christmas, her friend video-called her just as Naomi was laying with her e-reader, bundled in the blanket fort she had built in front of the fire.

“Hello, stranger,” Naomi answered, an involuntary smile pulling at her lips at the sight of her best friend doing her makeup, her phone propped up against the mirror.

“Hello, stranger,” Hayley said back in a sing-song voice. “How's it going over there? Got tired of the snow yet?”

“It’s going well,” Naomi replied, ignoring the second question. “It’s quiet and cozy.”

Naomi turned the camera to show her the fire, then turned it back to herself, showing her setup in the middle of the blankets and pillows.

“Cozy indeed,” Hayley agreed.

Naomi watched as her friend worked on her makeup, the familiarity of the motions bringing her comfort.

“Are you going somewhere nice?” Naomi asked, curious.

Hayley grinned. “I have a date.”

“With who? Anyone I know?”

“You remember the person I met the other night, when I went out on that team dinner? Well, I saw them again yesterday at a coffee shop. We exchanged numbers and I asked them on a date.”

A week before, Hayley had a dinner with some of her colleagues. She was outside on a cigarette break when someone tripped and fell on her. When her friend had recalled the moment, she had gushed about how handsome the stranger had looked. Naomi wasn’t surprised to find out Hayley had immediately scored a date when she saw them again.

“Make sure you tell me all the details once it’s over,” Naomi reminded her.

Hayley grinned, a mischievous look in her eyes. “Of course.”

She immediately went back to her makeup, and as Naomi quietly watched her, she

began feeling more and more distant from her. Just a few weeks away from Hayley and she missed her like crazy, despite all the texts and calls.

“You could use a break from city life, you know,” Naomi said.

Hayley narrowed her eyes at her friend. “You don’t need to convince me. I’m already coming, remember?”

“But can’t you come a bit earlier than everyone else?” Naomi asked, pouting for dramatic effect.

“Stop that, you’re a grown woman,” Hayley scolded, but there was no real irritation in her tone.

“Please,” Naomi said, purposely making her voice sweeter. “Honey, sweetheart, my baby boo, can you come keep me company a few days earlier? I miss you.”

“Oh my God!” Hayley threw her hands up, exasperated. “Okay, okay, I’ll see what I can do. I’ll talk to my boss tomorrow and let you know if they let me take a couple more vacation days.”

“Yes, please. Ask and let me know.”

Naomi didn’t want to sound desperate, but she was surely feeling it. If she could just spend some quality time with her best friend, she could forget about Kilean for a few days.

The two of them kept chatting as Hayley finished her makeup, then Naomi helped her choose an outfit.

“Text me when you’re back home,” Naomi reminded her. “Or if you end up going

home with your date.”

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Hayley winked at her, the look in her eyes suggesting that she was very likely going home with them.

When they eventually ended the call, Naomi found herself again in the quiet of her lonely chalet, the sound of her deep sigh filling the room.

CHAPTER 9

Welcoming Krampus

KRAMPUS

Walking out on Naomi had felt much more intense in comparison to before, despite them not saying goodbye the first time.

Now, with the promise of seeing each other looming over him, he felt the weight of his powerlessness pulling him down. Every breathing moment, he worried about disappointing her.

Would she wait for him aimlessly until the end of her days? No matter how flattering her affection was, he didn't want that for her; he didn't want her to waste her whole life waiting for him. After all, their meetings would always be so short and spread out, that they couldn't even compare in importance with the rest of her life.

Still, a part of him hoped for an answer to his problems.

When he went back to Hell after their first encounter, he had immediately tried to

investigate the gray krampus that attacked them. He must have had connections with demons of other levels, because Kilean struggled to find whoever had fed him the information about absorbing others' powers, but he did find some other interesting information.

In addition to not being allowed to interact with many other demon species, Krampus also weren't allowed to venture too deep into their old libraries—as a way to keep them ignorant—so it took Kilean a very long time to find information that could work as a silver lining, and even more time to find a way to talk about it with the right demons and not arouse suspicion.

The year when he had his second encounter with Naomi, he found someone who could help him—a Nightmare whom he had interacted with before, and who had come to visit his section of Hell.

Part of him was scared, and he couldn't deny it even to himself. Even though he didn't like his job or current status, there was familiarity in it, safety. He wanted to be with Naomi—in any capacity she'd allow—but that meant fighting against the system that would oppose it, and anxiety choked him at just the thought. It would mean taking a leap into the unknown, likely taking away all the order he knew and had worked with for centuries. He was conflicted: one side telling him not to leave the bit of comfort he had, and the other desperately asking him to try, for Naomi. For his own potential happiness, too.

“Is there a way for us demons to change our roles and ranks?” he had asked the Nightmare, hesitant, picking at his nails.

She kept quiet, studying him and his question. In the silence, he grew ashamed at subtly wishing the Nightmare wouldn't have a solution, so that he could have an excuse that he tried and go back to what was familiar.

“I’ve heard of it before, but I never looked into it properly since it never interested me,” she eventually replied.

Nightmares were demons with smoke-like forms, who could shapeshift to look like other beings—mainly humans. Their main job was to enter people’s subconscious and cause nightmares, and while they often did that to the same people the krampuses then punished, Nightmares were tricksters and more spiteful demons, instead of punishers like Kilean’s kind. If the Nightmares weren’t expelled from the person’s home soon enough, they would take root and bring them bad luck until the person eventually died a brutal death.

Despite having similar tasks, Nightmares were higher ranked than krampuses, which came with more freedom.

Both groups were violent in nature, but krampuses focused on bad people while Nightmares targeted everyone. Despite that, Kilean still felt that he could trust her. She seemed good at her job, and seemed to enjoy it too, but she never gave him a reason to think she was foul or devious in her private life.

“Could you help me find out more?” he had asked, cautious. “What I can personally discover is limited.”

“I’ll see what I can find.”

He caught himself wondering if she had a name—if Nightmares, in general, had names. If so, she had never shared it with him before, and never having had one himself, he had never even thought to ask, not thinking it would be important. Now, he couldn’t help his curiosity.

She was about to walk away when he stopped her.

“Do you have a name?”

A side of her lips pulled upwards, exposing her sharp teeth.

“I had one, but it wasn’t mine. We Nightmares are many people, but very rarely we are ourselves,” she said. “An old friend called me Clementine, Clemmie for short. You can use that one.”

Clementine didn’t ask the question back to him, and he was glad. He likely would have given in and told her the name he should have only been sharing with Naomi.

Clementine went to do her job, and he was left alone with his confusing emotions. He trusted her with the task and waited to hear more from her; meanwhile, he still kept trying to find more on his own, too. He was never very successful in finding clues, though, and every day, he hoped that she would have more luck than him.

The more time passed, the more his hope faded, and again, he couldn’t figure out if he was sad or not about not being able to change his life.

The following year, Kilean couldn’t go visit Naomi, only making him more closed off. He never really interacted with others, but the fear and confusion he was feeling—added to the increased distance from the one person who seemed to be able to ground him—was only making him gloomier.

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It was a week before Christmas when Clementine showed up again.

“I found something useful,” she announced, visibly excited. “It is frowned upon and the records of it show that higher ups did their best to hinder the process, but there is records of lower demons climbing the ranks. So it’s possible.”

He released a deep sigh, and despite the nervousness, found himself smiling.

“You’ll have to go through a whole trial while also still doing your job, so you’ll be super busy, but there is a way to ask for more. However, it doesn’t look like a quick process.”

Clementine explained the technical parts to him, relaying everything she learned, and informed him of all the ways that demons who tried had been sabotaged.

It wasn’t at all what the gray demon had found. This method seemed more official and less violent. However, it might be much more difficult. But if Naomi wanted him to, he would do it.

As if the universe were on his side, some krampuses were released into the human world for a last-minute mission, just a few days before Christmas. This time, they sent him.

He wasn’t expecting to see Naomi, knowing that the period she usually spent at the chalet was already over, but if he could find some time to go by the house, he could leave her a note explaining the situation.

He completed his tasks as quickly as possible, then snuck to the valley. From far away, he saw the smoke coming out of the chimney, and he immediately frowned. His confusion only grew when he came closer and saw that the lights were on, too.

Knowing that Naomi was here, he let himself in to surprise her. However, it wasn't Naomi that he found.

At the kitchen counter, with a direct view to the front door, stood another Black woman. She was dark-skinned, thin, and shorter than Naomi. Her hair was in thin braids, but without the curls at the end that Naomi had in hers the previous time. Nothing in her features told him she was family, but she did look familiar.

As soon as the woman saw him, she screamed.

"What? What's going on?" Naomi yelled, running down the stairs.

Naomi locked eyes with him first, her mouth dropping open, then immediately looked back at the other woman. Kilean followed her gaze to find the woman holding a big kitchen knife.

"Naomi, move away from it!" she shouted.

"Oh, no, no, no!" Naomi rushed forward, passing by him and stopping at the kitchen door. "He's harmless!"

The other woman looked at Naomi like she wasn't making any sense. "What the hell are you on about?"

"Hayley, do you trust me?"

The stranger shook her head. "A minute ago I would have said yes, but I'm starting to

question it now.”

“Put the knife down and I’ll explain everything,” Naomi said. “Please.”

Hayley narrowed her eyes at Kilean, then glared at Naomi. The two women stared into each other’s eyes for a few seconds, but whatever she saw in Naomi’s eyes must have been enough. Hayley sighed and slowly put the knife down on the counter.

“Okay, well... I never thought I’d find myself in this situation so I don’t have a speech ready.” Naomi smiled awkwardly, then gestured for him to get closer. “Hayley, this is Kilean. He’s a krampus.”

“He’s Krampus?”

“A krampus,” he corrected, quietly, stopping next to Naomi.

Finally, he looked at her properly. It’d been a year since he saw her, but he still noticed the subtle ways Naomi had changed—in her features and the way she carried herself. Her expression seemed more mature, and she carried herself with more confidence. She seemed to have changed her hair again, too. While the braids seemed to be the same type as before, the shade was lighter, closer to her natural color. It was so interesting to see her slowly change every time they met.

“... we’re friends now, and he visits me from time to time.”

He shook himself from his thoughts, focusing back on the conversation.

“Kilean,” Naomi called to him. “This is my friend Hayley. I’ve mentioned her once but I’m not sure if you remember.”

A friend. Now he realized why she looked familiar. She was in the photos that Naomi

had shown him.

“I’m sorry for the scare,” he said, hoping it would help her relax.

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She was listening carefully to everything Naomi was telling her, but she was still so tense.

“I get that you’re friends but you can’t just let yourself in like that. I could have stabbed you!” Hayley said, visibly stressed.

“It wouldn’t have hurt,” he replied matter-of-factly, which made her mouth drop open.

Grimacing, Naomi looked at him. “Could you wait for me in the living room? I’ll talk to her in private and then we should be good.”

He nodded and left them to talk. However, the two rooms were right next to each other, and while the two of them tried their best to whisper, he could still hear their conversation.

Naomi gave her a very quick recap of who he was and why he was there, and every sentence or two Hayley would interrupt to ask if she was sure, if she was alright, or if she had been enchanted to believe he was safe.

“Goddamit Hayley,” Naomi whispered harshly, exasperated. “I even fucked him and I’m still in one piece. He’s safe.”

“You did what?” Hayley screeched, way louder than a whisper.

Naomi shushed her but it was useless, he could still hear them. His lips tugged into a smile, amused and a bit proud.

Eventually, the two of them emerged from the kitchen, Hayley looking defeated.

“She promised not to tell anyone about you,” Naomi told him. “And she promised to be civil.”

Unsure of what to do, he simply nodded. While Hayley sat down on the couch farthest from him, Naomi settled herself right next to Kilean.

“You didn’t come on your usual days,” she said, a hint of vulnerability in her voice. “I thought I wouldn’t see you this year.”

“We had a last-minute mission,” he explained. “I wasn’t expecting to find you still here. I thought I would just leave you a note. And this.”

He held out his hand, calling the object with his magic. Naomi gasped quietly when it appeared, a smile stretching her lips. It was a wooden Christmas decoration for her tree, carved in the shape of a snowman. The sides weren’t completely symmetrical and the face was a bit crooked, but human books said that in gifts, it was the thought that counted most. He just hoped Naomi felt that way, too. He would hate to disappoint her.

“For me?” she asked.

“Yes.”

Naomi took the decoration, holding it gently as if worried it would break. Her smile grew as she admired it.

“I made it myself. I didn’t use magic,” he proudly said. “I found out humans really value handmade things.”

When she had let him decorate her tree—telling her the stories of each ornament—he had been so fascinated by the human tradition of putting objects and lights on trees. He had seen Christmas decorations before, but he had never interested himself in them. After seeing how precious it was to Naomi, however, he couldn't help being curious about it.

His stay in Hell had been followed by intensive research—stealing human texts wherever he could—about the human tradition of decorating for the holidays, until he went down a rabbit hole of information, learning about all kinds of holidays and traditions. Eventually, he found himself fascinated by how humans made some of the decorations themselves, and after researching more about that too, he had found himself with his talons chipping at blocks of wood.

“This is beautiful, thank you so much.”

Naomi placed a hand on his shoulder to pull him down, leaving a quick kiss on his cheek, and all the remaining worry evaporated from the weight pulling at his heart.

Hayley cleared her throat, mumbling, “I’m still here guys.”

Naomi ignored her and rushed to the tree, taking off a decoration in the middle to replace it with his snowman. She stepped back, admiring it, then turned to her friend with a smile so wide he thought her face would break. Seeing Naomi so excited filled him with warmth.

“Isn’t it adorable?”

Hayley sighed in defeat. “It is cute.”

Naomi slumped back on the couch, still admiring the tree. He hated to ruin a good moment, but now that he was there, he had to tell her the other reason why he came.

“I also came to tell you something,” he admitted.

When she turned back to him, her smile disappeared, replaced by a serious expression.

“Tell me what?”

He hesitated, suddenly worried she might reject him. What if she was actually content with only seeing him so sporadically? What if she didn't want him to be in her everyday life?

“I might have found a way to change rank,” he admitted quietly. “If I can change my role in Hell, I would have more power and freedom to choose things for myself. I could have more time for you, and actually plan when I will come to this world.”

The minute he finished talking, Naomi beamed with excitement and all his doubts disappeared.

“That's possible?”

“It seems like it, but it's going to be a hard and long process.”

Her smile wobbled a little. “How long?”

“I don't know a specific timeline, because not many have succeeded in doing this, but it will take years.”

Kilean hated seeing that sad look on her face, even more when he was the reason for it. But he truly hoped that with this, the sadness would only be temporary. If he could succeed, he would be able to truly focus on her and do everything in his power to make her the happiest woman.

“Would we not be able to see each other while you try for this?”

“I should be able to still come by, but it still might not be every year.”

“So he’s the reason you keep coming back here in December?” Hayley asked, interrupting the moment.

“We made a pact,” Naomi told her. “He comes when he’s able, and I’m always here to wait for him.”

Hayley glared at him. “You’re making her wait for you?”

Her eyes and tone were fierce, doing exactly what she was trying to achieve: making him feel ashamed.

“Hayley,” Naomi warned. “I’m the one that wanted to do this. Don’t take it out on him.”

Hayley raised her hand in surrender. “My bad, continue talking.”

Kilean sensed sarcasm in her tone, but Naomi seemed to purposely ignore it.

“It will be difficult, and dangerous, and it will take a long time. But if you also want it, I’d do it,” he said. “I hate to ask you to wait for me, to waste your time for this. I can’t promise that I’ll succeed, either, but if I do, I will make sure you’ll never have to wait again.”

Naomi reached out, taking his face in her hands.

“I want you to do it, but for yourself. You should do it because you deserve the freedom to choose your own life. Especially after all the years you spent doing what

they wanted, don't you want to do things at your own pace?"

"I do."

He was old, and tired. Being able to control his own life—outside of his routines, too—was a desire that grew every day.

"It's a risk for yourself, too," Naomi continued. "But if you feel ready to take on the task, I'll wait for you. I'll be here to support you in the little ways I can."

Her mere presence did so much more than she could ever imagine. Even just the thought of her was so powerful to keep him going.

His initial worry was gone now, and while a part of him wasn't ecstatic about changing everything he knew, it helped his resolve knowing that he was doing it for her and that Naomi supported him. She believed in him and would be waiting for him, so he couldn't fail, no matter what.

"You two are really close, aren't you?" Hayley asked, curious eyes traveling back and forth between them.

"We are," Naomi confirmed, squeezing his cheeks a little.

His chest filled with warmth as he took one of her hands, intertwining their fingers together.

"How long can you stay this time?" Naomi asked.

“Only until tonight, I think.”

Sadness flashed behind her eyes, but she was quick to hide it with a smile.

“Let’s make the best of it, then.”

Naomi spent the rest of the day trying to get Hayley to warm up to Kilean. She even forced them to cook together, as to show her friend that he wasn’t a threat. Hayley kept asking questions about the way they met and their unconventional relationship, then eventually relaxed enough to joke around with them.

When he wondered why Naomi was still at the chalet, and why she had company, Naomi explained she had chosen to spend the entire December there, since her job was flexible enough that she could work from home during the holidays.

“The first week or two is for waiting for you,” Naomi said. “And then closer to Christmas, my friends and family join me here and stay until New Year. This place is the perfect Christmas setting, after all. It would be a waste not to take advantage of it.”

Hayley had arrived a few days earlier than the rest of her loved ones, and he quietly thanked the universe for it. If he had accidentally walked into the house to Naomi’s full family, it would have been much harder to explain himself.

When night came, Kilean and Naomi had some private time. She told him about her new artistic hobby, and made him pose as she tried to sketch him. He watched her as she worked, trying to calm his wild heart doing backflips in his chest. The idea that

she wanted to have something to remember him, that she cared about him that much, created such intense emotions in him. It was all new and a bit confusing for him, yet beautiful. He, too, cared immensely about her, but he wasn't able to put those feelings into words for himself, let alone for her. He sincerely hoped he was at least able to show his affection through actions.

They ended up cuddling in her bed: Kilean sitting with his back to the headboard, and Naomi in his lap. He held her hands in his, playing with her fingers as he talked about the process of ascending to a better rank. He kept asking her whether she really was okay with waiting and risk wasting her time for him—and each time, she reminded him that she believed in him, and that waiting for his success wasn't wasted time at all.

He hid his head in the crook of neck, inhaling her sweet scent.

“Thank you for finding me that day,” he whispered. “Even if I wouldn't have died without your medical help, I don't know how my life would've turned out if I had never met you.”

Naomi wrapped her arms around him, squeezing his big body.

“Thank you for caring for me,” she answered back.

His hands roamed over her curves, caressing her round backside and thick thighs. He squeezed a little, earning an amused chuckle from her.

“Like what you feel?”

“I really do.”

Naomi leaned back just enough to look him in the face, her dark brown eyes gazing at

him so intensely that he had to look away.

“Can we try something?” she asked, biting her full bottom lip.

He simply nodded and watched as she rolled out of bed, quickly removing her clothes and throwing them somewhere around the room. When she came back to him, she straddled only one of his thick legs.

Kilean stared, her beauty taking his breath away. Long, bronze braids cascaded over her shoulders, framing her full breasts. All her curves and rolls were exposed, with beautiful stretch marks painting her light brown skin. He still had no idea how a woman could be that gorgeous.

Naomi cleared her throat, catching his attention. She gestured down with her head. He followed her gaze, only to notice his cock out of its hiding place and already erect. His cheeks heated, not realizing his body was acting on its own.

“I’m gonna move, okay?” she asked, pulling all her braids to one side as she prepared herself.

His voice was already breathy when he answered, “Okay.”

All the air disappeared from his lungs once her pussy made contact with his thick thigh, her heat and wetness spreading on his fur. One of her hands caressed the curve of his round belly, while she placed the other on his chest, her fingers digging into his fur.

She sent him a knowing grin, then started her movements. Slowly, she rocked back and forth on his thigh, rubbing her soaking pussy on him. Her hands wrapped into fists in his fur, lightly tugging when she’d hit that spot on her clit, making her breath hitch every time.

His cock twisted painfully between his legs. He didn't want to ask her to insert himself into her hot cunt, assuming that Naomi would have told him if she wanted that. Instead, she was rubbing herself on him and he wanted to be respectful of her decision. If, after, she wanted to do more, he'd be more than happy to oblige.

"You can touch yourself," she told him.

He obediently wrapped a hand around his cock, rubbing it slowly as he watched her.

"Yes, touch yourself to me," she moaned, smiling. "Fuuuck."

With a mind of its own, his tail wrapped itself around her leg, possessive. Naomi moaned quietly, eyes half-closed, lost in the pleasure she was giving herself. Unable to keep his hands to himself, Kilean wrapped his free hand on her backside, feeling her softness and helping her move. His eyes fixated on her heavy breasts, swaying every time she moved.

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They rocked together, Naomi on his thigh and his hand on his cock. When she picked up her pace—face contorting into pleasure, with her beautiful mouth wide open in silent moans—he began moving his hand faster, too, almost aggressively trying to satisfy himself.

He groaned loudly when he came, droplets of seed painting her thigh and hip. As if him coming was the sign for her to reach her own high, Naomi grinned and leaned forward, hiding her face in the fur of his chest, moaning against him while her hips rocked quickly on his leg. She let out a muffled cry, shaking as she pressed her cunt on him.

He held her through her orgasm, caressing her back.

“You’re so beautiful,” he whispered, voice full of awe.

She pulled back, looking at him with a blissfully exhausted gaze. Her hand cupped his face, thumb brushing over his cheek.

“You’re beautiful, too,” she whispered, still a bit breathless. “Beautiful and so, so sweet.”

Never in his life had he been described as sweet, but it didn’t feel like a bad adjective. Coming from Naomi, it felt like the best compliment. His cheeks warmed, silently thanking his complexion and fur for making it impossible to tell when he blushed.

He took her hand in his, and placed a kiss on her palm.

“Let me hold you while you rest,” he whispered.

They laid down properly, and his heart filled with an immense sense of accomplishment when Naomi put her head on his chest. Kilean wrapped her in his arms, fingers tracing lightly over her silky skin. They exchanged some words here and there, but for the most part they cuddled in silence, content with the closeness and affection.

He did his best to postpone his departure as much as possible, but eventually had to let go of the beautiful woman that had given herself to him. He kissed her forehead, trying to ignore the sad look in her eyes when he said goodbye, but when he walked out of the door, it wasn't only sadness he felt.

He had a promise to fulfill now, and he was not going to let her down.

Epilogue: Wrapped for Krampus

KRAMPUS

seven years later

On the same night almost every year, the krampus sought out that small house deep into the white mountains. Every time, he saw the dim lights shining through the windows, and the smoke coming out of the chimney—and the closer he got, the more hungry he became.

The front door was unlocked, like it always was, and the smell of sugar hit him as soon as he entered.

A big Christmas tree stood in the corner of the room, neatly decorated in shades of white and silver and gold, and illuminated with yellowish lights. The previous year,

the human had only used red to decorate it.

The same two couches were still in the middle of the room: one looking straight at the fire, and one on the left side facing the tree. In the middle of the formation was a carpet of furs, and then, the best part of the house: her.

The human laid on her side with her back to the fireplace. A wide red ribbon caressed her light brown skin, wrapping around her body and tying her limbs together.

His pretty present, waiting for him.

“I’ve been a bad girl this year, too,” she said as he closed the door behind himself. “Oh big bad krampus, what will you do with me?”

His low growl only made her smile grow bigger, the excitement shining in her eyes. He stalked up to her, hunching his figure as if attempting to swallow her smaller body. She wasn’t really small per se—at five foot eleven, she was tall for a human woman, and she wasn’t thin, either.—but she always looked tiny compared to his seven foot eight.

Over the past couple years, the fur around his face and chest had also started turning gray, making him look even older, but he wasn’t that bothered by it. His older look, big body, and monstrous features usually scared humans more.

Well... humans were scared of him regardless. All of them but her.

She battled her eyelashes at him. “You’ll have to punish me, won’t you?”

Another growl rumbled in his chest as he lowered his head close to hers, her honey brown coils tickling his face. He inhaled her natural body scent, mixed with coconut and sugar. He already knew she had baked before this, but smelling the scent on her

skin was his favorite part.

He could smell her arousal, too, and his body immediately answered to it, his cock straining inside its pocket.

He pulled back to look at her, the ribbon lightly digging against her soft curves. It covered her breasts, pushing them against her chest. It tied her arms and hands in the front, then wrapped around her waist and wide hips with her round ass exposed, just to then immediately tie her legs together. He leaned to the side and got a full view of her exposed pussy, shaved and ready for him.

His hand wrapped around her backside, squeezing it and watching as her pussy inevitably clenched in reply.

“Bad,” he growled.

“Yes, I’m bad,” she replied.

With taloned hands he ripped the ribbons off her body, earning a gasp from her. Her breasts spilled free, and he pushed her down on her back, pulling one leg to his other side so that she was fully open in front of him.

The full scent of her arousal hit him and he felt his brain shutting off, the beast side of him fighting to take control. His abnormally long tongue had a life of its own, pushing against his sharp teeth, impatient to be let out and taste her. He loomed over her, covering her body with his but not touching her yet, and looked at her one last time. Her dark brown eyes were expectant and excited, no sight of hesitance or fear in them. Never fear.

Finally, he opened his mouth, letting his tongue free. First he licked her neck, the point of his tongue sliding up to cradle her round cheek. He slowly moved down her body and his tongue followed him, licking her chest and wrapping around her right breast like a tentacle. He squeezed her tit with it, its point tickling her nipple.

Faint, light moans left her full lips, her eyelids closing slightly as if trying to focus only on the sensations.

While his tongue moved to her left breast, he covered the right one with his hand, loving the feeling and weight of it in his palm, squeezing. Unable to resist, he lowered himself to her left tit and took her brown nipple in between his sharp teeth, biting down gently on it. The contact made her back arch, a long, quiet moan

escaping her lips.

Reluctantly, he let her tits go and began moving downwards. His tongue passed over her chubby stomach, over her smooth skin until it reached her wet center. Her legs opened more on instinct, ready for him. She tasted sharp, sweet, delicious. The human let out a screech as he wrapped his whole mouth around her cunt, his tongue burrowing inside her. He pushed in, twisting and reaching depths not physically possible by any human tongue or cock.

“Yes, there, please,” she moaned.

Her pussy creamed around his tongue as her arousal grew, and he greedily ate her up, like a starved beast. Her walls clenched and her sounds became breathy, but when he felt her coming closer to her release, he pulled his mouth and tongue away.

Whines left her lips, but not even her batting eyelashes would make him stray his course. She needed to be punished, so that was what he'd do.

A slit in his furred crotch opened, revealing his hard cock, ready to take her. Grunting, his patience fighting against his beastly side, he moved up her body, kneeling over her head. His heavy cock slapped her face and she opened her mouth on instinct, tongue reaching out to taste him. Grabbing her jaw, he guided his cock in her mouth until he hit the back of her throat. Her tongue twisted around his thick length, throat clenching around his tip as she gagged.

He wrapped his big hands around her cheeks and kept her in place as he buckled his hips into her. She was so warm and wet, and couldn't fully fit him, but she was eager to take as much of him as she could, occasionally pushing her own face further forward as if testing her limits.

She gagged and moaned around him, the vibration pleasing him as much as the

tightness of her mouth. He bucked his hips faster, watching as the human's eyes rolled back, and when he felt his balls tighten, he pulled out—her spit leaving a trail behind—and took a step back to come on her breasts, painting her skin.

She smiled up at him, her lips a mess of spit and pre-come. She didn't taunt him with words, but those eyes he knew so well now silently asked him for more.

He settled himself between her thick thighs once again. He put his cock against her pussy, tip brushing against her folds, and pushed his hips forward in an upward movement. Instead of slipping in, his cock brushed between her fat lips until it flicked her clit, and she gasped in surprise. He repositioned himself and repeated the motion, again and again. Every time his tip bumped against her clit, her body would tremble and her breath would catch, followed by a little whine.

“You've been bad,” he growled. “You don't get to come.”

He pulled back again, put his cock between her lips and pushed upwards until it flicked her clit once more. She whined louder now, clearly frustrated.

His hands reached forwards, spreading his come over her breasts like a cream, using his taloned fingers to pinch her nipples as he pushed forward again and their most sensitive parts came in contact once more. She shook, her whine turning into a half scream, and her legs curled on instinct, but he still didn't give her what she wanted.

She squeezed his hands as if telling him to continue, but he pulled his hands away instead. He kept teasing her clit with his cock, until she became a whiny mess, her body trembling with frustration and need each time they touched.

“Please, please,” she whined repeatedly, too far gone in her arousal to even know what she was begging for.

He wanted to tease her more, to make her cry with need, but it had been too long for him, too, and he needed to feel her—fully feel her.

She let him move her around like a toy, picking her up and turning her around, sitting her on her knees with her back to him. He picked up an intact piece of ribbon from the floor and tied her arms behind her back.

The woman whined softly when he grabbed her by the thighs and picked her up, positioning her over his cock. Her back and arms brushed against the fur of his soft chest and round stomach, her warmth seeping into him. But it wasn't enough—he needed to be closer to her, he needed more.

In one swift motion, his dick slipped between her folds and into her warm cunt, so wet and ready for him that it opened around his cock without problems. He jumped her up and down his length, like a doll, as if she weighed nothing. Her voluminous coils obscured the view of her face, but he knew she had her eyes closed, mouth open in blissed shock. She cried out every time he hit the deepest part of her, and gasped when he pulled her up.

“Bad,” he growled again, his beast not letting him say anything more elaborate.

He wanted to tease her, to punish her, but her warm walls around him, desperately squeezing his cock, had him chasing his release again, not minding whether she finished too or not.

The room was filled with her moans and high-pitched whines, and the lewd sound of him fucking her. She screamed loudly and shook in his arms, her walls clenching around him as she came.

Feeling himself getting closer, too, he put her down on the floor again—face down, ass up—, his cock still inside her, slipping a hand under her head so she wouldn't rub

her face against the carpet. He leaned over her, caging her with his body, and began thrusting into her pussy like an animal, quick and harsh. Mixes of their juices and creams dripped out of her cunt, her walls continuously clenching as if her climax still hadn't subsided.

“Fuck, fuck, yes,” she chanted.

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He grunted in her ear, the force of his hips gradually pulling her down until she was fully laying on her stomach. Her hands grabbed a fistful of his fur, pulling at it with every movement.

He roared loudly and emptied his seed inside her. When he pushed his knot into her, the human cried out and squirted around his cock, wetting his fur and the carpet.

He stood over her, breathing heavily against her ear, trying to calm down despite the feeling of her pussy still clenching around him. Very slowly, his mind cleared and his knot gradually decreased. When he finally slipped out, all of his come—mixed with her cream and juices—gushed out of her pussy.

He leaned back and watched her carefully. She was still catching her breath and her eyes were closed, but there was a small, pleased smile on her lips. He noticed scratches on her thighs, not deep enough to draw blood but still noticeable. He hadn't realized he was gripping her so tightly, and his mouth tasted sour from the realization.

Grunting, he stood up and headed to the bathroom. He took a towel and dipped it into hot water, then walked back into the living room. Quickly discarding the ribbon, he freed her and laid her on her back. She watched him with half-lidded eyes as he carefully cleaned her chest, then between her legs, without saying a word.

He wrapped his arms around her, picking her up bridal style, and he momentarily moved her to the couch. He took the dirty carpet and dropped it into the bathroom with the used towel, making a mental note to clean that later. In the living room, he grabbed some new furs and set them on the floor, then picked up the human again and placed her back on the floor in front of the fire.

The human... his human.

Naomi.

Satisfied by the release and feeling more relaxed, the white noise clouding his mind began fading.

He laid next to her, and she scooted closer to him, putting her head on his soft chest as he pulled another fur over her naked body.

“I missed you, Kilean,” she whispered.

The mention of the name had him stiffening for a moment, clarity slowly spreading in his mind. She was the one that chose it for him, and she was the only one that ever used it. He had almost forgotten he had one now—until he met her again and she reminded him how to feel like a real person again.

Nowadays, it was harder to remember who he was whenever he was in Hell—what he was, other than a mindless demon. Maybe it was his age catching up to him, maybe it was the stress of the endless work and trials he was still undertaking, or maybe he was getting too used to her presence—even though it was so scarce—that whenever he went back to being a nameless krampus, the humane part of his brain would shut off as a coping mechanism.

Naomi was his anchor. She pulled him back into his own mind whenever they met again, giving his beast side a break.

“Was I too rough?” Kilean asked, almost embarrassed.

He brushed a hand against her leg, feeling the presence of the scratches even though they were covered by the blanket. Despite the fact that they had previously planned

that roleplay encounter—like many others in the past—he always worried that he might have gotten carried away.

“I tell you every time, you can be rougher with me,” Naomi answered. She dipped her fingers in his grizzled fur, the corner of her lips tugging upwards. “I still liked it, though. Very much.”

He leaned down to brush his face against her hair, taking in her scent, forcing his brain to catalog everything about her so he could hold onto those memories whenever he felt lonely. He was lucky he got to have her like this at all, but he couldn’t help being greedy, when a woman this beautiful and kind showed him how good life could be.

After all these years, his ascension process still wasn’t over. As the Nightmare had told him back then, the higher-ups didn’t like the idea of a low demon like him getting more power and freedom. But he had something to fight for, so he hadn’t given up despite the hardship. He would get to the end of this, one way or another. Even if he had to forget who he was from time to time.

“I have something for you,” he said.

With a gesture of his hand, he materialized the Christmas decoration and handed it to her. This year, he made a wooden replica of the chalet. With all the practice from making her decorations over the years, he challenged himself with a more complicated project. It was a little crooked, but looked good enough to show the clear similarity to the real chalet.

“Oh my God, this is our house!”

Our house.

Almost choking on his words he said, “Yes, it is.”

“They keep getting better and better,” Naomi said, smiling brightly at the decoration. She put it on the couch. “I’m too comfortable here, so I’ll put it there for now. That way I don’t accidentally roll onto it and break it.”

She kissed his cheek as a thank you, then wrapped her arms around him, cuddling against him once more.

“How have you been?” he asked, curious.

“I’ve been okay. I got a promotion at work, and that was fine at first, but I tried too hard and got burnt out quickly,” she explained, sighing. “It was a rough few months but I think I know how to balance it now.”

She played with the fur of his chest. “Actually, I’m thinking of quitting soon.”

“You are?”

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“At the start of the year I decided to use my drawing skills for something more,” she started. “I shared my art online, and started making mini-comics. Apparently people like it, and I’m making some money from it already.”

Pride filled his chest. “There is nothing you can’t do.”

“I started making a monster romance graphic novel. It’s been really fun, and my followers are excited about it. If I can get that going, I might be able to support myself solely with my art and writing.”

He took her hand and squeezed it. “You should do what makes you happy. Your art is stunning, and everyone deserves to see it and appreciate it.”

“You’re a sap,” Naomi whispered, chuckling softly.

Kilean hesitated a moment before he asked, “And what about your private life?”

“I tried a few dates, but no one is sticking out. There was one woman I thought would be the one, but our personalities were too different.”

Naomi was everything he had. He didn’t want her, however, to live like him and only have one thing to look forward to. Her life was different from his, finite and full of promise, so he wanted her to live it to the fullest.

Because of that, they had made an agreement a few years ago that Naomi would look for affection elsewhere, too. Naomi knew she couldn’t tell people about him, but she always made sure to approach potential partners with the idea of open relationships or

polyamory, telling them she had someone else that she wouldn't give up on. From what she had told him, Naomi had met many people who were okay with the arrangement. While she had adventures with some of them, she had never managed to form a connection with anyone—one deep enough to want them to stay permanently, at least.

If Naomi ever fell in love with someone, Kilean would find a way to be okay with letting her go. And if she wanted to keep them both, he'd be happy with that.

She sighed quietly. "I don't think I'll ever find anyone to fill your spot, to be honest."

"Naomi..."

He called her name in a whisper, as if worried that saying it out loud would make her disappear.

"I know, I know. You can't stay, I know."

Her voice was sad, but not irritated. He would have preferred that she was mad, to yell at him that he wasn't doing enough, or to stop bothering her and giving her false hopes. All of that would have hurt less than her simply accepting this life, of waiting for this night every year and never asking him how the trial was going, too worried that talking about it would sadden him.

He cherished these rare and blessed moments with her, but part of him still wished more for her. She deserved more than him and what he could offer.

"I can feel it getting closer," he confessed, quietly. "But I think I still have a few years in front of me."

He truly, truly, hoped the end was near. The process was draining him, and the

uncertainty was hurting both of them.

“It’s okay,” she repeated in a whisper. “Waiting is hard, but I’m glad I can have you at least once a year.”

She smiled, then, her eyes unfocusing as if looking for something inside her memories. “Our routine is pretty nice, actually. Coming here every year, meeting you, spending some time in the snow, then having my friends and family join me right around Christmas. This place is so pretty, and it holds such beautiful memories for me now.”

It pleased him to know she had made great memories there, that she was living well even when he wasn’t present, and that she was coming back to the chalet because she loved it, and not just to wait for him.

He had been doing his duty for so long that he couldn’t even remember a time when he was young. For so long, his life had no meaning until he met her. Now, he could work himself to the bone every day, knowing that after all that work, his reward would be spending time with her. He could undergo years of hardships to improve himself, knowing she would welcome him with open arms when he finally achieved his goal.

She had saved his life that first day, when she found him bloodied and unconscious in the woods. If only she knew all the ways in which she really rescued him.

“Your affection is the only thing keeping me going,” he admitted. “You should know, if I never cross that threshold again, it’ll never be my choice. If you don’t see me again, it’s because it was something bigger than me. If you don’t see me again, I would likely be dead.”

Sadness immediately flooded her eyes. “Do you have to be so catastrophic?”

“I’m sorry,” he whispered, brushing his knuckles against her cheek. “I just need you to know where I stand.”

“I hope nothing ever happens to you.”

“I hope that, too. I want to keep coming back and see you gradually become gray like me.”

If he didn’t do anything stupid, he would likely live for much, much longer than her lifespan. If he could permanently stay by her side until the end of her days, he’d be happy.

She opened her mouth in a big yawn, her hand slow to cover it. “Sorry,” she mumbled.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:22 am

“You’re tired, you should sleep.”

Naomi shook her head against him. “No, we don’t have much time to begin with, I can’t be sleeping while you’re here.”

“You can, and you will. Just a few hours, then I’ll wake you up, and we can spend some more time together before I go.”

Her pout warmed his chest, another feeling he only ever experienced when he was in her presence. In any other moment, his life was filled with only cold. But here, with her, there was only ever warmth.

“Sleep,” he commanded, gently.

Letting out a resigned sigh, she made herself more comfortable against him, her arm wrapping around his big body. He hugged her back, his tail wrapping possessively around her leg, and put his chin on her head.

“Make sure you wake me up, okay?” she asked, voice gradually getting quieter. “Don’t disappear.”

His lips brushed against her forehead, smiling sadly. “I promise.”