



Susie's Orc

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Category: Romance, Paranormal

Description: I've got a crush on the orc from accounting.

Jonah Greenwood. He's big, nerdy, and exactly my damn type. Well, he would be, if I'd only been able to work up the courage to ask him out at any point in the two years since I first met him.

It seems like a lost cause, but when he catches me checking him out in a Friday afternoon meeting, finds me after work in the parking lot, and accepts my absolutely reckless proposition for a no-strings hookup, all bets are off.

Susie's Orc is a short, spicy, slice-of-life monster romance novella with a guaranteed HEA. For full content details, please visit the author's website.

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Chapter 1

Susie

Who schedules a meeting at 3pm on a Friday?

Seriously, if they think any of us in this room are actually listening to the presentation on the new accounts payable process, they're living in a daydream.

All around the conference room, my coworkers are zoned out into various stages of boredom and distraction. I can almost see the little thought bubbles over everyone's heads—imagining their happy hour plans, or dreading sitting in Friday afternoon traffic, or mentally queuing up their Netflix selection for the evening.

Any other day, I'd be in the same boat. And truthfully, I'm probably not any less distracted than anyone else here, but today I'm distracted for a very, very different reason.

I'm sitting next to Jonah from Accounting.

And yes, that's how I've always mentally referred to him. I do know his last name. It's Greenwood, but somewhere along the way he became 'Jonah from Accounting' in my—way too frequent—thoughts about him, and it just stuck.

Or maybe Greenwood's his clan name. I'm not one hundred percent certain how naming conventions work for orcs.

If someone had told me five years ago that I'd be attending an accounts payable meeting, listening to a half-faun talk about claims filing, sitting at a table between an orc and a vampire, I would have asked them what kind of drugs they'd taken.

But here I am, working in the Community Outreach department of the Paranormal Citizens Relations Bureau—theMonsterRelations Bureau, as most people call it.

Despite the worldwide shock that came with the passage of the Paranormal Acts five years ago, followed by the merging of the paranormal and mundane worlds, now it seems like just a fact of life. I started at the Bureau two years ago, and being a human working alongside paranormal coworkers is nothing to bat an eye at.

Well, I might still want to bat an eye at Jonah from Accounting.

Six and a half feet tall, broad as a freaking mack truck, and with skin a lovely shade of cool green, he's kind of hard to miss. Not that I've really gotten to know him beyond a few polite conversations in the breakroom and the handful of times my expense reports have landed on his desk and he's had to reach out with questions.

I've never had enough courage to get to know him better, even though I've had a big, dumb crush on him for the last two years.

That's right. A huge, stupid, pathetic crush I'm absolutely not brave enough to act on.

Until today, that is, but even that hardly counts. When I got to the meeting room he was already here, and there just so happened to be an open seat next to him. I slid into it right before Carol got started with her presentation, so I didn't even get the chance to strike up a conversation.

Jonah, for his part, looks like he's completely engaged in the presentation because... well, because of course he would be. He seems like that kind of guy. Earnest, kind, a

little dorky with his slightly too-big khaki pants and his navy blue polo.

He's exactly my damn type. I like them big, and I like them nerdy, and even though nothing in our interactions up to this point has made me think he's crushing on me, too, it's still distracting as hell to be this close to him.

Focus. I need to focus.

Somewhere near the back of the room, someone clears their throat. A clock ticks on the wall, and a few afternoon clouds drift by outside the window. In the row in front of me, a minotaur checks her watch, no doubt just eager to get out of here as the rest of us.

I glance down at the empty notebook page in front of me and try to listen to what Carol's saying. It's probably important. I'm hopeless when it comes to filing all my expenses correctly, so I could benefit from whatever she's saying.

Instead, my eyes wander from the blank page to where Jonah has his hands resting on the table in front of him.

How have I never noticed his hands before?

And now that I have...

I can't stop staring at his fingers. They're enormous. His entire hands are, really. The same pretty green as the rest of him, they're the biggest damn hands I've ever seen. They're huge and calloused and rugged, and an intrusive thought flashes into my dirty, depraved mind.

I can't help but wonder what those fingers would feel like inside of me.

There's a sharp throb between my legs, my inner muscles clenching on nothing like they're already imagining what it would be like to be impaled on two, maybe three, of those thick digits. Good lord, they're huge. Even one would give me the friction I need to...

What the hell is wrong with me?

Am I having a stroke? Did someone lace the water cooler with hallucinogenics? Are they pumping some kind of aphrodisiac in through the HVAC?

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I swear on my employee-handbook I'm not usually this much of a freak, ogling my poor, innocent coworkers, and there's no earthly reason I should be fixated on Jonah from Accounting's hands.

I'm just sitting here, supposedly listening to Carol from Accounting talk about the new accounts receivable process—or was it accounts payable? I honestly can't remember—while also privately fantasizing about an orc in ill-fitted khakis who's just minding his own damn business.

And I'm so busy gawking at his fingers that I take a horrible, life-ruining amount of time to realize I'm not being as sneaky as I think I am.

Oh, my god.

I look up from Jonah's hands to find him staring at me. He has one eyebrow cocked as he looks from me to his fingers and back again, mouth in a slight frown around his tusks, like he's trying to figure out what's got me so focused on him. I can't help but follow his gaze down to where his hands rest on the table.

And then those damned fingers flex and I have to bite my lip to keep from moaning.

To make matters worse, I glance back up at him, and all the confusion on his face is gone. In its place is pure, amused knowing, and my entire body breaks out in a flash of heat.

Making myself turn away from him, I stare unseeing toward the front of the room, and a silent stream of pleading begins in my brain.

A fire alarm. A sinkhole. A portal to hell. An earthquake to bring the whole building down around me. Anything, anything to get out of this meeting would be a blessing.

For the last ten minutes of the training, I look straight ahead, pretend I'm paying attention to Carol, and wish to any gods who might be listening that this will all turn out to be a dream and I'll wake up any moment now.

And still, those hands are there. Stretched out in front of him, clasped together with his big fingers intertwined, taunting me.

I flee the meeting room the moment the presentation is finished, and make a beeline for the nearest bathroom. It's blessedly a single room with a locked door rather than a long line of stalls, and I pace back and forth across it, trying to get a handle on myself. After turning on the sink and splashing some cool water on my face, I stare at myself in the mirror.

The same persistent, blaring thought rings through my brain.

What is wrong with me?

I've never been this mindlessly, viscerally attracted to someone, let alone to someone's freaking hands, but that's no excuse for what a creep I just was to Jonah. Another thought occurs to me as I stare at my flushed skin and bright, shame-filled eyes.

How long has it been since I got laid?

That the answer isn't immediately obvious tells me everything I need to know. It's been way, way too long. Not that it's an excuse to objectify Jonah and his sexy hands, but maybe the two-year-long dry spell I'm in has something to do with my temporary insanity.

My mind flashes back to the meeting room, to Jonah, and before I can think better of it, I let myself sink into the memory.

It wasn't just his hands. The knowing look in his hazel eyes behind the wire frames of his glasses, the way one of his eyebrows quirked up so high it almost touched the black, slightly shaggy hair over his forehead, the smirk set on his surprisingly full lips.

Fuck... just, fuck me and my stupid crush and whatever streak of insanity made me decide today was the day I was going to get bold and sit next to him.

Turning off the water, I dry my hands and face with a paper towel and slowly open the bathroom door. After making sure the coast is clear, I book it back to my desk in the Community Outreach department, which is on the other side of this floor from Accounting.

I don't see Jonah again, and thank god for that. Maybe I'm going to make it through the rest of this day unscathed.

I'll get out of here at five on the dot, retreat to the small apartment where I've lived by myself for the last couple years, and spend the weekend hibernating. I'll pretend that none of this ever happened, and maybe by Monday, Jonah will have forgotten, too.

Chapter 2

Jonah

There's a spreadsheet open on my computer, but I can't see any of the numbers. It's all gibberish, a nonsensical mess to my scattered, racing mind.

The ambient sounds of a Friday afternoon at the office filter in, but I can barely hear

it. At least not over the low pounding of my heartbeat in my ears.

Every one of my senses feel dulled and sharper at the same time, closed off from the world around me and still entirely focused on what happened in Conference Room B a few minutes ago.

Did that just happen?

Did I really just sit next to Susie Grove in a meeting and...

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I take a deep inhale and almost imagine I can still scent it, still taste it, the impossibly delicious scent of her...

No.

That can't be it.

There's no way Susie was sitting next to me in that boring accounts payable meeting, staring at my hands, perfuming the air between us with her arousal.

No. Not possible.

Eyes still on my computer, I make myself focus on the last page of the report my boss is expecting by the end of the day. We're wrapping up quarterly financials, and I can't leave until I turn my portion of the reporting in.

It should be easy enough. I've run this same report every quarter since I started working at the Bureau, and by this point, I could probably do it in my sleep.

But unlike all those other quarters, I don't have the memory of Susie Grove's face seared into the backs of my eyelids to haunt me while I stare at all those numbers.

Wide-eyed, flushed, so adorably guilty as she quickly averted her gaze. And the way she shifted in her seat when I adjusted my hands in front of me, flexed my fingers, like she was trying to soothe an ache between her thighs, trying to give herself a little pressure so she could—

I bite back a silent curse and give my head a hard shake, but it's no use. I can't stop playing the images over and over in my mind. Each time I do, I'm more and more certain that I'm not wrong.

Gods above, I hope I'm not wrong.

Because all those memories are stirring something in me. Something deep and hungry and possessive, something that calls on all my most primal, deep-seated instincts and commands me to go to her, find her, draw more of those flushes and more of that sweet scent from her, pull her to me and—

“Greenwood.”

Visibly startling in my chair, I turn to find my boss, a cranky old griffin named Kingston, peering over the top of my cubicle wall.

“Yeah?”

“You got those end of quarter reports finished up?”

“Yeah.” I clear my throat. “Yeah, I’ve just about got them wrapped up.”

He gives me a curt nod. “Good. The executive team needs them bright and early Monday morning, so make sure you send them before you leave today.”

Turning my eyes back to my screen, it takes a few more deep breaths for the numbers to settle themselves back into something resembling order.

It also takes every one of those breaths for me to get a damn handle on myself.

I shift a subtle hand down to my lap, praying Kingston doesn't come back before I

have the chance to tuck my aching, embarrassingly hard cock out of the way.

Gods, what am I, fifteen and sitting next to a pretty girl for the first time?

Because that's sure as hell what it feels like. Given everything that happened in the last half-hour, I'd barely believe I'm the thirty-year-old, rational, mature, sensible being I like to think I am.

Nope, one hint that Susie Grove might be attracted to me and all that better sense goes right out the window.

But there's nothing I can do about it right now.

At least, not unless I want to go find her at her desk and make things even more awkward than they were when she fled the meeting room like the building was on fire, so I turn my attention back to my computer. With the clock ticking down to five and the work day coming to a close, I scramble to finish the reports Kingston needs.

Cantankerous bosses and irrational office crushes aside, I love working at the Paranormal Citizens Relations Bureau.

After all the changes the Paranormal Acts made in the world, society has been shifting at its most fundamental level. Paranormal folk have had the freedom to step into the light and be who we are, and being here, helping those changes along, is soenergizing. It's inspiring to be a part of the organization helping to create this new future we live in.

And it's been even better since Susie started working here.

I've been so fucking gone for this girl from the first moment I saw her.

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Nevermind that she's so far out of my league it's laughable to even consider asking her out, and nevermind that I'm only beginning to develop some actual confidence after all the work I've been doing on myself the last couple years.

It's impossible, this crush I have on her, but I've been carrying it around for the last two years anyway.

Only... the ghost of Susie's scent still lingers in my nose, and the sight of her pretty face as she glanced up at me like she just got caught doing something very, very naughty is seared into my retinas.

I can't forget it, can't get it out of my mind, can't stop wondering if it means that she might feel—

From the corner of my eye, I catch sight of a flash of soft brown hair, the curve of a sweater-clad shoulder near the elevators.

Susie steps inside a moment later, and the sight of those doors sliding shut, the sight of her leaving, snaps something in me.

Deep in my bones—unfamiliar but undeniable—instinct bursts into life.

I fire off the last report I owe Kingston.

It's half-assed, sloppy, and I can almost imagine the fierce scowl on his beaked face when he opens it, but I can't stop myself.

Piling all my stuff in my backpack, I swing it over my shoulders and head for the stairs. I'm not taking the chance of waiting on the elevators, and I doubt my racing pulse and the restlessness in all my limbs would let me do so, anyway.

Not when it's imperative that I speak to Susie before she leaves.

Why? I'm not exactly sure. I can't pause my racing thoughts long enough for it to make any kind of sense.

What am I going to say when I catch up to her? I have no idea.

But I can't stop now that I've started, not with that instinct coursing through me. Not when every single cell in my body is yelling at me to go after her, lay eyes on her, speak to her.

And sure, I guess I could try to catch her on Monday, but if I don't talk to her now I might lose my nerve. Or she might spend all weekend feeling as embarrassed as she looked right before she high-tailed it out of the meeting room. She won't know that embarrassed is the very last thing I want her to feel around me, that there's nothing on earth I want more than for her to—

Those thoughts draw up short as I jog out of the building and catch sight of her about to reach a dark blue sedan on the second level of the parking garage.

My heart lurches in my chest and relief washes over me in a deluge. I made it. I'm not too late.

"Susie, wait up."

Chapter 3

Susie

“Susie. Wait up.”

Jonah walks toward me across the parking garage in long strides, his too-big khakis swinging around his legs. Now that we’re out of the office fluorescents and standing in the early spring sunlight filtering in through the garage’s open walls, I’m reminded again why I’ve had such an enormous crush on him this whole time.

Besides the big sexy orc thing, he has a sort of boyishness about him, something open and friendly and maybe a little nervous as he walks over to where I’m standing next to my car. His long black hair hangs loose around his shoulders, and he has two sharp, gleaming white tusks jutting up from under his bottom lip. The rest of his face is all chiseled jaw and high cheekbones, softened a bit by hair that’s tousled enough to make me want to run my hand through it and mess it up a bit more.

Get it together, Susie.

“Uh, hi Jonah,” I say, trying and failing to sound normal. “What’s up?”

For a moment, he looks completely uncertain, like maybe he’s misread the whole situation.

“So, about what happened earlier—”

“Back in the meeting room, that was—”

We both speak at the same time, laugh a little awkwardly, and fall silent again. A few uncomfortable seconds pass. He looks back over his shoulder, shifts nervously, and for a terrible moment I think he’s about to leave.

He can't leave.

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Not before I say something.

Not before I... before I...

“Yeah,” I say quickly, grabbing at anything to say to keep him from going. “I mean, sorry. If I made you uncomfortable.”

There’s a light sheen of sweat on my forehead and neck, and I’m pretty sure I’m about to keel over out of sheer embarrassment, but I don’t want him to go. Not yet. I’m about to keep babbling, tell him it wasn’t what he thinks it was, try to have a normal conversation, but Jonah speaks first.

“Don’t be sorry.”

The world tilts for a moment as I process his quiet, steady words.

Maybe he was alright with it? Maybe he...

A shiver races down my spine and anticipatory heat unspools low in my belly.

“You... don’t mind? The way I was staring at you?”

“Susie,” he says, like I’m missing something completely obvious. “I loved the way you were staring at me.”

I have my hands resting awkwardly on my hips, and as he speaks, Jonah reaches out to curl his long, thick fingers around my wrist.

I've always been on the scrawny side, and his huge grip circles it easily. His hand is warm, so warm, and the rough rasp of his callouses against the tender skin of my inner wrist is a delicious contrast. He's holding loosely enough that I could pull away if I wanted, but tight enough to make it clear he knows exactly what I'd been looking at during the meeting.

"Oh. Oh, I..." My breath catches and I trail off, but he fills in the silence.

"Do you want to... I mean, if you're free sometime..."

"What about right now?"

Holy hell. Did I really just say that? Am I really offering what I think I'm offering?

Jonah's eyes widen. He searches my face like he's not sure he heard me right. "Now?"

For a split second, I nearly take it back. There's still time to be a coward. I could bow out, stutter over some explanation, or backtrack into an excuse.

Except... I don't.

I can't.

Not when my heart's pounding so hard and fast in my chest and my pussy is throbbing and Jonah from Accounting is standing here, looking at me wide-eyed like it's Christmas morning and I'm his present.

"Yeah..." I say slowly, throwing the rest of my caution to the wind. "I mean... I live pretty close by if you wanted to... you could come over."

The grip he has on my wrist tightens, and he leans in close. “And what would you want me to do with these hands if I came over?”

“I think you already know.”

Where that streak of boldness comes from, I have no idea, but the flash of pure lust across his face is enough to make it worth the risk. His pupils dilate, his nostrils flare, and his wide chest expands with the deep, bracing breath he takes.

“I’d love to come over.”

Okay. So we’re doing this. We’re really doing this.

I really just invited Jonah from Accounting over to my apartment for a hookup, and he really just accepted.

This is chill. This is cool. People do this all the time.

Some people, I mean, not me. But today’s apparently the day I jump off the deep end completely, and if I’m going to do it with anyone, I’m glad it’s with Jonah from Accounting.

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God, I have to stop mentally calling him Jonah from Accounting.

“Just, leave here in like five minutes, okay?” I ask after giving him my address. “I need to... my place is a bit of a mess.”

“Sure. Yeah. Sure, that sounds good.”

When I look back up at him, he seems almost as nervous as I am, but also so damn pleased and eager as hell.

Which, okay, I kind of love that. It makes me bold enough not to chicken out, bold enough to do this, with him. No turning back.

I grin at him before heading to my car. “See you in a few.”

Chapter 4

Susie

Inside my apartment, I toss my bag haphazardly into my bedroom, then go into speed-run cleaning mode. It's not a total disaster in here, but my heart's still racing as I pick up a scattering of laundry, the empty tea and coffee mugs that seem to multiply all on their own on the coffee table and side tables, and the stack of unopened mail that I quickly stash away in a drawer.

My eyes scan the room, looking for anything else I can tidy, but before I can do any more last-minute prep, a knock at the door announces Jonah is here.

I quickly cross the room to open it, and oh boy, is he here.

The office has tall ceilings, lots of windows, and an open floor plan, but seeing him standing in the normal-height hallway just outside my apartment door is another thing entirely.

My heart races with the reminder of just how spectacularly big and broad he is, how unbelievable it is he's here—actually here, in my apartment.

“You found it alright?” I ask, swallowing around a wave of nerves and stepping aside so he can come in.

“Yeah,” he says, looking around the place. “It must be nice, living this close to work.”

“Uh, yeah. It has been.”

God, I'm terrible at small talk.

Or maybe I'm not.

Maybe I just can't remember how to make it when I've got a coworker-slash-hookup standing in my apartment looking so handsome and touchable.

I close the door behind us, painfully aware of how lacking my apartment is.

Hand-me-down couch, IKEA bookcase, half-dead potted fern in the window. I'm twenty-seven, and my place looks like it belongs to a college kid. Which, alright, I'm acting with the approximate maturity level and impulse control of a college kid right now, so maybe I shouldn't judge myself so harshly.

Stepping around Jonah and toward the living room—which is also connected to the kitchen and dining space and is usually pretty roomy, but feels awfully small right now—I internally agonize over my next move.

Do I take him to my bedroom? Hop up on the kitchen counter? Drop to my knees right in front of him?

Living room seems like the best middle ground, and I continue on into that space before turning around to face him.

Oh, god. What do I do with my hands? What do I say? Should I kiss him? Start stripping?

Wordlessly, Jonah takes off his jacket, lays it on the back of one of my dining chairs, and strides toward me with a slight smirk on his face and unmistakable intent burning in his hazel eyes.

We're really doing this.

I expect awkwardness. I expect a little fumbling, maybe some painful conversation about what we're going to do and how we're going to do it. I expect doubt and weirdness, and part of me still thinks we should just call this whole thing off.

I've never done this. I've never felt this... this... crazed. It's an out-of-body experience, and I'm expecting it to come to a crashing end at any moment.

What I don't expect?

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I don't expect Jonah to reach right out and cup my pussy over my black work slacks. I don't expect him to lean in close and press his lips on the tender spot beneath my ear.

"Is this what you were thinking about in that meeting?"

I nod, grinding down a little onto his fingers. Even over my clothes, it feels incredible.

"Words, Susie. I want to hear your words."

Holy shit. Jonah from Accounting is bossy. Bossy and stern and so fucking hot right now.

I also still really, really have to stop calling him 'Jonah from Accounting.' 'Daddy,' maybe, or 'sir' might be more fitting. I'm still thinking about it when he gives me an impatient little tap between my legs.

"Focus, Susie."

"Yes!" I yelp when he pushes the heel of his palm against my clit over the fabric.

"Yes, I was thinking about this."

"I thought so," he says, a delicious thread of certainty and smugness in his voice.

"Take your pants off."

I obey immediately, stripping my slacks down my legs and kicking them aside along

with my socks. I'm standing in only my panties and sweater in the middle of my living room. The blinds are open, and anyone in the building across the street could look over and see. Fuck, part of me wishes they would.

My hands go to the waistband of my panties—purple cotton, bikini-cut, nothing special—and I'm just about to take those off too when Jonah stops me.

“No. Leave those. Come here.” He sits down on the couch and pats his thigh.

My mind scrambles, and then blanks out entirely. He wants me to sit on his lap?

My legs decide for me as I wobble over to him and stop just short of bumping my knees to his. Gripping my hips, he turns me around and tugs me down so I've got my back to his chest. He tucks his thick thighs between mine and pushes them wide, spreading me open. His hands run up and down the inside of my thighs, stopping just short of brushing up against my pussy, and leaving little fires burning in their wake.

When I'm settled, he presses his lips to the side of my neck. The smooth slide of his tusks against my skin, the slightest prick of their pointed tips, makes me gasp.

“So pretty, Susie,” he murmurs, running his tusks lightly over me again. “Pretty little purple panties just waiting for me to take them off of you.”

The noise I make is nowhere near coherent when he snakes one hand down to rub against the fabric.

“Already so hot for me.” He leans forward over my shoulder to watch himself stroke me.

I can't believe this is happening.

Full stop.

My mind struggles to keep up and my body won't stop squirming against him, trying to make sense of all the new sensations. He's so warm, so big, and every time he speaks, the deep rumble of his voice vibrates all the way through me.

"On or off?" he asks, playing with the hem of my sweater.

"Off," I tell him breathlessly. "Bra too. Please."

He obliges, and the noise he makes in the back of his throat when my tits are out for his appraisal echoes straight down between my thighs.

"Fuck, Susie. This is what you've been hiding under all those sweaters you wear?"

I do wear a lot of sweaters. Even in the summer. I don't have a lot of extra padding on my slim, almost curveless frame, and I always seem to be chilly. He noticed?

"When were you looking at my sweaters?"

"Every godsdamn day."

Jonah reaches up to caress my breasts. He kneads slowly, plucks at my nipples, rolls them between his fingers and I arch into the slight zing of pleasure-pain.

With one hand still at my breasts, he snakes the other back down to work me over my panties. Pulling the fabric taut between two of his fingers, he rubs a third over and over my clit. The pressure is incredible, the steady, commanding touch so damn delicious as he rumbles his approval into the side of my neck when I cant my hips to chase the sensation.

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“Good, Susie. So good. Just like that.”

His fingers press down more firmly. He sucks at the side of my throat, and a desperate gasp rips out of me. My core tightens into a heavy, insistent twist of pleasure, striking fast and hard.

I’m sure he thinks he’s just teasing, but with as tightly wound as I already am, it’s enough to have me racing toward a climax.

It’s too much.

He’s too much.

Jonah, who sees me in my sweaters and wonders what’s under them. Jonah, who I’ve been crushing on for years. Jonah with the big, rough hands and the unexpected bossy streak who’s here, playing with me, whispering filthy praise and encouragement against my skin. He’s barely touched me, and I’m nearly ready to combust.

I do just that a few seconds later.

My back arches, and a stifled scream rips from my throat as my climax breaks over me. Jonah holds me all the way through my tremors until my muscles go lax.

“Fuck,” Jonah curses. “Fuck, that was hot. You came just from that?”

I can only give him a shaky nod as his hand keeps moving, stroking me down through the last of it. My head rolls back, resting against his shoulder, and when I take a deep

inhale, my nose is filled with the scent of him.

Jonah smells like the outdoors. Like cedar and pine and fresh clean air. I don't know if that's an orc thing, or if he's got some kind of incredibly appealing cologne, but damn do I want to bottle it up and keep it close by so I can take a whiff whenever I want to.

No. I absolutely did not just think that.

"Do you want another?" he asks, still stroking me lightly. "Do you want to come again, Susie?"

I should probably return the favor first, touch him, make him feel as good as he's just made me, but I'm still pleasure-drunk and hungry for more.

"Do you want these fingers inside of you?"

Well, damn. This orc really knows how to win a girl over.

"Yes," I say, breathless, needy.

"Good," Jonah says, fingers sliding under the waistband of my panties. "Off with these, then."

Before I have a chance to stand up and take them off myself, Jonah lifts me with one muscular arm and uses his other hand to tug them down my thighs. It happens so fast, and feeling him move me with no apparent effort whatsoever leaves me even more breathless.

He settles me back into the same position, spreading me even wider this time. Instead of touching me right away, though, he leans forward over my shoulder and stares

down at me for a few long seconds.

My cheeks burn hotter and hotter the longer he stares. Spread open like this, I'm completely bared for him, no shame or coyness or secrets, and he's silent long enough that I'm almost convinced he doesn't like what he sees. I'm about to shift off of him, snap my legs shut, when he lets out a long, ragged breath.

"You're beautiful. Just perfect." Jonah draws the broad tip of one finger all the way up my slit, spreading the damp heat he finds there. "Fuck, Susie. You're so wet. Is that all for me?"

"Yes," I moan. "All for you."

He tests and teases, dips just inside and retreats. I'm writhing on him, pressing my ass back against his thick, insistent erection. I try to force myself down further on that teasing finger and he just clucks his tongue and pulls his hand away.

"So greedy," he scolds me. "Be patient."

"Can't," I whine. "Can't wait. Please."

I'm begging, needy, pathetic, and I don't even care. I've just had one of the best orgasms of my life and I want another.

"Greedy, greedy girl. You left that meeting room so fast today. Were you embarrassed by how much you wanted these fingers inside you?"

As he asks the question, he plunges his finger deep, and my moan bounces off the walls around us. It's one finger, a single damn finger, and I'm already full. He crooks it forward, hits that sweet spot so deep inside that my belly melts into pure liquid. I can't speak, can't do anything but clench on him and grasp at his thick forearms, nails

leaving crescents on his skin.

“Susie,” he says sternly, stilling the motion of his hand. “I’m waiting for an answer.”

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Damn him. Damn him for making me say it.

Although, even while I'm mentally cursing his name, something deep and dark in my core flutters at the small humiliation.

"Yes. I was embarrassed."

Satisfaction rumbles up the back of his throat, and he pushes his ring finger inside of me to join his middle finger. The stretch is obscene. I'm stuffed to the seams, so deliciously full. Desperate for more, I ride his hand, rolling my hips and trying to take him even deeper.

"Good girl," he says against my neck, shifting his legs to let me have even more freedom to move. "You take everything you need from me, Susie."

I fuck myself onto his fingers, soaking his entire hand with my wetness. Shifting slightly, he tilts the heel of his palm to massage against my clit. I'm still aching there, sensitive after he rubbed me over my panties and it's almost too much. Almost.

"Look," he says, voice still so stern. "Look at how pretty this pussy is with my fingers spreading you."

Who am I to resist a command like that?

And god damn, the sight of his two thick fingers disappearing into me, stretching me, is enough to make me cry out again as the first waves of another climax start building.

Jonah makes a low, appreciative noise in the back of his throat. “You shouldn’t feel embarrassed about this. I’ve thought about it, too.”

“You have?” I pant, rocking my hips to increase the pressure on my clit. The heightened sensation makes me clench down on him, and we both groan.

“I could scent you,” he murmurs. “In the meeting room. I saw you staring at me and scented your arousal and knew you wanted this as much as I did.”

Fuck.Fuck,that’s hot.

“I just never thought I’d be so damn lucky.”

He thinks he’s the lucky one?

I can only latch onto the words for a moment before the heel of Jonah’s hand presses down hard on my clit again, and any coherent thoughts simply cease to exist. He’s relentless, working my body with single-minded determination, breathing almost as hard as I am. He brushes my clit again, a fainter touch this time, almost teasing, but I’m too far gone.

My second orgasm washes over me with devastating totality. I might be moaning, or saying his name, or just speaking outright nonsense, and I’d never be able to tell.

Jonah’s lips skate along my neck, his two sharp tusks brushing against my skin in a tiny bite of pain that amplifies my pleasure. He’s murmuring just like I am, saying my name in a breathless, awed voice that sounds almost... reverent.

“Sweet Susie,” he whispers, dragging his tusks over the side of my neck again. “Look at you. Look at how beautiful you are when you come.”

Jonah holds me tight, still murmuring to me, soothing me, sturdy and warm and wonderful at my back while I float in my post-orgasm bliss.

When I'm finally able to see straight again, I reach up and back, tangling one hand into his hair and running my nails along his scalp. He hums in pleasure, body melting into mine, but tenses when my other hand dips down between us, tugging at his shirt where it's tucked into his waistband.

"Hey," he says softly. "Just rest."

"You don't want..." I say, gesturing at the truly impressive erection tenting his khaki pants and playing with the hem of his shirt where I've pulled it free.

Jonah shakes his head and draws his fingers slowly out of me. "It's alright, I wanted this to be for you."

Even as my whole body shudders with the sensation of him sliding out of me, I frown. "You're sure? Because I really—"

"It's alright," he says again, gently pulling my hand away from his shirt.

There's something tight and uncomfortable in his voice, and the sharp, unexpected sting of rejection settles in my gut. Why doesn't he want me to touch him?

Before I can ask, the sound of a phone ringing comes from where Jonah left his jacket near the door. Brow furrowing, he looks toward the sound and then back at me, apologetically.

"I should answer that."

"Oh," I say, scrambling out of his lap. "Um, alright."

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He stands and crosses the room to fish it out of his pocket. Speaking too quietly for me to hear what he's saying, he hangs up after a minute or so.

When he turns back around, he looks even more apologetic than before. "I have to go."

Oof. If I felt rejected before, I'm entirely dejected now.

Still... this wasn't a date. It was just casual, just a hookup. Just me propositioning him, really, not asking for dinner and flowers or anything like that, so I hide whatever I'm feeling under a smile and grab the blanket off the couch next to me. Standing, I wrap it around my shoulders, fully aware of how ridiculous I must look, and wait for him to say something else.

"I'm really sorry," he tells me, and although he looks it, I can't help but feel disappointed and self-conscious and stupid.

Was I that bad? Did I do something that turned him off so much he's in such a hurry to get out of here?

Or maybe he pulled the classic move of getting a friend to call him after a certain amount of time had passed, so he had a viable excuse to leave his crazy coworker's apartment.

"That was my boss," he explains. "We're at the end of the quarter, and apparently something I was working on today didn't pull through right on the end-of-quarter reports. Can't imagine why. Wasn't like I was completely distracted and useless for

the last hour of the day.”

He laughs a little self-deprecatingly, and I want to believe him, I really do, but doubt crawls up my throat in a chokehold.

Still smiling, though it feels horribly forced, I nod. “Alright. Um, sorry you have to go.”

A look crosses his face that I can’t quite decipher. Something tight and pained and maybe... regretful? Whether it’s regret that he has to go, or regret he ever came here at all, though, I don’t know.

“I am, too.” He stands there for a moment more, still looking conflicted, before he shakes his head and gives me a small smile that seems almost as fake as mine. “Well... I guess I better be going.”

“Sure, uh, have a good weekend. Hope they don’t keep you too late.”

“You, too. The weekend part.”

It’s like an out-of-body experience, how intensely awkward this moment is. I don’t know what else to say, how to process this or wrap my mind around what the hell just happened.

The moment passes, though, and Jonah turns and heads for the front door.

He opens it, half-turns back to face me, and offers one last regretful smile. “Bye, Susie.”

“Bye.”

The door closes after him, and I drop the damn smile. The blanket, too, suddenly too rough against my skin. I feel... wrong. Discordant. Like a broken bell chiming tones that set my teeth on edge.

The worst kind of whiplash makes my head spin, and I don't know which way is up.

How the hell is it possible to feel that much pleasure and then that much discomfort in the span of five minutes?

What on earth just happened?

Not knowing what else to do, I head to my bathroom to clean up. In the mirror, my hair is a bird's nest and my makeup is smudged under my eyes. Great. So in addition to being awkward as hell, I look like a lunatic, too. Perfect.

All cleaned up, I head into my bedroom and flop down backward on the bed, letting the waves of humiliation and shame and regret wash over me.

So much for my brief foray into promiscuity, and so much for taking a leap and seducing the orc I've been crushing on for two years.

The second part of that regret stings infinitely worse than the first. I roll over, pull a blanket over me and reach for the remote, ready to watch reruns of some comfort TV show until it stops stinging so much.

Or until I just die from shame. Whichever comes first.

Even as I do, my muscles still ache, my pussy still throbs, and if I inhale deeply enough, I imagine I can still smell Jonah's woods and sunshine scent on my skin.

Chapter 5

Jonah

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For the second time today, my world has been entirely thrown off its axis.

Only this time is so, so much worse.

I stumble down the hall outside Susie's apartment. I feel drunk. Or like... I was drunk. Drugged, maybe. Under hypnosis. Lost in a trance that I'm just now coming out of, thrust back into the stark light of day.

I have to get back to the Bureau ASAP and fix the mess I made of the reports Kingston just rightfully chewed me out for, but I barely make it to the stairwell before I have to pause.

Both hands braced on the wall beside the door, I hang my head down between my shoulders and try to breathe through the waves of arousal and shame and disappointment coursing through me, every single instinct I possess screaming at me to go back to her.

Damn those spreadsheets and damn my job. Damn anything that's not Susie and that incredible body of hers, that sweet, tight, hot cunt that was just soaked for me, the way she was so fucking responsive for me, what she sounded like when she came all over my—

"Fuck," I rasp, making myself push the memories aside.

But it's useless.

I'll be clinging to each and every one of those memories for the rest of my damn life.

They feel like they're etched into my bones, every inch of me branded by her. Her scent still clings to me like a second skin, and my cock has never, in my entire, godsforsaken life, been this hard.

My instincts are still raging, unlike anything I've ever felt before.

The last fucking thing I want to do right now is go back to the office and spend the next couple of hours unravelling the mess of what I sent Kingston.

I want to say the hell with it all and go back to her, keep touching her, kiss her, and let her...

Only... do I?

My skin crawls, and a choking wave of sanity tightens my throat when I remember Susie's hands on me, the way she wanted to get me naked.

The way I immediately froze up when she did.

It's a familiar feeling, one I've been trying to get over for the better part of the last year, and one that's kept me from being intimate with anyone for a long, long time.

I wish I wasn't like this.

I wish I wasn't such a self-conscious mess about my body.

I shouldn't be.

I know I shouldn't be, but the hangups I have around how I look after all the weight I've lost over the last couple of years are a hell of a thing. Every time I think I've made progress in accepting that—barring surgery of some sort—I'm just going to

have to deal with some loose skin, that it's okay to have some loose skin, to look the way I look, to exist in my body without feeling shame about it, something will happen to put me right back to square one.

I don't blame Susie for it, not at all.

She was so goddamn beautiful, lost in the moment and in her pleasure. Pleasure that I gave her. She wanted me, she fucking wanted me, and after the pathetic mess I've been—pining after her for two goddamn years—the fear that she'd see me naked and all that desire in her eyes might have turned into disgust hit me like a ton of bricks.

It made me pull away from her, and that's on me, not her.

Taking a few more deep breaths, I give myself a minute.

Thirty seconds to freak out. Thirty seconds to pull myself back together.

But I barely make it through ten of those seconds before my phone's ringing again. I pull it from my pocket and answer, already knowing who it's going to be.

"Sorry sir," I say hastily. "I'm just on my way out. I should be there in—"

"Not until next week, hopefully. And though I'm flattered you're finally recognizing my authority, you really don't need to call me sir, Jonah."

My older sister's voice on the other end of the line draws a bark of startled laughter out of the back of my throat, and I run my hand through my hair, cheeks heating.

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“Sorry, Gem,” I say, heading down the stairs with the phone pressed to my ear. “I thought you were my boss.”

“Hey, make no mistake, I’m still the boss of you.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

“And what the hell would your boss need from you on a Friday night, anyway?”

Reaching the ground floor and stepping out into the lot next to Susie’s building, I let out a long sigh. “I fucked something up earlier today, and I’ve got to go back in and fix it.”

“Jonah Greenwood, math whiz and all around nerd extraordinaire, fucking up something at work? I don’t believe it.”

Unable to come up with a good retort, I just grumble a little as I reach my car and slide in the driver’s side. I turn the ignition, but don’t leave right away, tipping my head back against the headrest and closing my eyes.

“Everything alright with you?”

Gemma’s voice has taken on a different tone now, all traces of teasing older sibling superiority evaporating.

“Yeah, I’m alright.”

She hums, like she's trying to figure out whether she's going to take that at face value or keep pushing, but must decide to let me off the hook for now.

"Alright. I just wanted to call and see if you're still planning to fly out next week?"

"Of course I am. You know I wouldn't miss it."

I can almost hear her smile over the phone. "It's alright if you're busy. I know you've got a whole life out there, and all this stuff is so traditional and outdated and—"

"Gem," I gently interrupt. "I'll be there. You and Kasey are too important for me not to be."

Another long pause, and a pang of homesickness spreads through my chest as I imagine her grin and the sight of rolling green hills behind her. I honestly have no idea whether she's outside or not, but in my mind she is, enjoying a beautiful night in the quiet little village where we grew up.

We discuss a few more details about my flight and when I'll be arriving before saying our goodbyes and hanging up. With no more excuses and no reason to loiter, I finally put the car in drive and reluctantly pull out of Susie's lot.

The work I need to do on the reports ends up being just as tedious and irritating as I thought it would be, and it's nearly eight by the time I leave the office for the second time tonight. Kingston's still working, too, and he barely gives me more than a grunt of acknowledgment when I give him a heads-up that the new reports are in his inbox.

By the time I make it outside, it's already getting dark, and for the thousandth time since I left her apartment, I wonder what Susie's doing. My hand twitches toward my phone where it's tucked away in my pocket before I remember.

I never got her number.

It's one more damning failure, one more way I let myself get in my own way and potentially screwed up my one and only chance with the woman I haven't been able to get out of my mind for the last two years.

Disappointment is a heavy, bitter weight in the bottom of my stomach, and I silently vow to do everything I can to make sure that's not the case.

Monday.

I'll find her Monday.

I'll talk to her and let her know in no uncertain terms that I don't want what happened tonight in her apartment to be one-time thing.

Monday. I'll make it right on Monday.

Chapter 6

Susie

I do not, in fact, perish of shame on Friday night. Or Saturday. Or Sunday.

I'm still alive and kicking and feeling every bit the damn fool as I drive to work on Monday morning and duck into the building, hoping like hell not to see a pair of big broad shoulders or a head of shaggy black hair.

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I make it to my desk and survive most of the morning, right up until my coffee habit whispers in my ear and I get up from my desk with mug in hand. It's a mistake, because the moment I'm in the fifth floor breakroom—the one the Community Outreach Department shares with Accounting—my luck runs out.

“Good morning, Susie.”

Like Pavlov's fricken bell, it only takes the rumble of that deep voice for a shot of arousal to run all the way through me. I swallow hard and turn around to face him.

“Hey, Jonah.” I try for casual, but I'm sure I land somewhere near ‘still horny and embarrassed out of my fucking mind for this orc.’

The corners of his lips quirk up in a knowing smile, and even though that sends another little spark through my veins, I need to remember I'm annoyed with him right now.

He gave me two of the best orgasms of my life then got all weird and left. I should be pissed. I shouldn't be a lump of horny putty, just begging for his enormous hands to do what they want with me.

Before I can remind him of that, though, he takes a long, slow look at me with unmistakable heat in his hazel eyes, and when he finally meets my gaze again, all my thoughts burn to ash.

“Nice sweater.”

It is a nice sweater. Tight and red, with a vee neck that shows off my collarbones and my non-existent cleavage.

I'm not really even surprised he noticed it. What had he said when I asked him about noticing my sweaters?

Every godsdamn day.

Like he can read my mind, that smile of his grows even more wicked, and my cheeks heat. Unbidden, a series of images from Friday flash through my mind. How he pulled off my sweater in one smooth tug. The way he looked down at my bare breasts and handled them with such rugged tenderness. The way he...

Stop, Susie. Jesus.

Jonah's still looking at me, eyes darker now, and when his nostrils flare slightly, I remember what he said about scenting me, about knowing just how wet he makes me.

Goddamn it.

I'm going to have to quit working here. Either that, or spend every Monday through Friday being completely, devastatingly transparent about how much I want this confusing, handsome orc who rejected me so spectacularly.

Taking my coffee and fully intending to turn tail and run back to my desk, Jonah's deep voice stops me in my tracks.

"Susie. We should talk about Friday."

Oh, my god. He's not doing this. Not now. Not here. Double-checking to make sure there's no one else nearby, I lower my voice and practically hiss my reply.

“No, I don’t think we do.”

A flash of surprise on his face. “You’re angry.”

It’s not a question, and not something I feel like I need to dignify with an answer. I step toward the door, but Jonah puts himself right in my path, halting me.

“I need to get back to work.”

He shakes his head. “Just hear me out?”

I don’t want to, I really don’t want to, but when I glance up from where I’d been stubbornly staring at the center of his chest, he’s got that same pained look on his face that he did on Friday. I still don’t want to hear him out, but seeing that look thaws my resolve a little.

“Fine,” I say. “You’ve got sixty seconds.”

To emphasize my point, I lift my wrist to look at my watch, only to realize I’m not wearing one.

Perfect.

Look at me, preserving whatever pathetic bit of dignity I have left.

Lips twitching, Jonah does an admirable job of not laughing at me before he regains his composure. “I don’t want you to think I regret what happened on Friday.”

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“Yeah, well, I guess I enjoyed it more than you did.”

Jonah goes absolutely still. “You think I didn’t enjoy myself?”

Cheeks still flaming, I break his gaze. “Well, I mean, you didn’t exactly let me return the favor. And you left so fast, I just assumed—”

“Susie,” his voice is low and serious, and when I look back up at him, he’s glancing around to see if we’re being observed. When the faint sound of voices reaches us from around the corner, he takes my mug from my hand and sets it on the counter before putting a gentle hand on my elbow. “Come here.”

Letting him steer me down an adjacent hallway, I don’t protest when he opens the door to the office supply closet and nudges me inside. He follows me in, closes the door. There’s barely any room to move with his massive frame taking up most of the tiny space. I suck in a breath at the nearness of him, and am immediately overwhelmed by his woods and sunshine scent.

Damn, he smells good. I thought so on Friday, too, but in the confined space it’s impossible not to notice.

Jonah turns, takes a step even closer, and I scoot away until my back is pressed up against the metal shelving unit. He moves with me, placing both his hands on the shelf on either side of me and caging me in with his body.

This is overwhelming, too, the sheer size of him towering over me, the warmth radiating from him. Overwhelming, but also incredibly sexy. Damn it. And what he

says next doesn't help matters in the slightest.

“Don't think for one second I didn't enjoy myself with you, Susie Grove,” he says, leaning down to speak softly next to my ear. “Feeling you come around my fingers and hearing all those little noises you made was the hottest fucking thing I've ever experienced.”

My insides go liquid, and I reach out to grasp at the front of his shirt. “Then why did you leave?”

His eyes lock onto where I'm holding him, and he lets out a harsh breath before he answers. “I really did have to come back to the office.”

I shake my head. He's not getting off that easily. “But even before that, you didn't want to take things any further.”

“I didn't want... I didn't want to presume you wanted anything more.”

“I offered. You weren't exactly pressuring me.”

Another harsh sigh. “I know. I just...”

He trails off, brow furrowed and eyes distant with whatever's got him so tied up in knots.

Whatever's up with him, it's clear he's not ready to talk about it.

Maybe I should just leave it there, walk away, let him sort his own shit out and get back to me, but something in me can't accept that.

Just like Friday, I want more.

I want Jonah to know I'm open to this, open to him, even if it has me making a fool of myself all over again.

If he's not ready to tell me everything he's thinking, that's okay.

As a matter of fact, we don't have to talk at all.

Flattening my hands against his chest, I slide them up, up, up until I reach around his neck and sink them into his soft hair, gripping lightly and tilting his head back so he has to look at me. With our height difference, I need to lean up onto my toes to get my arms all the way around him, but even that small reminder of how big he is thrills me all the way to the tips of those toes. Holding his gaze and moving in slowly, slowly enough that he has more than enough time to stop me if he wants to, I kiss him.

As soon as my mouth touches his, something in Jonah snaps.

One of his hands plunges into my hair, and the other splays across my ass, lifting me up and forcing me to wrap my legs around his waist. He backs me into the shelf and it clatters, threatening to send boxes of pens and staples and copy paper crashing to the floor, but I couldn't give a shit right now. I open my lips, letting him in, and devour his deep, satisfied groan.

Jonah tastes just like he smells—fresh and bright and earthy. He plunges his tongue into my mouth, and though it's a slightly strange sensation to have his tusks pressing into my skin, it doesn't seem unnatural or uncomfortable.

It's just... Jonah.

He pulls away from me with a sharp gasp. "Susie..."

“Yeah?” I ask, panting.

“I’m really, really fucking sorry about leaving like that.”

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This time, I believe the regret on his face. I believe it so much that I kiss him again. Jonah lets out a low, approving growl and tightens his hold on my hair, my ass, pressing me tightly enough against him to feel his cock straining into the vee of my thighs.

When we come up for air again, we're both clinging to each other, breathless and bright eyed and so utterly inappropriate to be doing this in a closet at work.

Jonah must realize it too, because he sets me slowly back down on my feet, keeping his hands braced at my waist until he's sure I can stand on my own. Which is kind of questionable right now, given the wobbly state of my knees. When I'm steady, he leans down and presses his forehead against mine.

"Do you believe me now?"

"Maybe. You might have to work a little harder to convince me, though. Maybe a round two where you don't leave right when things are getting interesting?"

Jonah laughs. "Are you free tonight?"

I shake my head. "I volunteer on Monday nights with the Paranormal Advancement Society. Tomorrow?"

"I'm out of town visiting family starting tomorrow. I'll be home on Friday night, though."

That's a bummer. And somehow feels a little too reminiscent of him having a super

convenient excuse to run his sexy ass out of my apartment.

“I swear,” Jonah says, laughing again and reaching for the phone in his pocket. “I can show you my boarding pass if—”

“Alright, alright, I believe you. And I’m free Friday.”

God, I sound eager. Too eager, probably, but Jonah doesn’t seem to mind as he leans down and kisses me again.

“Then it’s a date.”

Chapter 7

Jonah

“Hey! Earth to Jonah. Anyone home?”

The blur of a green hand waving in front of my face snaps me out of the thousand-yard stare I’d been stuck in, eyes fixed on the distant horizon of rolling green hills and sunset, thoughts a few thousand miles away back in Washington.

Gemma, owner of said green hand, plops into the seat next to mine on the wide back porch of the house we’ve spent all day filling with boxes and furniture.

“Sorry,” I mutter, shaking off the last of my distraction. “Need help with something inside?”

She shakes her head. “Nah. We’re good for today. Dad’s working on dinner and mom and Kasey are discussing what color we should paint the guest room.”

Gemma clasps her hands behind her head and lets out a satisfied sigh. After the long day we've had, I'm in complete agreement with the sound.

The evening offers a bit of quiet reprieve after how busy the whole day has been. Friends and family from around the village have been popping in and out all day, bringing food to fill the fridge or helping to carry furniture or just stopping by to offer their well wishes and congratulations.

It's one of the things I miss most about living here, the way everyone comes together to mark special occasions like one of their neighbors moving into a new home, babies being born, weddings celebrated with the entire clan. All the milestones that make up a life are commemorated by the whole community.

I still love the life I've built for myself in Seattle, but it's hard not to feel that wave of nostalgia, longing, and homesickness on a day like today.

"Thanks again for being here," Gemma says, and a pinch of regret settles itself in my chest.

"You don't have to thank me."

She arches a brow. "You flew all the way across the country and took time off from your job. Saying thanks is the least I could do."

"It's not that big of a deal."

That brow of hers arches even higher. "Of course it is. You know how proud we all are of you for what you've accomplished."

I'm aware.

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It usually comes up a half-dozen times whenever I come back to visit, and it never fails to make me squirm with discomfort, feeling distinctly like an impostor.

Sure, they might see it as impressive, but I still feel like I barely know what I'm doing most days, bumbling my way through adulthood, attempting to find myself in a world I would have had no place in just a few years ago.

I've always had a little chip on my shoulder about it. Not only in the small-town-kid-heads-to-the-big-city sense, but in the sense that all paranormals have felt in some degree since the passage of the Acts. Being visible, being a part of the human world, going up against centuries of legends and folklore that would paint us as monsters to be feared, as well as against all those people who hold the opinion that the world was better off before we were an acknowledged part of it.

It's all been a lot to handle, and I can't imagine my part in it being anything to write home about.

"All I've accomplished," I say with a scoff. "Yeah, sure. Even if that means I've been a terrible son and brother and barely make it back here once a year."

"You're here now, aren't you?"

"I still feel bad," I mutter. "I haven't been home as much as I should since I left for college."

"Don't beat yourself up about it." She leans over and nudges me with her shoulder. "You've always been too hard on yourself."

I grumble a denial, but she just rolls her eyes.

“You have been, and you know it. And you also know you can loosen up, right? You don’t have to be everything to everyone, and you don’t have to be so perfect all the time. You’re great just the way you are.”

Her words strike a nerve. Raw and sensitive, something that’s been gnawing at me for years.

I’ve been carrying it around even before I met Susie, but I’d be a damn liar if I tried to pretend it hadn’t gotten worse this last week. This old, tired need to prove myself, make something of myself, be a ‘success’, whatever the hell that means. Like I always had just a little further to go before I was worthy of good things.

But maybe that’s not so true anymore.

Maybe it’s never been true.

Who knows?

Being home always makes me feel like this, like I’m not doing enough, not here enough, not repaying all my family and all this entire village has given me throughout my life. Like I’ve got this bar I’ll never quite reach, this magical ‘good enough’ that will always be just out of my grasp.

It’s the same way I’ve felt about myself, my body, my sense of confidence and willingness to go after what I want.

But Gemma’s still looking at me with that half-patient, half-superior expression on her face, like she knows she’s right and she has no problem waiting until I pull my head out of my ass and realize it, too.

And even while I don't want to give her the satisfaction, the words feel different this time around. Maybe it's getting older. Maybe it's the way I've finally been finding my confidence and settling into my skin these past couple of years, but I decide not to fight her on it this time.

"Maybe you're right," I mutter.

Gemma's eyes go wide and a gloating smile curls her lips. "I'm sorry? Can you say that again?"

"Don't push it."

"Come on," she taunts. "Just once more. So I can savor it."

"Gem," I say, exasperated. "You're right. Okay? Let's not make a bigger deal of it than we need to."

She lets out a whooping laugh. "Oh you bet your ass I'm going to make a big deal of it."

I grumble some more, and am just about to stand and leave her to soak in her victory, but she reaches over to lay a hand on my shoulder.

"And you should make a big deal of it, too, Jonah." Her voice has taken on a different quality. Softer. More sincere. "You deserve all the good things in the world, and I really hope you know that."

The nerve strikes again, somewhere closer to my heart this time.

I cough around the sudden lump of emotion in my throat. "Thanks. I'll try to remember that."

“Good,” she murmurs.

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We both fall silent, watching the sun set over emerald green hills. Overhead, birds call and lazy clouds drift through the sky, and the faint sounds of mom and dad and Kasey's voices come from inside the house.

A perfect night.

Here, with my family, in this place that will always be home no matter how much time I spend away from it.

"Alright," Gemma says, slapping her hands on her knees before she stands. "That's enough of that. We've officially met our heart-to-heart quota for at least the next year. Let's go see if dad needs help with dinner."

I stand as well, following her into the kitchen with a light, expansive burst of joy unfurling in my chest. A weight lifted off my shoulders I hadn't realized I was carrying.

Later in the evening, after we've eaten and said our goodnights, we leave Gemma and Kasey to settle into their new home in peace.

My parents have kept their cozy den built into the mountain rather than opting for something more contemporary, and that's where we head after dinner.

The village is a wonderful mix of past and present, tradition and modern sensibility. On one end, carved into the mountains, dozens of dens filled with families that have histories here going back generations. On the other, a patchwork of new development, homes filled with some of those same legacy families, but also

newcomers. Blended homes and new faces, a breath of fresh air to usher in a whole new era after the Acts were passed.

Mom and dad turn in early, dad grumbling all the while about how he's too damn old for manual labor, and mom giving him an indulgent smile because she knows just as well as the rest of us that when it comes to his family, there's no favor too big and no help he wouldn't give.

It leaves me alone, and after taking a shower I wander back to my childhood room, a small chamber cut off a short corridor leading from the main part of the den.

It's strange to be back here, in this space that feels so much smaller than it used to when I was a kid.

Stranger still is lounging across my bed strewn with its soft mattress and furs, closing my eyes for a moment and reflecting on a whole life that I couldn't even imagine existing when I left here to make my way into the world.

My mind drifts to Seattle, to the Bureau, and, inevitably, to Susie.

A big, dopey grin spreads across my face when I think about that evening in her apartment, our conversation at the Bureau, where we left things and where things might go when I get back.

I'm finally getting somewhere with the woman of my dreams. I have a date with her on Friday, and I'll be damned if I'm not prouder of myself for that than I've ever been of anything in my life.

Still, I'm not sure what the rules are here. I've been aching to text her for the last couple days—or better yet, call her—but I don't know if that would be weird.

After all, besides what happened at her apartment and that kiss we shared in the supply closet, I barely know Susie. I've been too much of a godsdamned coward to work up the nerve to talk to her beyond asking her questions about her expense reports and occasionally saying hi in the breakroom, so I have no idea if reaching out to her now would come across as... too much.

I don't want to rush things, and I don't want to scare her off, but the longer I sit in the silence, the harder and harder it becomes to deny that urge.

An echo of what I felt last Friday afternoon. An undeniable tug. An instinct calling me toward her.

And after everything Gemma and I talked about, I'm feeling a renewed surge of confidence. After so many years chickening out and beating myself up and not having the courage, maybe it's long past time I stepped it up and let Susie know what my intentions are here.

Besides, it's just a text. One text. I'll send her one casual text, just to let her know I'm thinking of her. If she doesn't respond, no biggie. It's evening back in Seattle and she might be busy, anyway.

Even with all those excuses and cop-outs running through my head, I can't stop the swell of anticipation—of hope—as I reach for my phone and type out a message.

Chapter 8

Susie

On Wednesday night, my phone lights up with a new message from Jonah.

This week has been excruciatingly long already, with the promise of Friday never far

from my mind. It's been downright distracting, and even though we exchanged numbers before going our separate ways on Monday—something Jonah rightfully pointed out could have saved us a lot of angst and misunderstanding if we'd had the foresight to do it before he left my place Friday—I've so far refrained from texting him.

But just as I'm about to curl up in bed and reach for the book I checked out from the library this afternoon, a buzzing from my bedside table catches my attention.

I'm surprised, but not disappointed in the slightest when I look over at my phone and see his name on the screen.

Hey! How's your week going?

Smiling, I text back immediately, not caring at all that I'm outing myself as eager and completely uncool. Hi you. Could be better.

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Three dots appear immediately as he types his reply.

I could say the same.

We send a few more texts back and forth about his flight out there and my week at the Bureau. When the conversation lulls a little, those three dots appear, disappear, and then reappear before his next message arrives.

I've been thinking about you a lot this week.

Oh? I respond. Good things, I hope.

The best things.

I'm grinning at my phone like an idiot. I've been thinking about you, too.

More dots, appearing and reappearing. What kind of things have you been thinking, Susie?

Oh. So we're going to have that kind of conversation, are we? I think for a minute before responding.

I don't know, I finally type. You didn't give me a lot to fantasize about.

Didn't I? The way you came on my fingers would suggest otherwise.

My toes curl, and a little thrill of arousal races straight down between my

thighs. Yeah. But you got to see all of me. And I didn't get to see any of you. A crime, really.

It's a risky text. I hope he knows I'm teasing him. Maybe being a little mean, yeah, but also hoping he takes it as the joke it's meant to be.

When he texts me back, there's a photo attached. Heart racing, I open it to see a picture that takes me a minute to recognize, but when I do, I nearly choke on my own spit.

It's the top portion of a pair of light grey sweatpants, pulled tight to reveal the outline of...

You may not have been able to see it, but I bet you could feel my cock pressed against your ass while I was getting you off.

Jonah's text comes a moment after the pic. It makes me blush, actually blush. I stare at the screen for a full minute, mind racing with how to reply, until he texts again.

Shit. Did I just make this really weird?

No! I hurriedly type back. Just trying to scrape my jaw off the floor.

Good to know it opens that wide. Might come in handy someday.

No. He absolutely did not just say that.

Snapping my own pic, one that shows off my legs where they're propped up in front of me in bed, the short shorts I'm wearing pushed even higher to leave my thighs bare all the way to my knees, I send it his way with a text.

I've got good knees, too. Mighta found out if you would have stayed longer.

It's his turn to take his sweet time texting back, giving me just long enough to second guess if my message was a lame cop-out considering he sent me a photo showing the whole outline of his dick, when my phone buzzes with his reply.

It's another photo. This time, he's tugged the waistband of his sweats down a few inches, showing a sliver of green skin, a happy trail of coarse black hair, and the very top of a thick, veiny shaft.

I fully intend to find out when I'm home on Friday.

Oh my god oh my god oh my god.

Two can play at this game.

The next pic I send back is... decidedly less innocent than the shot of my legs. Kneeling on my bed, I turn toward the lamplight shining from the bedside table, pull one strap of my tank top down to expose my breast, throw my hair forward in what I hope reads as sexy and tousled rather than feral and insane, and take a few selfies to find the best angle.

When I'm satisfied I've got a sexy shot, I send it his way. I hope you give me something better to fantasize about this time.

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The next message he sends comes through a minute later. No text, just a single pic.

It's a long, thick orc cock, gripped in his enormous fist.

And... holy shit.

Without thinking, without giving myself time to chicken out or second guess, I call him. On a video call.

Jonah answers on the second ring. Wherever he's at is dim, with only a bit of faint warm light from a lamp or candle beside him, throwing the broad planes of his face into highlights and shadows that make him look dark and handsome and delicious. "Susie?"

Hi," I say, suddenly shy as I peer at him through the screen.

"Hi yourself," he says with a warm chuckle in his voice. "What are you up to tonight, pretty girl? Other than driving me out of my mind?"

"Hanging out at home in my bedroom," I tell him, panning away from my face for a second to show him the room. "Just... enjoying the pictures you're sending me."

A beat of silence. "How much are you enjoying them?"

I'm about to answer, to tell him all kinds of dirty things I'd like to do to drive him even further out of his mind, when a wicked idea strikes me.

“Should I show you?”

Who even am I, and what is it about this orc that makes me turn into some kind of sex-mad vixen?

And, apparently, an exhibitionist.

“Show me, Susie,” Jonah says, voice deep and tempting. “I want to see you.”

Propping up the phone against my footboard, I scoot back and kneel in the middle of the bed. On the screen, Jonah’s eyes are rapt, and his growl of approval echoes through the speakers as I reach for the hem of my tank top and pull it over my head. Bare from the waist up, I run my hands over my breasts, pinching my nipples softly, keeping eye contact with Jonah the entire time.

“These too?” I tease, sliding my fingers along the waistband of my shorts.

“Off,” he growls.

I take my sweet time sliding my shorts and panties over my hips, turning to the side so he can’t really see anything other than the curve of my hip and ass.

“Susie,” Jonah says, almost tortured this time.

God, teasing him is fun.

“Mmm?” I murmur, slowly sliding my shorts down my thighs before going down on my hands and knees and kicking them aside.

“Let me see you.”

I arch my back, taking my time, and glance back over at where the phone is propped up. “Let me see you first.”

With another harsh growl, he tips his camera downward to where he’s stroking his cock. The grip he has on himself is tight and firm, and I watch, mesmerized, for a few moments as he jerks himself off.

I know how big that hand of his is, and if the comparison is any indication, his cock is... oh, my god.

But, I mean, why am I surprised? Everything about this orc is larger than life.

“Susie,” he rasps. “Are you just going to watch, or are you going to show me that pretty cunt?”

With a choked whimper, I lower down onto the bed and pull a couple of pillows to rest under my back. Legs spread and pussy thrust forward toward the camera, it’s the dirtiest damn thing I’ve ever done. My whole body buzzes with excitement as I prop myself up on an elbow and look down to see Jonah’s face filling the screen again.

“What do you want me to do?”

“Lay back,” he says, voice low and rough. “Spread your legs.”

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I obey, reaching down to stroke the inside of my thighs, teasing just at the edge of my pussy.

“Are you wet for me, Susie?”

I let my finger slide just inside. “Yes. I’m fucking soaked for you.”

“Finger yourself. Fill yourself up.”

I dip my middle and ring fingers into myself, grinding down onto my hand, but the moan that slips out of me is more frustration than pleasure.

“Yours feel better,” I whine, pulling my hand away and plunging back in. “You fill me up better.”

“Fuck, Susie,” he says, breathing hard. “You don’t even know how full I could make you.”

The idea of it, the thought of his thick cock sinking into me, pressing deep, stretching me to my limit, makes a rush of liquid warmth pool between my legs.

“Play with your clit,” Jonah commands, voice even more rough and hoarse than before.

Still thrusting my fingers into my pussy, I circle my clit with the pad of my thumb. The slightest touch is electric, sending waves of pleasure rippling out through me. I press my hips into that touch, arch and strain and grind against my hand until the first

tremors of my approaching climax build.

“Are you going to come?” Jonah asks, barely intelligible now.

He’s panting, breathless, and when I sneak a glance up at my phone, he’s positioned his own so the camera shows the whole of his still-clothed torso and his face and his cock. His hand moves roughly up and down the thick green length of his shaft, slick with precome leaking from the fat, bulbous head.

All of it—his full attention and his rapt arousal and the satisfied noises he’s making—are enough to have me bucking harder into my hand. Imagining Jonah’s hands and cock in place of my own fingers, I work myself harder, almost forgetting he asked me a question until...

“Yes!” I groan. “Yes, I’m going to come. Jonah, I—”

My climax breaks over me before I can get another word out. Jonah groans sharply, and when I glance down at the screen there are ropes of thick white come exploding from the tip of his cock, coating his hand as he continues to thrust into his grip and murmur my name.

It’s the single hottest thing I’ve ever seen, and it just feeds into the intensity of my orgasm as I call out his name and come back down from that peak.

For a couple minutes, neither of us speaks. It doesn’t feel strange, though. It doesn’t feel awkward or shameful or anything but natural as both our breathing returns to normal.

Jonah’s the one to break the silence first. “Stay on the phone for a minute? I need to go clean up.”

I tell him I will, then make a quick dash to the bathroom to do my own cleanup before grabbing my phone and crawling back into bed and under the covers. Peering through the screen, I get nosy, squinting to get a better look at where he is. The lighting is still dim, but from what I can see, he seems to be in some sort of cave. The walls are made of stone, and in the background there's a pile of something that looks like soft, plush furs laid out to make a bed.

Jonah comes back into frame, picks the phone up, and his handsome face fills the screen. He smiles when he sees I'm still there.

"You look cozy."

I smile back and pull my fleece blanket up to my chin. "I am. And I could say the same for you."

He shrugs, looking a little self-conscious. "Yeah, uh, I'm visiting my family and it's a little... rustic out here."

"Sorry," I say quickly. "If you don't want to talk about it, I mean."

"It's not that. It's just, I don't know when talking about all the orc stuff is going to weird people out."

All the orc stuff. Like talking about his family and where he comes from might be offensive to some people. It's probably not far from the truth, either. Since Congress passed the Paranormal Acts, there's been no shortage of debate and criticism and backward attitudes around the question of how paranormal beings should integrate into society.

The Bureau is on the forefront of that fight, working to help everyone find their place and smooth the transition. Still, it can't be easy to know that some humans look at

paranormals with scorn and don't want them to be a part of their world.

"It doesn't bother me at all," I tell him. "If you'd like to share, I'd love to hear about it."

Jonah's smile returns. "Alright. Yeah, we can talk about it."

So we do. We talk about the village where he's visiting his family. Set far back into the Appalachian mountains, he tells me how much of a shock it was to move out of the dens once the Acts passed and go to a human college in Chicago before graduating and moving to Seattle.

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“I’m back out here for the week helping my sister and her girlfriend move into their first place together,” he says, and goes on to explain about the orc custom of coming together as a community to help couples move into their first homes.

I tell him about my winding path from a small town in Kansas to college in Denver to making the move to Seattle and starting at the Bureau a couple of years ago.

“I suppose I just ran out of room to keep heading west,” I say with a laugh.

Jonah smiles. “Well, for what it’s worth, I’m really glad we both ended up in the same city.”

“I am, too.”

A slow warmth spreads in my chest as the conversation meanders from there. We talk about some of our favorite spots in the city and all the differences from the small towns where we grew up. We talk about our families, and where we want to go in our careers at the Bureau.

When my eyelids finally start drooping, I belatedly remember he’s in a time zone that’s three hours later than it is here.

“Sorry for keeping you so late,” I tell him. “You must be exhausted.”

Jonah chuckles. “I’d stay up all night talking to you, Susie.”

I can’t help the big goofy smile that spreads across my face, one that’s matched by

his own.

“I can’t wait to see you on Friday,” I say.

“I can’t wait, either. But you should get some sleep. Wouldn’t want you going into work tired tomorrow, especially if you have any expense reports to turn in. I’ve seen what they look like on a good day.”

“Hey!” I protest with a startled laugh. “I try. Numbers just aren’t my forte.”

“Oh, believe me, I’m well-aware.”

I laugh again, shaking my head. “Alright, alright. Goodnight, then.”

“Goodnight, Susie.”

Chapter 9

Jonah

My apartment is clean as it’s ever been, the lights are low, and I’m just about ready to jump out of my skin by the time eight o’clock rolls around on Friday night.

My flight landed a couple hours ago, and I raced back across town to get here and tidy the place up, clean myself up after the long flight, and get dinner ordered and warming in the oven. I’d much rather have cooked something, but between the tight turnaround and my own unsteady nerves, I didn’t trust myself not to make a mess of it.

Not to mention, Susie might not even want dinner.

Maybe it was presumptuous of me to assume she would. Maybe all of this is presumptuous, too much, way out of bounds for a simple hookup.

The thought draws me up short, and a cold sweat breaks out on the back of my neck.

Even though the conversation we had while I was at my parents' place was long and sprawling, we didn't talk about what this is. We didn't make any promises or declare any intentions, and for all I know, Susie's content for it to be what it's been.

Fun. Casual. Simple.

So maybe getting dinner sends the wrong message.

Before I can decide one way or the other, there's a soft knock at my front door.

I cross the room in a few long strides, all tangled thoughts of how badly I might have messed this up forgotten at the prospect of seeing her again in the flesh rather than on the other side of a video call.

And when I finally do? I've got no thoughts at all.

There's nothing but Susie standing—impossibly—in my doorway.

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There's nothing but the pink flush on her cheeks and the uncertain smile on her lips. Nothing but the scent of her—gods, the scent of her—and the soul-deep need to touch her.

“Susie.” I barely recognize my own voice, as husky and pathetically steeped in need for her as it is, but she doesn't seem to mind.

“Hi.” The flush on her cheek deepens. She tucks a strand of hair behind her ear and shifts from one foot to the other, a reminder that I shouldn't keep standing here gawking at her like an idiot.

I step back and gesture her inside, suddenly hyper-aware of my space, trying to see it through her eyes.

Are the lights too low? Is the decor too rustic? Is it too much of a bachelor pad? Would it have been better if I'd offered to come over to her place rather than—

She unzips her jacket, and instinct takes over—apparently the only thing stronger than my debilitating, self-conscious indecision.

“Let me help you with that,” I offer, resting my hands on her shoulders.

Susie relaxes under my touch, leaning into me and drawing a low, unstoppable rumble of pleasure from the depths of my chest.

I don't even have time to wonder if it's another misstep, if I'm going to freak her out by rumbling at her, before the jacket's off and set aside, and my hands land on her

hips, nudging her to turn and face me.

With a slow, delicious smile spreading on her lips, she complies. She raises her arms and loops them around my neck, pressing the full length of her body against mine. Her fingers toy with my hair and that rumble gets louder, more insistent.

Right. This is right.

Susie is right.

The two of us here, together, touching, is right.

The last of my doubts and hesitations and chronic overthinking slides away.

How could I hold on to any of it when I'm here, in Susie's embrace, feeling like some piece of myself I didn't even know was missing has finally, finally slotted into place?

"This has felt like the longest week," she murmurs, fingers still working into my hair and the intoxicating smell of her arousal blooming between us.

"Missed me?" I can't help but tease.

"You have no idea."

"Oh, I think I might be able to guess."

Unable to stop the hunger gnawing a hole in me from the inside out, I dip my mouth to hers. She rises up on her tiptoes to meet me, and the kiss she presses to my lips lights up every nerve ending and every instinct to taste her, to fuck her, to keep her. To hold her and never let her go.

We both groan, a desperate chorus to accompany our grasping hands and straining bodies, like neither of us can be close enough to be satisfied, like this hunger isn't just mine alone. Like this makes just as much sense to her as it does to me.

I run my tongue along the seam of her lips and they part immediately.

Is this only the second time I've had the opportunity to kiss her?

Could have fooled me, because there's something about kissing Susie that feels like years and decades. Like we've done this a hundred times, a thousand, and will do it a thousand more.

I stroke into her slowly, teasing, building, until I can't, until urgency takes over and I plunge into her, plundering, claiming.

Reaching down, I grip Susie's pert, perfect ass and haul her up against me. She wraps her legs around my waist, presses her denim-clad pussy into me and groans.

Fuck, I'm already hard as stone for her.

There's no way she can't feel it with the way I'm holding her. Greedy and insistent, I press against her and she groans again. By the time I walk us over to my sofa and sit, settling Susie against me so she's straddled over my lap, she's rolling her hips on me, grinding into me. She grips my hair harder, leans in, and runs the tip of her little pink tongue over my tusk. I growl and give her ass a light smack, and she yelps in delight.

"Are you still so greedy for me, Susie? Still so impatient?"

Her only reply is another roll of her hips and a whimper, such a desperate, lovely sound that I chase it with my mouth and get to work on removing all the layers between us.

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Jeans removed, Susie settles back over me and I splay my hands wide across her lower back, fingers dipping beneath the waist of her underwear to give her ass another squeeze. Leveraging that grip, I flip our position so she's sprawled across the sofa's cushions, then make myself comfortable between her thighs.

She shifts, makes room for me, and sinking into the cradle of her hips is like the pull of a magnet, natural and inexorable. Her thighs grip me tight, and the mouth-watering scent of her wafts up between us.

I murmur some nonsense about it as I dip my head to taste her skin. I tell her how delicious she is, how incredible she smells, how much I can't wait to have my mouth on her as I sink down, down, down to the slight curve of her stomach and the hem of her sweater.

Susie Grove and her godsdamned sweaters.

I'll be seeing those sweaters in all my dreams and all my fantasies from now until forever. For as long as I live, I'll be seeing those sweaters.

But right now, this one has to go.

I catch the tip of my tusk in the soft fabric, and Susie takes it as an invitation to pull it up and off of her, tossing it aside and leaving her bare except for her panties.

"No bra?" I ask, entirely unable to tear my eyes away from her perfect breasts, her rosy pink nipples catching the lamplight.

“Thought I’d make it easy for you,” she says, breathless.

I chuckle, wondering at the truth of it.

Maybe it always would have been this easy. Maybe if I’d had the courage and taken the initiative, we could have had this for years already.

But there’s no time to dwell on it now. Not when Susie Grove is all but naked in my apartment, and not when her lips are parted so prettily, just begging for another kiss.

I give her that kiss, and a few more as I work my way down the delicate lines of her throat, over the fluttering pulse point right at the base of it, over the dip of her collarbones.

Her skin is just as sweet as I imagined it would be. Lips fastened around one taut nipple, I suck and lick and nip at her until she’s crying out again, until she’s arching into me and tugging at my hair. Wild, writhing, heart pounding fast in her chest, I lavish attention on one breast, then the other, working her near to a frenzy before continuing toward my destination.

“I’ve been thinking about this since last time, how much I want to taste you,” I murmur, toying with the waist of her underwear. “Are you going to let me, Susie?”

Her fingers fist in my hair, urging me lower, and it’s all the answer I need.

But as much as I want to rip this little scrap of lace off her and bury myself between her thighs, I’m already too close. The muscles low in my abdomen ripple and tighten, my balls ache, and I thrust into the cushions a couple of times just to get a bit of relief.

Gods above, I’m going to come in my pants if I’m not careful. One good taste of

Susie and I'm done for.

Catching my tusks in the elastic at her waist, I give it a gentle snap, and she gasps and squirms. I take a moment to study her, to admire the sight of her pretty pussy covered in delicate black lace and commit it to memory, searing it into my mind.

I lick her over the panties, cover her with my mouth and suck.

"Lace," I taunt, running my tongue up her slit over the fabric. "How did you know lace was my favorite?"

"Lucky guess," she gasps, and I must not be doing my job right if she's still coherent enough to form words.

I slip her panties off and toss them aside. My mouth waters, and every instinct I have is screaming at me to lean back in and get a real taste of her, but I can't resist pausing to look.

Gripping her thighs, I spread Susie open for me. A gorgeous flush blooms on her cheeks, races down her neck and stains her chest until she's nearly glowing with it.

"Just so pretty and pink for me everywhere, aren't you?"

I barely recognize the words coming out of my mouth, barely recognize the person I become when I have her like this.

Raw and instinctual, the pull that hasn't left me since last Friday at the Bureau.

Gods, has it only been a week?

It feels like this hunger has lived in me for years. And maybe it has—dormant,

waiting for me to find the courage to do something about it.

And now that she's here, now that I've found that courage, I can't wait any longer.
Can't wait to taste her. To devour her.

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I lean in and tease her swollen clit with the side of my tusk. Gently, and remaining mindful of the pointed tip, I rub it over her, make her moan and grasp me harder before I finally get my tongue on her.

A taste isn't enough. I need to be inside of her, to learn the shape and the feel of her, to know exactly how she likes it.

I spear my tongue into her, plunge as deep as I can, and stroke forward. Susie cries out and tugs me closer, presses that sweet pussy against me and grinds. I rumble my approval into her and she moans again, soaking my face with her arousal.

I could do this forever. The taste of Susie Grove on my tongue could sustain me for a lifetime, and I'd gladly spend the rest of my days right here, licking her, listening to all the sweet sounds she's making and knowing I'm the one who's bringing her pleasure.

But my little human might not have that long.

Her muscles tense, her cries grow more urgent, and her tight channel squeezes hard around my tongue. I pull back, and her hands scramble for purchase in my hair, desperate to bring me back.

"Not so fast," I admonish, delighting in the quiver that runs through her. "You're going to give me at least twenty minutes of this."

She bites at her lip and gives me a shaky nod, but as soon as I lower myself back to her, I know it's a lost cause.

And fine, we'll get this first one over quick so she can give me a few more.

Tongue at her clit, I ease one finger inside her, then two. She's slick and hot with her arousal, but it's still not an easy fit. When I glance up, though, there's not a bit of discomfort on her face. Her head's thrown back, mouth parted on a gasp, face flushed and eyes squeezed shut as she rides my hand, chases her pleasure, tightens and tightens around me until she shatters.

I stay with her through every spasm of her climax, lick and suck at her until she slumps back against the couch cushions.

"Again, Susie," I command, nipping her thigh with my tusks. "I'm not done yet."

Despite her boneless pleasure, a little smile turns up the corners of her lips, and my heart might burst at the sight. Gods I love playing with her like this, love seeing her respond to this side of my nature that I didn't even know existed, love the sweet little grumble of protest she makes even as she buries her hands in my hair and drags my face back to her pussy.

Just as she's coming down from the tremors of her second climax, I finally relent, shifting myself back up onto the couch and pulling her over me.

Straddled over my hips again, Susie's hands find the waistband of my jeans immediately. Making quick work of the button and zipper, she shoves them roughly down over my hips, revealing her prize.

Fuck, the sound she makes when she finally has me bare.

A strangled little gasp of surprise, of delight, accompanied by a widening of her eyes and her mouth falling open on a gasp.

She takes me in hand, and that gasp turns into a wicked smile.

Susie must have taken a few pointers from watching me stroke myself on our video call, because there's nothing gentle about the way she tightens her grip and tugs.

My breath hisses through my teeth. "Fuck. Yes. Just like that."

She strokes me once, twice, again, and the devious, satisfied expression on her face is the last thing I see before my head drops back against the sofa.

"Your shirt," she says, dragging her teeth over my throat. "Take it off."

I freeze.

A bucket of cold water over my head couldn't have done more to jerk me right out of the moment than those words and the light tugging grip she has on the bottom of my shirt.

My throat tightens, and all my muscles bunch with the immediate need to get up, leave the room, put some space between us.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

This is exactly what I didn't want to happen.

This same old tired need to cover myself, to make myself invisible, to hide.

I drag a breath in through my nose and make myself meet Susie's eye.

And the worry I find there, the uncertain frown that's replaced all the beautiful lust she was wearing just a few seconds ago, sends my stomach plummeting right down to

my feet.

Chapter 10

Susie

For the first time since he helped me off with my coat, Jonah hesitates. It's slight, but impossible to miss. His body tenses, and when I lean back to look at him, his expression is blank and guarded.

"I'd rather leave it on."

It takes my sex-mad brain a few moments to catch the full weight of his discomfort, and my heart sinks. He's clearly not comfortable with what I just asked of him, and even if I don't know why, I wish I could take it back.

"O-oh," I stutter. "That's alright. Sorry, I didn't mean to push you. If you're not comfortable with it, that's fine."

He lets out a harsh breath. "Don't be sorry. It's my own hangup."

A heavy pit settles into the bottom of my stomach. I withdraw my hand.

I don't know what to do, what to say, how to dispel this awkward tension.

How badly did I just fuck up? It drives home the fact that I don't know Jonah, not really, and the idea that I might have just crossed some big red line of a boundary for him makes me feel awful.

“It’s just... I’ve just...” He starts and stops a couple times, like he’s trying to think how to explain.

“It’s okay,” I say quickly, stomach sinking even lower as I watch his face fall.

Jonah shakes his head. “No, I want to tell you. I... I’ve lost some weight over the past couple of years, and I’m not really comfortable being naked. Around other people, I mean.”

He’s lost weight? I run through my memories of him and yeah, I guess I can see it. I’ve always found him so damned attractive that it didn’t really register with me that his body was changing, but he’s definitely leaner now than he was the first time I saw him.

Suddenly those baggy khakis make sense.

So does the way he pulled my hand away when I was playing with his clothes in my apartment, and the way he zeroed in on my hands when I grabbed his shirt at work.

“It’s alright,” I assure him. “We don’t have to do anything you’re not comfortable with.”

He shakes his head again. “I want to. With you... I... I don’t want to let it be something I’m self-conscious about.”

Without waiting for me to say anything else, he reaches down and pulls his shirt up over his head, tossing it aside and letting out a short, tense breath.

He’s got a great body.

Sure, his skin hangs a little loose over his chest and stomach, but it’s not something

that bothers me in the slightest. He's clearly put in a lot of work, if the muscles beneath that skin are any indication. It's probably not something I would have even noticed, and definitely not anything I would have commented on or been turned off by if he hadn't said anything.

Still, he was brave enough to share that insecurity with me, and I don't want to take it lightly.

"Can I touch you here?" I ask him, hand hovering over his bare chest, and he gives me a jerky nod.

Jonah's skin is warm and covered with a thick mat of coarse black hair. The muscles in his chest bunch and shift as I run my hands over him, and when I lean in to trace my lips along the path my hands have made, his breath catches in his throat.

"It doesn't turn you off?" he asks. "Me being insecure like this?"

I pull back slightly and give him a wry smile. "Not at all. It's not like I don't have my own insecurities, too."

The look he gives me is wide-eyed, disbelieving, and so adorable that I laugh out loud.

"You seem so confident. This whole time, you've been so damned sexy in going after what you want. Making the first move when you invited me over."

"Yeah," I say, laughing again. "Sure. After crushing on you for like two years and not doing a thing about it."

I didn't mean to make that particular confession tonight, and a second after it slips out of my mouth, I realize what I've done. Cheeks burning, I wait for Jonah to look

uncomfortable or horrified at the realization of just how long I've been pining for him, but all I see is a slow, pleased smile breaking over his face.

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“Two years, huh? So, since right after you started at the Bureau?”

I bury my face in his neck. “You remember when I started?”

“Of course I do. I’ll never forget it. The first time I saw you, coming around with Yvette for introductions, you had on one of your sweaters and a little black skirt. I’m pretty sure I forgot my own name when she introduced you to us all.”

I remember that day. It was my second day at the Bureau and Yvette, my boss, had walked me around to the other departments to meet everyone.

It had been the first day I’d noticed Jonah, too.

Where I’ve still got my face pressed to his neck, I smile against his skin. “We’re a mess, aren’t we? What if we’d both just gone for it?”

Jonah laughs and threads his hands into my hair, tipping my head back so he can meet my gaze. “Who knows? But what I do know is that I’m so happy to be here with you now.”

“Me too. And besides, I’ve felt like you were the confident one this whole time. Telling me what to do. Talking to me like you do.”

His eyes and tone darken. “How do I talk to you?”

“Praising me,” I whisper. “Telling me what you like about my body. Telling me what you want from me.”

“You like that?”

“I love it,” I say, and kiss him.

As soon as my lips touch his, the Jonah from ten minutes ago comes right back. Demanding, bossy even when he’s not saying anything, taking the kiss over immediately as he uses one arm to pull me flush against him and fists his other hand in my hair, angling me so he can kiss me deeper.

His erection flagged a little during our conversation, but it comes roaring back to stiff, insistent life as soon as I’m touching him, kissing him, grinding my pussy down on his lap, searching for the friction I need. Without breaking our kiss, Jonah shifts his hips and shimmies his pants and boxer-briefs down his legs, kicking them aside.

Instead of pushing inside, though, his hand finds my pussy. He eases two big fingers into me, spreading them a little, stretching me.

“Have to make sure you’re ready for me,” he murmurs against my lips, thrusting them into me again. “I don’t want to hurt you, Susie.”

“You won’t,” I gasp, even as a small thrill of nerves runs through me.

Will this be... okay?

I can’t imagine it won’t be, and I know Jonah would never intentionally hurt me, but he’s still... well, he’s still fucking enormous, and I still don’t know how I’m going to take... all of that.

My mind whirls, wondering how we can make this good for each other, how we’ll fit together, how—

“Come back to me,” he whispers. “Wherever you’re at in that head of yours, come back to me, Susie.”

I huff out a shaky laugh. “I’m right here.”

“Yes.” An achingly gentle kiss against my lips, a third finger wedged inside of me. “You are. You’re right here, and I’ve never been more damn grateful for anything.”

I melt into those sweet words, relax into him as much as I can, and the more he eases me open, the more I believe we can make this work.

Of course we can make this work.

He’s Jonah Greenwood. My orc from accounting. The guy I’ve been waiting for these last two years. A silly, impossible crush finally made into something real.

“Do you think you’re ready for me?” he asks a few minutes later when I’m soft and wet and aching for him. “Do you want to try this?”

He pulls his fingers from my pussy, licks them clean, and the noise that comes out of my throat is thready and hoarse and needy.

“Yes. I’m ready.”

Jonah drives his hips up into me, running his cock over my clit and spreading my wetness on himself. I grind right back into him, but when the head of his cock brushes against my entrance, a small sliver of sanity returns.

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“Condom?” I ask, breathless.

“I’m dormant. I take a birth control which makes it impossible for me to get anyone pregnant.”

“Okay. I do too. Take birth control, I mean. A human one.”

He flashes me a grin. “And the last time I checked, there isn’t any crossover between human and orc STIs, but I’ve also been tested recently and I’m good.”

“So am I.”

He runs his cock over me again. “Whatever you’re comfortable with, we can do.”

A strangled noise works its way out of my throat when he notches himself against me, dipping just inside, and fuck it anyway. I want him. All of him.

“This is good,” I breathe, meeting his thrust. “I’m alright with this.”

With a satisfied growl, Jonah tucks both his hands under my ass and stands, carrying me from the living room down a short hallway and into his bedroom. I crane my head around to get a look, and this space is even cozier than the rest of his apartment. An enormous bed takes up much of the room, piled high with blankets and furs. The walls are painted a deep, mossy green, and all the furniture is made of dark wood. It feels close and intimate, a little slice of privacy where we might be the only two people in the world.

Instead of heading for the bed, he carries me to a wide, plush armchair in the corner and sits so I'm straddled across his thighs again. From a small side table next to the chair, he pulls out a bottle of lube and squeezes some into his hand before stroking it up and down his shaft. Even with as wet as I am and how ready he made me, I appreciate the foresight. I've never been with anyone nearly as big as Jonah, and even though I'm more than eager to hop on and go for a ride, I'm still a little nervous about the mechanics of it all.

Setting the lube aside, Jonah palms my ass and shifts me up to hover over his cock.

"We're going to take this slow," he says, notching himself at my entrance again. "And you're going to tell me if you're uncomfortable or if anything doesn't feel right."

It's not a question, but I nod anyway as I shift my hips, making more room for him. He leans in to kiss me, then grabs one of my hands and brings it down to grasp his cock.

"Guide me into you, Susie," he whispers roughly against my lips. "You take just as much of me as you want to."

Even the stretch of his cock's broad head is... a lot. He's barely inside me, and I have to pause and let my body adjust before lowering myself another inch.

Jonah's breath hisses between his teeth. "Fuck, Susie. Just... fuck."

"Good?"

"Incredible. You're incredible."

He holds me steady as I take another inch, and then another. The position he chose is

perfect for this, and though I can feel the tense strain of his thigh muscles between my own, and the slight tremors that rock his whole frame as I keep working myself down on him, he doesn't thrust or move a single inch, letting me take my time.

Bracing my hands on his shoulders, I lower even further, working myself down on him until our thighs are flush together and I'm stretched wider than I've ever been. There's still a slight sting to that stretch, and I work to relax into it, relax into him.

I drop my face to his chest, breathing hard even though we're not moving yet, and Jonah reaches up to thread his hands through my hair, tipping my face up. His expression is creased with concern, and I lean in to kiss all those worries away.

"It's good," I say, not really sure I can put my thoughts into coherent sentences right now, but wanting to reassure him, anyway. "You feel so good."

I raise up a little, testing the feel of him inside of me before sinking back down, and we both groan. I do it again, and again, letting my body soften for him until the slight sting recedes and all that's left is fullness and heat.

Leaning back, I brace my palms on his thighs and arch my back. Slowly, I rock my hips, finding a rhythm that feels right. When I glance at Jonah, his eyes are fixed on the spot where we're joined, watching himself move in and out of me with rapt focus on his face. Like he can feel my attention on him, his gaze snaps up to meet mine, and the fires burning in his hazel eyes send a shock of pure lust through me.

It's lust that only kindles the blaze between us higher as I pick up my pace, and Jonah moves one hand between our joined bodies, thumb pressing against my clit to work me in slow, firm circles. My nails dig into the muscles of his thighs and I revel in the strength and the size of him as I move.

"Just like that," Jonah grates out. "You're taking me so well, Susie."

His deep, rough voice delivering that reverent praise, the firm command of his hand, the impossible fullness of his cock in me—all of it has me spiraling higher, tightening, panting and crying out as my climax builds almost to the point of pain.

It breaks over me in waves of pleasure, intense enough to make my muscles go lax and my torso slump, but Jonah's right there. He bands an arm around my back and pulls me into him, keeping our bodies pressed together as I come apart on top of him.

I'm trembling with the last pulses of my orgasm when he stands, still buried in me, and carries me to the bed. Jonah lays me down on the pile of soft furs and starts thrusting in me again. Heavy, deep, and slow, he murmurs to me while he moves—telling me how fucking sexy I am when I come, how good I feel on his cock, how he wants one more orgasm out of me before he fills me up with his come.

I arch to meet his thrusts and toss my head back onto the furs. I can't. I don't have another one in me. A string of garbled words is coming out of my mouth, sounds of pleasure and pleas for mercy, but Jonah's not having it for a moment.

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“One more, baby. Give me one more.”

Baby. The word is so painfully tender in his gruff voice, and I feel the improbable, impossible stirrings of another climax building deep in my core. Jonah shifts us again so we're on our sides, facing each other, and hitches one of my legs up over his hip before reaching down to stroke my clit.

His other hand cradles the back of my head, pulling me into him until our foreheads are touching and our lips bump over each other in uncoordinated not-quite-kisses. We're both panting, straining, bucking and grinding against each other in a deliciously messy, graceless rut.

Jonah's face is screwed up in an expression I might almost think was pain if I didn't know better, and his muscles tense and quiver with the strain of holding back his release. It's hot, so fucking hot to see him undone like this, and it pushes me higher, cracks and fractures me until I fall off that edge again and spasm around him, coming with a strangled scream.

He follows me a moment later, thrusting deep and spilling into me. Burying his face in my shoulder, he bites down lightly, groaning and shuddering with the force of his orgasm.

We stay like that for a few long minutes, breathing hard and coming back down to earth. When he finally pulls back, he's got a dreamy, dazed expression on his face.

“I'll be right back,” he whispers, brushing his lips against my forehead as he pulls out of me with an audibly wet slide that makes me whimper in over-stimulated pleasure.

When he returns, he has a warm, damp washcloth he uses to clean me up. Tossing it aside, he climbs back into bed, pulls a soft fur over us both, and tucks me into his side. I nestle into him, press my face into his chest, and his satisfied sigh puts a smile on my lips.

Still, as the silent minutes tick by, a bit of uncertainty creeps in.

Through everything we've shared and everything that's happened over the last week, we haven't really talked about this, haven't talked about what we're doing. As much as I don't want to bring it up and spoil the moment, this feels like... a lot. Being here with him like this, cuddled up, hearts beating in sync, basking in the afterglow.

It feels a hell of a lot more intimate than a friends with benefits or hookup situation should be, but what do I know? And even though it might just be me over-thinking it, a sense of certainty settles in my mind with each passing second.

I can't do casual with Jonah.

Not after what we just shared. Not after this entire week of pining over him and getting to know him and realizing just how wonderful he is. It makes my gut twist to think he might want a no-strings arrangement, but I also know going any further with him and finding that out later would hurt so, so much worse.

I have to rip the bandage off. I have to know.

"Are you..." I say, and almost lose my nerve. Gathering my courage, I press on. "Do you see this... us... going anywhere other than... this? A hookup?"

Jonah props himself up on an elbow and looks at me with a soft smile on his lips. "I want so much more than this, Susie."

A small, mellow glow spreads from the center of my chest.

“I mean,” he quickly corrects. “This is great. This is so much more than I ever expected. But I’d also like to date you. I’d like to see what this can be.”

All that uncertainty disappears in a sparkle of warm, fizzy joy, and I grin up at him.

“Is that... is that what you want, too?”

“Of course it is,” I tell him, throwing myself into his embrace and kissing the hell out of him.

When we come up for air, we’re both smiling like love-struck fools. Which, fair, maybe that’s what we are, and when I kiss my orc again, it’s with all the promise and hope in the world.

Chapter 11

Jonah

I’ve never tasted anything as sweet as Susie Grove.

If I thought she was delicious before, she’s even sweeter now that we’re both on the same page, now that we’ve agreed that this is going somewhere, really going somewhere.

Any doubts I’d still been holding onto and any reservations lingering in the back of my mind disappear completely. There’s only this. Only her and the impossibly heady sense of triumph at the confirmation that she wants this, too—wants me, wants us.

I deepen the kiss, devouring her breathy moan and answering it with a growl, body

roaring back to life after our brief rest.

Our kiss is interrupted, however, by the sound of Susie's stomach rumbling.

A low, unhappy grumble lodges itself in the back of my throat. "I'm sorry, I should have gotten you something for dinner before we—"

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She interrupts me with a laugh, shaking her head as she pulls away. “I think we’re both to blame for that.”

She’s not wrong, but it still doesn’t sit right with me that she came here, to my home, and I didn’t have the decency to slow down and be a good host.

Susie sits up in bed, holding the sheet to her chest, and smiles down at me. “I don’t really, uh, feel like going out anywhere. Not after... all of that. Maybe we could order something in?”

A gorgeous blush climbs her cheeks.

“All of that?” I can’t help but tease her, a shot of desire pounding through me when I remember how well she’s always responded to a bit of sensual taunting, a reminder of the earthy, carnal connection we share and how I never want her to shy away from it. “You mean, after how well you took my cock? How rough you let me fuck you?”

She swallows hard. “Yeah, that.” That blush of hers deepens, the scent of her arousal blooms, but she shakes her head. “And since I’m not sure I’m going to be able to wait long for round two, maybe we could—”

“I... I’ve got dinner,” I mutter, feeling the creep of a blush on my own cheeks, the reminder that I still need to properly care for her, and shove all thoughts of round two aside. “I was planning to make this an actual date. You know, before you jumped me and derailed those plans.”

I’m not sure where the embarrassment is still coming from, this deep desire to be

earnest and affectionate and caring with her, to make myself vulnerable with her when I'm so out of practice.

Any momentary discomfort evaporates in a second, though, when a wide, beautiful grin spreads across her lips.

"That sounds wonderful."

We end up back in my living room, cuddled together on the couch with our empty plates on the coffee table after we polished off our servings of the pasta I ordered before she came over.

Susie's wearing the shirt I had on earlier, and I didn't bother grabbing another one, opting instead to pull on a pair of sweats and call it good. It leaves me bare-chested, and though a few faint stirrings of that same old shame and the self-conscious urge to cover up still threaten to creep back in, I manage to keep them at bay.

It's not all that hard to do, especially when Susie nestles into me and lays her cheek against my chest, brushing little kisses against my skin and letting out a happy, contented sigh when I wrap my arm around her and pull her close.

We talk about my trip home and her week at the Bureau. We make plans to go see a movie this week. It's easy and natural and effortless, the exhale of the breath I've been holding for two years.

Even though it's just the beginning and we still barely know each other, all things considered, something about it also feels... permanent. Like this night could be happening right now or next month or ten years from now.

Not that I want to hurry us up or miss any of the getting to know her along the way. I don't want to take a single second for granted.

Especially when Susie shifts against me, and I glance down into the open vee of my shirt's collar—the one she oh-so-helpfully left unbuttoned down to the tops of her breasts. I shift, too, suddenly and painfully aware of the heat of her body against mine, the press of her cheek where it rests against my chest, the slight swell of her tits against my side, and the way the shirt has ridden up to the tops of her thighs.

She glances down at my lap and lets out an amused little snort.

“What?” I ask.

“You knew what you were doing, didn't you?”

I don't know what to make of the question or of her raised, teasing brow, at least not until I follow her gaze down to my lap. The gray sweats I'm wearing aren't doing a whole hell of a lot to disguise the half-erection I've been sporting ever since we sat down and she scooted up next to me, quickly moving into full-erection territory.

I might be embarrassed about it, if it weren't for the way Susie's eyes have gone all half-hooded and hungry, mischievous as her fingers drift from my knee to my thigh, higher, brushing against the ridge of my cock. A strangled groan catches in the back of my throat as her grip tightens and she strokes me once, twice, glancing up from under lowered lashes to watch herself unravel me.

“Fuck, baby,” I breathe, eyes drifting shut. “That feels so...”

My words trail off when I realize her teasing strokes have stopped. I peel my eyes open and find her looking at me, gaze widened with surprise, a blush spreading up her cheeks.

“What?” I ask, stomach dropping.

“Baby,” she whispers, then shakes her head. “I…”

Shit.

It was really weird to just drop a nickname on her, wasn't it? I think I said it while I was fucking her, too, though it's pretty damn hard to remember anything I might have inadvertently let slip while I had my cock in her.

I immediately try to backtrack. “Don't like it? I won't call you that if—”

She shakes her head again, more adamant this time as that impossibly adorable blush continues to stain her cheeks and neck.

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“I like it.”

Fuck, I love the sound of that little whisper. Almost as much as I like the way she looks so damn flustered, her bottom lip caught between her teeth and the scent of her arousal rising heady and delicious between us.

“Yeah?” I grip her hips and tug her over me until she’s straddled across my lap, holding her in place while I grind up into her. “You like it when I call you baby?”

“Yes,” she gasps, winding her arms around my neck and pressing her blunt little teeth into the side of my throat.

“Good,” I rumble, a deep, satisfied pleasure spreading through me. “Then tell me what you want, baby.”

Susie doesn’t answer right away.

She rolls her hips against me, and when the shirt slides a little higher on her hips, I realize she never put her underwear back on. Entirely bare except for my clothing, that satisfaction spikes deeper, harder as she grinds her bare pussy into my sweat-clad lap.

I’m fully fucking hard now—beyond hard, really, out of my damn mind for her and ready to toss her down on the sofa and lose myself in her—and with each roll of her hips and each bite and kiss and suck against my neck, my control gets thinner. Stretched to its limit, I bury a hand in her hair and tip her head back gently to meet my eye.

“Tell me what you want, Susie.”

As much as I'd love to fuck her again, and even though she teased me earlier about going for round two, I know I'm not... small, and I know she might be sore or need some time to rest. I won't push her for anything she doesn't want or anything that feels less than incredible for her.

But Susie, who I'm beginning to strongly suspect will never cease to surprise me, surges forward and catches my lips in a deep kiss before pulling back, breathless.

“I want your cock.”

Well. I guess that answers that.

“You sure?” I ask, needing full confirmation she's alright with it. “We don't have to. If you're sore from earlier, or if you'd rather wait and—”

She cuts off my words with a kiss, biting at my bottom lip as she pulls back.

“I'm sure.”

Keeping her firmly held against me, I stand from the couch, devouring her squeak of surprise as she wraps her legs around my hips. I walk us back into the bedroom, carrying her to the bed and pressing her into the mattress, letting her feel the weight and the length of me.

But apparently she's got other ideas.

With a firm hand against my chest, she silently orders me off her. I comply, letting her lead as she eases me back onto the bed. Her hands find the waistband of my sweats and I respond immediately, helping her slide them off me. Heart in my throat,

I lean up on my elbows so I can get a better look.

Susie kneels between my thighs and wraps a hand around my cock, giving me a few experimental strokes with a teasing, satisfied smile turning up the corners of her lips. She leans over me, the ends of her hair brushing against my bare thighs in a light caress that sends a shiver of pleasure and anticipation through me. When her tongue swipes over the head of me, lapping at the drop of precome poised right on the tip, I bite back a curse and can barely stop myself from thrusting into her hot, eager mouth.

Like she knows exactly what she's doing to me, how crazed she's making me, Susie glances up from under lowered lashes—that smile of hers even sharper—before her full lips wrap around the head of my cock.

This time, there's nothing I can do to stop my strangled moan or keep myself from reaching a hand up to tangle in her silk-soft hair as she works me into her mouth. She closes her lips around me and sucks, and my grip tightens, pulling a low hum of pleasure from the back of her throat.

I chase the sound, arching my hips up and nudging her forward, sliding deeper inside of her. I watch her beautiful face for any sign of discomfort, and when she pulls back with a gasp, I release my hold on her.

“Too much?”

She huffs a soft laugh, running a hand over her jaw. “We're... we're probably going to have to work on that a little.”

My cock and my chest both ache with the idea of working on it, of taking our time and learning each other, of having that time together.

I nod, reaching for her. “That's alright, it can wait for another—”

“Jonah,” Susie says, arching a brow. “Just because I can’t quite deep throat that monster cock of yours doesn’t mean I want to stop.”

Fuck. I feel a flush rising on my cheeks, both at her filthy compliment and at the look in her eyes as she leans back over me.

“I can take you like this,” she murmurs, gripping me tightly with one hand and lowering her mouth. “You like it a little hard, right?”

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Another strangled curse is the only reply I can manage, but she takes it for theyesit's meant to be as she squeezes me even harder and parts her lips.

Susie works me just like that—one hand around my shaft, the other dragging over my thigh, then up to cup my balls and give them a gentle tug. Her mouth is utter fucking sin on me, tongue pressed to the sensitive spot on my frenulum, over the head of my cock to lap at the precome flowing freely, moving in tandem with her hand as she learns just how to make me fall apart.

When I feel myself tipping perilously close to that edge, I tangle my hand in her hair again and tug gently. Susie catches my meaning immediately and pulls off of me with a satisfied smirk, panting a little and looking terribly, ruinously pleased with herself.

It fans the flames in me even higher, makes me greedy with her as I grab her around the waist and flip her over so she's on her back on the mattress.

I make a move to crawl back over her, press myself into her, and sink into all the incredible warmth and softness of her, but she lays a hand against my chest. She pushes me back softly, and I follow the wordless command, kneeling on the bed.

Then she turns over.

She pushes up to her hands and knees, putting her perfect, pert ass on full display.

“Susie,” I growl, barely in control of myself. “What are you—”

Susie, the vixen that she is, just gives me a cheeky little glance back over her

shoulder, one brow raised in a challenge.

Gods, the sight of her like this does something to me.

Something deep and primal tugs on all my instincts to claim her, to keep her, to mark her and cherish her for the rest of my days.

I grip her ass with both hands and press firmly with my thumbs, spreading her open to get a better view.

Her glistening, delicious cunt is pink and still slightly swollen from taking my cock, slick with my release and her arousal. Shifting my grip, I run a thumb over that impossibly erotic sight, push a couple of inches into her.

Susie gasps, and I still my hand.

“Sore?”

She immediately shakes her head, then huffs a laugh. “No. Well, I mean... a little. But it’s... good. It feels good.”

“Just good?” I tease, resuming my light, stroking touches, pushing back inside with the tip of my thumb until she gasps again.

“Jonah.”

My name on her lips in that breathless, desperate tone is nearly my undoing. I drop my hand and replace it with my cock, breaching her entrance in a tentative press, watching and listening for any sign it’s too much.

I find none.

All I find is more of that eagerness, more of that hunger as she presses her hips back against mine, taking another couple of inches.

But when her breath hitches again, I grip her hips firmly, holding us both in check.

“Baby,” I whisper, reaching, grasping, clawing for restraint.

“Don’t—stop—” Susie grinds out.

Her head drops between her shoulders, and then her arms go lax, her upper body collapsing into the mattress as she pants and groans.

“Susie,” I try again, worried it’s too much for her.

But when she turns her head enough to look back at me, there’s nothing but more of that wicked, tender teasing in her eyes, in the challenging smile that turns up the corners of her lips.

“Jonah, if you don’t hurry up and fuck me again, I swear that I’m going to—”

I lean my full bulk over her, cutting off her words in another sharp gasp when I run my tusks over the hot, damp side of her throat, pausing to whisper into the skin just below her ear.

“You’ll tell me,” I remind her. “If anything doesn’t feel good for you, you’ll tell me.”

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“Yes,” Susie cries, already trying to wedge herself back further onto my cock, the tempting little creature.

“And you’ll let me set the pace.”

If I let her have her way, she’ll run us both ragged and this will be over in seconds.

That won’t do.

I’ll savor my beautiful, sweet Susie in my own time, and she’ll just have to deal with it.

“Jonah,” she protests, and I grip her hips tighter to stop her wiggling.

But I’m not without mercy.

As much as I like the feeling of being pressed over her, I can’t deny the instinct pulsing in me. It’s an instinct that wants to watch, that wants to see my cock disappearing into her, see the way I claim her, see how her body yields so sweetly to me.

Leaning back with her hips still firmly held, I admire the picture before me.

Susie, spread and glistening, the tip of my cock already stretching her wide. The soft curve of her ass and the slope of her back, damp with sweat as her panting moans echo through the room.

I work myself inside her in a series of short, shallow thrusts, letting her adjust to my size.

Well, that, and teasing her into a lather, making her squirm and moan and beg so prettily. She jerks her hips again, trying to get more friction, and a sharp growl breaks in my chest. I draw back my hand and bring it down on her ass in a firm spank. Not too hard, but enough to let her know who's in charge here.

“Fuck,” Susie groans, the sound filled with pleasure.

The sight of blooming pink on the pale skin of her ass makes me somehow, impossibly, harder where I'm buried in her, and all of it draws on that deep, primal instinct to have her, to claim her, to keep her.

Gods, I didn't know I had it in me. This side of me is entirely new and yet completely natural, like it's always been there, just waiting for her to bring it out.

I draw myself out almost to the tip, then sink back in. I'm coated in her, glistening with her, and the easy slide and delicious stretch has her groaning again, arching, surrendering to the pace I set.

I bounce Susie off me as I thrust, balls slapping against her clit, my fingers making divots on her hips and her sweet moans filling the air between us. When I feel the first tightening spasms of an orgasm threatening, I drop a hand between her thighs and find her clit, rolling it beneath my middle two fingers.

It's enough to detonate her, and as she squeezes around me in climax, I'm done for, too. I spill into her with a shout, collapsing above her with my hands planted on the mattress, heaving chest against her back, emptying myself of everything I have to give.

When I'm finally able to form a coherent thought again, I pull out of her, a deep, satisfied rumble lodged in my chest at the mess I've made of her. Wet and swollen and dripping with me, I look for a few long, indulgent moments before getting a new cloth to clean her up.

"I'm going to pay you back for that," she murmurs once we're curled back up together, voice heavy with sleep, eyes already closed. "Next time, I'll be the one giving the orders."

"Yes, ma'am," I murmur back, cock twitching at the prospect.

I can't wait to see what she'll do to get me on my knees, how she'll take advantage of me while I'm there.

Susie nuzzles closer, one hand spread over my heart and her head tucked up against my chin. It's late, and even as sleep tugs at my own eyes, I fight it.

I want to savor as much of this incredible day as I can.

Every minute, every second, I don't want to miss a single one.

Because, as I finally drift off a few minutes later, I already know it's the first of the rest of my life. Here, now, with my Susie curled against me, it's just the beginning.

Chapter 12

Susie

Being called into a meeting with Human Resources always feels like I've been sent to the principal's office.

Sure, both Jonah and I are to blame for asking for this meeting, and by the tenor of the conversation so far it doesn't seem like we're about to be fired, but I'm still nervous. I'm squirming a little in my chair, and Jonah reaches over to put his big hand on my knee, anchoring me and calming me down.

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Yolanda, the HR rep we're speaking with, shuffles through the papers in front of her.

"Well," she says when she finally looks up from the stack. "You're not in the same department, so that takes care of concerns about favoritism, or any issues with chain of command or managing subordinates."

An image flashes through my mind of Jonah on his knees, waiting for me to tell him exactly what I want him to do to me, sunlight streaming in through the open window of my bedroom this past weekend.

Managing subordinates, indeed.

Out of the corner of my eye, I see Jonah's nostrils flare, and the hand he has on my knee tightens.

It's only been a few weeks, but I've got it bad for my orc. And based on the absurd amount of time we're already spending together—both in bed and out of it—it's easy to guess he's got it bad for me, too.

Still, it's not the place or time for me to be thinking about that, and I snap my mind out of the gutter.

"No, none of that should be a problem," I say.

"Unless I have to approve any of her atrociously inaccurate expense reports," Jonah chimes in.

“Hey!” I protest. “I always include my receipts, don’t I?”

“Yes. Whether those receipts have anything to do with what ends up being entered into the report is another matter entirely.”

I’m about to retort and tell him just where he can enter that report, when Yolanda clears her throat. We both look at her sheepishly.

“We’ll see that another accountant is assigned to her reports,” she says in a flat monotone.

Beside me, I think I hear Jonah mutter something like thank god for that under his breath, and I elbow him in the ribs for good measure.

We get our papers signed and one last warning about the Bureau’s policy for public displays of affection before walking out of Yolanda’s office free and clear to date and keep our jobs at the Bureau.

It’s another Friday afternoon, and an entire weekend together stretches out in front of us. We’re having drinks after work with a few of our coworkers who could totally guess something was going on before we ever fessed up, then spending as much time as we can just being together. Simple, uncomplicated, perfect.

“Well,” Jonah says after we’ve both grabbed our stuff from our desks and head into the elevator. “That went better than I expected.”

“What did you expect?” I ask, pushing the button for the lobby. “Doom and gloom and our walking papers?”

He laughs, stepping toward me and backing me up against the far wall of the elevator. “I don’t know. Maybe a sterner warning. A reminder not to accost you in any supply

closets.”

“Or ogle you in any accounts payable meetings,” I add, reaching up to loop my arms around his neck.

He kisses me, soft and slow, until the elevator doors ding and we step out into the lobby.

The sun is shining and the spring air smells sweet as I take Jonah’s hand and walk out the Bureau’s front door with my orc from Accounting.

Epilogue

Jonah - One Year Later

“Is that the last of it?”

Gemma sets down a heavy box of books in the middle of the condo Susie and I signed on late last week, then dramatically wipes the back of her hand over her brow. “Your stuff’s heavy as hell. What do you have in here, bricks?”

“Hey now, did I give you shit about that armoire you made me move for you and Kasey?”

“Yeah, you totally did.”

I grab a soda from the fridge and toss it to her. “I think your memory is going. I was nothing but happy to help you move.”

“Sure you were,” she says, rolling her eyes as she sinks down onto the sofa.

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My folks, Gemma, and Kasey have been in town all weekend helping Susie and me move into our new place. Susie's parents were here yesterday, too, and while it might not be quite the same as having the entire clan pitching in, it's meant the world to both of us.

We're nearly wrapped up with moving everything in, and though we'll no doubt be spending the next few weeks putting everything just where we want it, the place already feels likehome. A little haven to start the next chapter of our lives together.

Right on cue, Susie, Kasey and my parents walk through the front door carrying their own last boxes, setting them down with definitive, satisfied thuds.

And that's it, we're moved in.

Dad slings an arm around Susie's shoulder. "You two will take care of each other, yeah?"

It's what worries dad most, knowing I'm out here without the support of a clan. I don't blame him, but between Susie and the Bureau and all the friends I've made as I've cobbled together this life outside the village, he's got nothing to worry about.

"Of course we will," Susie says.

He gives her a squeeze and drops his arm. "And if there's anything you ever need, we're only—"

"A six-hour plane trip away?" I ask, and he scowls at me, but it melts a moment later

as he runs a hand over the back of his neck.

“You know we worry,” he says with a shrug.

“And we always will,” mom chimes in.

“I know,” I say. Susie crosses the room to stand beside me and I squeeze her hand.

“But we’re alright, really.”

It’ll never be enough to convince them, but I suppose that’s just parents.

Later, once we’ve all indulged in a pizza dinner with whatever scattered plates and utensils we could find in the boxes, and everyone has returned to their hotel for the evening so they can catch their early flights tomorrow, that same tenderness hits me square in the chest again. That same sense of how right this all is, even if it’s underscored by a bit of bittersweetness.

Susie and I head up to the rooftop to catch the sunset, the perfect end to our first night here, the rest of our lives stretching wide in front of us.

Susie

Watching the sunset over the city, joy and contentment and more than a little exhaustion from carrying boxes all day sit comfortably on my shoulders.

Standing at the railing, I breathe the night air deep.

It’s what sold me on this place, the fact that it’s got this little rooftop oasis. Open to all the building’s tenants, I already know it’s going to be the perfect place to lounge with a book or host gatherings with friends.

Two strong arms close around me from behind, and a contented murmur breaks

across my skin as Jonah buries his face in the side of my neck.

“I thought they’d never leave.”

I snort. “You know it would have taken us like five times as long to move in if they weren’t here, right?”

“True,” he allows, nipping at my ear in just the way he knows will make me squirm. “But if it was just us, I’d have bent you over the kitchen counter as soon as we’d brought up the last box.”

“The counter’s still there,” I point out, breathless, and he drops his lips to the extra-sensitive spot where my neck meets my shoulder. “So’s the bed. And the couch. And the shower. And all the other places I’m going to—”

My words cut off in a yelp as Jonah picks me up and effortlessly tosses me over his shoulder.

“What are you doing?”

A chuckle rumbles through him. “Making use of our new place. And we’ll have to be quick about it. We’ve got to be up bright and early to carpool in to the Bureau tomorrow.”
