



# The Longing

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**Category:** Romance, Paranormal, Fantasy

**Description:** One monstrous moment...and I fall for the dragon shifter...literally

Alice:

Falling through a portal to the realm of the Yeavinger was not in my life plan, but neither was being chased by my aunt with a gun. Falling straight into the arms of a dragon shifter wasn't on the cards either...but here we are.

The Lambton Wyrms are the most dangerous, most feral of all the monsters in the Yeavinger and he has decided I belong to him. Which, as he has no idea what I am, or what to do with me, is not ideal. Neither is the curse binding him, the one which says I am his fated mate, and the only way he gets to stay alive is if he breeds with me...

As if my day could get any worse...I have to teach the Lambton Wyrms all about mating, without being accidentally eaten by the big growly grump, regardless of how desirable he might be with his chiselled good looks and abs for days...

Looks like things are about to get interesting.

Fenrother:

I did not ask for a fated mate, the Yeavinger gave one to me.

And this one is my mortal enemy, a human.

She is not like me. Her anatomy is wrong and she smells...clean. But she is the key to unlocking my curse.

So I strip her of all weapons, including the strange holster on her chest and wait. Providing we share a bed, she will be mated and my curse lifted. Or at least that is what I was taught by my books. So when the human tells me it is not so, why should I believe her? No matter how good she smells, humans have killed Wyrms for centuries. I cannot give in to the way my heart flips in my chest whenever she is near.

Until the day I discover exactly what mating is...

**Total Pages (Source):** 92

# Page 1

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ALICE

“Get out.”

My aunt’s voice is cold and hard as she leans over me to flick the car door open. The engine of her powerful Porsche is still running.

“Here?” I look out over the empty moorland, already made into shades of grey by the gathering dusk. “But this is where the...”

“Yes, this is where the Faerie will take you. Get out.”

“What do you mean?”

She sighs, lifts the centre console, and pulls out a small silver handgun.

“Just get out, Alice. I don’t have time for this.” She points the thing at me like she knows how to handle it.

I scramble out of the low-slung car, wishing I’d not mentioned bathroom breaks.

“Why, Aunt Cathy?” I plead, aware of the crackle of magic in the air.

No one goes out after dark in the countryside anymore. Everyone knows what lurks in the nighttime, even if once we thought we ruled it.

Not after the plague broke out, the illness which took millions worldwide, including

my parents. Leaving an eight-year-old me at the not-so-tender mercies of my aunt, a woman who never cared for anyone other than herself.

A woman who sent me to boarding school as soon as she could and once I hit eighteen insisted I work for her as an unpaid PA. University was a long forgotten dream, and my boarding school friends edged out of my life with an almost practiced ease.

“Why, Aunty Cathy,” she mimics nastily. “I don’t understand how we can possibly be related if you haven’t worked that out already,” she snarls. “But then my brother was always a pathetic worm, which is why he married your mother.”

The casual cruelty of her words washes over me. She’s said far worse in the past. If it wasn’t for the fact my twenty-fifth birthday is in a week’s time and my trust fund inherited from my parents finally becomes mine...

“Fuck’s sake.” I raise my eyes to the sky. “If you wanted money, you only needed to ask for it.”

“What? And be beholden to a little shit like you?” Aunt Cathy laughs. “Why would I ask a child for money? I took what was mine.”

“You did what?” I hiss, taking a step back towards the car, my fists balled.

She cocks the gun. I don’t care.

“It was all my parents left me, after you sold the house.” I can hardly speak for anger. “And you took it.”

Aunt Cathy shrugs. “The world changed. I needed the money, and you were a child. Now you know how fucking hard the world is, you’ll appreciate being given to the

Faerie.”

“Last time I checked, I was not part of the lottery,” I snap at her.

The lottery is how the human world pays the Faerie back for saving all our pathetic lives, or at least those who hadn’t succumbed to the plague. The United Kingdom came off worst. Our land was filled with Faerie portals, and we’d particularly pissed them off with our rejection of their worship centuries ago.

The price: Human souls to be handed over to their lands beyond the veil. The Yeavingering. Souls chosen by lottery. Magicked away into who knows what.

No one ever returned. No one knows what is beyond the veil. It is a story to frighten children with as the world scrambles to avoid having to give themselves up as the price for saving the human race.

And I have the misfortune to be living in England, with an aunt who clearly values her stocks and shares more than she values life.

“You weren’t. I was, so I did a deal.” Aunt Cathy shrugs. “The Faerie might be able to take what they want, but they recognise good business when they see it.”

I’m sure they do. I only saw Faerie once when I was younger. Tall, beautiful in an almost forced way, the stench of magic clinging to their robes as they wafted through the crowd, humans parting in their wake, some of them bowing.

I didn’t like them much.

“Yes, I guess you did what you do best.” I glare at her, knowing my fate is sealed if I’ve been chosen in the lottery, whether my name was added without my knowledge or not, all because she wanted rid of me. “Belittle, backstab, and betray,” I add as the

wind drops and my shouted words are loud into the sudden silence.

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She glares at me with murder in her eyes.

“May as well call a spade a spade,” I add.

“Fuck you,” she says. “I’d shoot you right here and now if I hadn’t made the bargain.” Her voice is edged with rage. “Start walking.”

I don’t move. She lowers the gun and fires at my feet. I jump into the air as pieces of the tarmac leap up at me. A further series of clicks tell me she’s ready to fire again.

“They don’t care if you’re whole,” Auntie Cathy says through gritted teeth. “They just want a virgin.” She smiles nastily. “So, I’d keep your trap shut about your previous proclivities if I were you, and if you want to stay uninjured, start walking.”

“And have you shoot me in the back? Not a chance,” I retort.

If I’m going to die, killed by a woman who was supposed to be my own flesh and blood, then she’s not getting away with anything lightly.

Tires screech on the road, the back end slewing as the car speeds away.

If she wanted to kill me, and I’m sure she did, she must want the supposed reward very much. I feel as if all the emotion has drained out of my body. It wasn’t like we ever really got on. She was always cold and distant. But she was my only living relative, and she’s just left me to the mercy of the Faerie.

A long, low groan rips through the air and sets every hair on my body on end,

suggesting it's not the Faerie I have to worry about.

There's something hunting out here, on the wild moors, and I'm likely on the menu.

ALICE

I walk swiftly along the road, head bowed as I stare at the tarmac, or try to. It's so dark, the storm robbing the night of any starlight or moon which might have helped me see where I am or where I'm going. The rain has already soaked through my clothing, and I'm chilled to the bone.

I've not heard the animal sound again, but I keep imagining the noise of a car engine. Aunt Cathy, if she's coming back at all, it's to finish the job.

A flash of light has me leaping into the heather at the side of the road. What I didn't know about was the ditch, into which I drop. There's a couple of inches of freezing water in the bottom, and unable to help myself, I curse as it soaks through my clothing.

The road isn't the place for me anymore. I crawl out, mud sticking to me and, by the dim light of a crescent moon, find a scrappy track leading away over the moor. The rain has stopped for the time being, but, as it clears, the temperature drops.

But it's enough if I want to make my way across these moors. Whatever humans might think about magic, moors have always been where the veil is thinnest, places you stray across at your peril. I know now I should have never let my aunt take me on this supposed road trip to pick up a priceless treasure she claimed she wanted, but then hindsight is a wonderful thing for a woman clearly too naïve for words, i.e. me.

How could I have been so stupid to trust her? She never gave me a kind word, so why would she want me to come along on a road trip to London? The last place she would

ever normally take me.

I guess I was wanting that human connection she'd always denied me. Maybe I thought she was going to change.

Not a chance.

I shouldn't follow the path on the moor. But with the road being unsafe, what choice do I have?

My brain is so cold, I'm not thinking straight as I stumble through the heather, half following the way, only slightly more than an animal track. If I can get away...maybe I can disappear.

The long, low cry comes again, and I speed up, checking over my shoulder for anything following, but in the limited moonlight, there is nothing.

I jump as I turn back and see the huge shape looming out of the heather. For an instant, I think it's one of the monsters we were formerly warned about in ancient times, until the human world turned in on itself and decided to battle each other.

It doesn't move, and as a cloud moves past the thin moon, I see it for what it is—a large standing stone. Its edges are weathered by the eons it has sat here, unworshipped and watching. I can feel its presence, a tightening of my chest, a constriction in my veins.

And yet I'm still drawn to it, unable to stop my feet walking me ever closer to the monolith even though I don't want to go.

I'd rather return to the road, to the potential death which lurks there, than approach this stone, yet my feet drag meinexorably on, until I'm stood under it, having to lean



back to see where it ends and the star studded sky begins.

Perhaps I'll be abducted by aliens. Perhaps that's the way this ends.

Behind me, there's a slow slithering sound of something absolutely huge moving through the heather. The twigs snap under the weight. My breath flutters from me like moths escaping, my heart slamming in my chest so loudly it's amazing I can hear anything else. I don't want to turn. I don't want to look.

I don't want to feel the hot breath on my neck or see the massive Jurassic teeth studding a jaw which can only ever exist in nightmares.

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Humans might want to forget the magic. But it hasn't forgotten us.

I close my eyes. My aunt stole my money and left me to the mercies of the Faerie. Of all the things she could have done, it was neither of these acts I will remember. It was her total lack of empathy, her refusal to allow me to grieve the loss of my parents, which slices through my mind in these last moments.

"Come with me." The dark voice rasps in my ear and claws curl around my body.

I willingly surrender myself to my fate. How could anything be worse than what I had here?

ALICE

The movement is violent and terrifying as the creature which has me lumbers into the sky, its huge wings beating down as we go higher and higher, the moor disappearing.

My life disappearing.

The darkness encloses me, terrifying and ancient. I've always hated the dark. It was the darkness which told me my parents had gone. The absence of light and heat and food which meant I had become an orphan, one who wouldn't succumb to the plague, even if my aunt would have wanted me to.

The night sky spins around me, and I'm dimly aware of shouting for it to stop, it makes no difference. The huge claws form a terrifying cage which I have no option other than to clutch. They're as hard as steel, cold from the wind where as the scales I

kneel on are warm and slippery, every movement feeling like it will be my last. The creature who has me is going to eat me, and perhaps I should be pleased there will be no pain. And that everything will finally end.

But the flight doesn't stop. We don't stop. The wings beat on and on. On and on. I'm lulled into a trance, not sleeping, not awake. The creature flies on, occupying the starlit sky over the dark earth below.

If it wants to eat me, it's taking its time about doing so. I see the thin grey lines of dawn breaking ahead. Wherever we are, I know it has to be beyond the veil or the creature carrying me would have never been able to fly so far or so long before encountering some form of resistance.

I'm jerked to full consciousness as the creature lurches to one side. For a brief instant, there's enough light for me to see, partially, what has me. A huge blue-green dragon, with a long sinuous body, vast wings, and a tail which flutters in the strong breeze his wake creates.

The head I already know about. The thing we're told is a dinosaur. The monster our souls are terrified by. All teeth, slitted eye, long barbs and horns, endless horns curving back over the long neck.

I should be terrified. I am however, simply tired. And my bladder is making itself known.

I seriously need to pee.

It's terrible timing.

The ground rushes up to meet us, and I find myself pushing back within the clawed hand as if I could somehow stop us from slamming into the cold, hard earth.

But instead there is a winnowing, a long elephantine rush of breath, and we drop onto the ground like a butterfly.

The cage of claws releases me, and my knees buckle as I'm placed onto the scrubby grass.

There's enough light to see. Ahead is a line of dark forest, huge conifers poking up in rows. The moorland is no more. Instead it's grassland, dotted on the skyline with skeletal trees, leaning away from the wind, their bare branches poking up into the sky.

"Where..." My voice croaks from the rushing wind and long gone adrenaline.  
"Where am I?"

"The Yeavinger." The dark voice is closer than I expect, and I spin around to find, not a dragon, but a monstrous man towering over me.

His height and breadth are impressive. The horns are still evident, curling back from his forehead and surrounded not by barbs, but by long blue-black hair, plaited in places, small silver beads dangling. The wings extend from his back, and a tail curls around his feet. His chest is impressively bare, exposing a set of abs covered in iridescent scales.

He studies me with an air of detachment. I get the feeling if I make the wrong move, I will see the dragon again, but for the time being, I accept this is who I'm dealing with.

"The Yeavinger," I repeat.

His brow furrows over a set of amber eyes, clearly unimpressed with my response.

“I’m not from the Yeavinging,” I add.

“I know. You were given to me by the Yeavinging stone.”

“I was?” I feel my body tremble. “Why?”

“I’m due a mate.”

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Somehow, I don't think he means companionship.

"I don't think I'm right for you." I say the words before I think what they might mean.

"You don't get to decide," the creature growls, fangs extending past his lips. "You are a female, correct?"

All I can do is nod my head.

"Then you are my mate. My kind do not produce females."

"What are you?" I breathe.

The creature pulls himself up to his full height, which has to be close to eight feet. "I am the Lambton Wyrms, scourge of the Night Lands."

A shiver runs through me. Everyone knows of the Wyrms. They once terrorised our lands before being confined to the Yeavinger. The dragons of legend, they were only banished when the Faerie queen agreed to it in return for...I can't remember what she got. But whatever it was, the dragons left and became mere stories to frighten children with.

But this Wyrms hasn't eaten me yet. I pull myself up to my full height of just under five foot six.

"I'm Alice," I say.

Perhaps he won't eat things with a name.

"Alice." The Lambton Wurm hisses the word, wrapping his dark tongue around it as his incredible eyes rake over me.

"I presume you have a name?" I decide to push my luck, see if I can make some sort of contact with this monster. Any sort of contact which might result in me staying alive.

He glares at me.

"Fenrother," he says haughtily, as if he's handing me the world's best kept secret.

"Fenrother, I need to pee," I blurt out.

"Pee?" He rubs his chin.

"Come on, everyone needs to pee, even creatures of the magical forest," I say, exasperated.

"I piss," he rasps. "And shit."

I actually don't know whether to be grateful or horrified at his candour. All I can do is cross my legs and blink.

"So pee," he says.

"Here?"

"Yes, here. Why not here?"

“Turn around,” I say desperately. “Don’t look.”

“No.”

“Fine.” I glare at him, jerking down my jeans as I squat close to the ground, my bladder bursting.

The Wyrn stares down at me, head cocked on one side like he’s observing a science experiment.

If I thought it was bad that he’s watching me at all, when I finally encourage my bladder to do the business...he drops to his hands and knees and shoves his face right under me.

FENROTHER

She has no pizzle.



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I fall to the ground to get a closer look, but it is true, there is no pizzle, just a simple slit where she pisses. I am astonished, shoving my head in as her piss doesn't smell as bad as other piss, even mine.

With a squeak, Alice falls over backwards.

"What are you doing?" she yells at me.

"What are you doing?" I want to ask about her lack of pizzle, but instead I feel like I should inspect her further, to see what else she lacks, apart from the obvious—scales, wings, tail, and horns.

I lift her to her feet, the piss forgotten, and pluck at the rest of the clothing she wears. It is damp and some of it comes away in my hand.

"Stop it," Alice says.

"Remove this," I growl. "I need to check for...hidden weapons... before we continue."

"Not a chance," she responds, folding her arms over her chest.

I put my face close to hers. A Lambton Wyrms is not used to being defied, especially by little creatures like her.

"Don't challenge me." I shift my fangs, making them long and dangerous.

Her eyes widen, and there is a stench of fear which comes from her, although it's swiftly followed by the sweet scent of defiance.

This female is intriguing, not least her lack of pizzle. I know she is female by the diagrams I've seen. And my instinct, the thing which drew me all the way from my lair, from my castle keep and my ancestral lands, tells me she is female.

"Fine." She shrugs off the damaged outer garment and then, with a brief look around us, as if anyone would approach a Wurm here on my hill, she pulls the second garment over her head, revealing soft, creamy skin.

Definitely scaleless.

There is another garment she wears. It crosses over her chest like a weapons holster. I rear up. I should have known better than to trust anything left in the Yeavinger, anything which has a hint of Faerie about it. Nothing is what it seems.

I strike out with a claw, flicking the holster from her body.

It flies through the air, and I catch it on the end of my tail.

It is empty.

The noise of distress she makes is enough to convince me she is not what she seems at all. Even if the holster appears empty, she could have disposed of the weapons anywhere along our flight route.

"Did you think you could fool me?" I snarl at her, attempting not to show my own fear. "You cannot kill a Wurm, if that is your intention."

The female gasps, her arms crossed over her chest. Now her upper clothing is missing

and her lower garments around her ankles, I see she has fur in a small strip around the area whereher pizzle should be, and there are lumps on her upper half which bulge over her folded arms alarmingly. Her stomach also has a strange depression. I take hold of her shoulders, twisting her away from me to search for further hidden weapons.

Her bottom is, thankfully, quite normal. Small rounded globes, pinked and rather pleasant looking. I turn her back to me, and she flails her arms, releasing the rounded globes on her front.

I stare at them. I was absolutely right—no pizzle and these additional lumps.

She is very different to a Wym.

I run my hand over the mounds. These could also hold weapons. There are other creatures in the Yeavinger which can conceal items within their bodies, such as the Hedley Kow or the vampires. I can't trust anything.

Everyone wants a piece of the Wym.

My claw sweeps over the first globe, and it feels rather nice in my hand. The strange deep pink surround in the centre rises at my touch. I pull my hand away, and the female instantly covers herself with her hands.

“Have you seen enough?” Her voice is strangely choked and her body shaking.

I snort.

“I need to know my enemy,” I respond. “And until you prove otherwise, that's what you are. Put your garments back on.”

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She's already pulling up her lower garments even before I tell her to. She grabs her upper clothing and swiftly pulls it on, picking up the weapons holster before I snatch it from her and shove it into my pocket.

"I will keep this, save you from temptation."

Alice glares, but her eyes have no magic, proving she is, at least, no witch.

"Whatever you want," she says, finally. "You're bigger than me, after all. It's yours." Her voice is strange, slightly strangled. She wipes at her face for some reason.

"No one gets the better of me. Not even you, little creature. I will find any weapons you have, and I will take them," I respond.

"I don't have any weapons."

It's my turn to make a noise, this one of incredulity. "And you think I'm going to take the word of a human, whose kind has persecuted mine for centuries?"

"Then why not leave me at the stone? Why bring me here and..." She screws up her eyes. "Humiliate me."

"Because the Yeavinger stone gave you to me. It called me a day and a night from my lair, and I found you." I study her carefully. "But nothing is what it seems in the Yeavinger. And I will not take a gift without being sure it is not deadly."

"Do I look deadly?" she bursts out.

Admittedly, she does not. But then neither does a Redcap, and they are not creatures I'd turn my back on.

"I don't know yet."

"Then why take me?"

"Because the stone believes it is time I take a mate." I pull her close to me. "And it is you."

ALICE

He didn't eat me.

He didn't eat me.

He didn't eat me.

I keep chanting the words in my head as Fenrother changes back into his massive dragon form and, without asking, captures me in his claws once again before rising into the sky.

He doesn't ask for anything, that much is clear given how he asked me to strip...and I did. That he was looking for weapons and seems to have mistaken my bra for one is little consolation. The way he inspected my body was both horrible and, when he started handling my breasts, humiliating.

I've never been confident with how I look, and his cold appraisal was utterly awful.

I'd have been better off if my aunt had shot me on the lonely moor road than in the grip of this monster who has decided I belong to him. That I am his mate.

I turn the word over in my head a few times before the chilling realisation hits me.  
Mate means partner.

Fenrother believes I've been somehow given to him to be hiswife.

My blood becomes solid in my veins. Is this what my aunt meant about her bargain?  
Has she made me a bride for a monster in return for Faerie gold?

Confusion spreads over the humiliation. Was this Wyrn looking for weapons or inspecting his goods? He certainly sounded convincing when he stated he wasn't going to be fooled, but then he kept my bra.

He put the lacy garment into his pocket then changed into a dragon.

My head hurts with the switching, the spinning, and all the new things I'm trying to process, the biggest of which has me in his claws and is flying me back to his lair.

But if I'm to be his wife, how is he so suspicious of me?

All these questions mean I know I'm still at risk of being eaten and not in a good way.

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In a really, really bad way.

I take more interest in where we are going as it is light. The ground beneath us is getting rockier, and Fenrother is climbing as the green pastureland beneath us rises into swooping fells ahead of us. They have a steely look, weathered rather like the Yeavinger stone but with a presence which is unsettling, as if they hold secrets no one should want to know. The lower parts are dark burgundy with heather, but as we climb over them, the highest are dusted with snow.

Shivering in my damp clothing, frost nips at my exposed skin. I feel Fenrother's huge paw tighten around me. I doubt it's anything to do with not letting me fall, more his concern at what I am.

Humans persecuted the creatures we called dragons until they were nothing but a legend in the real world. No wonder they have retreated to the Yeavinger. I suppose I probably shouldn't blame Fenrother for his attitude.

But I can blame him for stripping me naked out on the hillside. For inspecting my body like I was a piece of meat. None of that was necessary. And all of it I acquiesced to in order not to be bitten in two.

We cross over the peak of the fell, and Fenrother's beating wings slow. Down below us is a forest of dormant trees, the multitude of browns almost warm after the snowy hillside. He turns into a sickening spin, and out of the corner of my eye, I see it.

A castle.

A huge lump of a castle, each corner a vast turret. The slab sides have mere slits for windows, and the roofline is heavily crenelated and fortified. It squats in the landscape like a honeyed stone monolith as if daring anyone to attack it. The Wyrms dips again, and the central courtyard is revealed. He dives, and I'm absolutely sure his massive form will not fit.

There is a scramble, a rush of wind, and Fenrother is setting me on my feet, claws diminishing as he becomes his human-like form. His pants have returned, and incongruously, part of the red strap of my bra sticks out of his pocket.

"This is my lair, my castle keep and the lands of my ancestors," he growls at me. "It is your home."

I start at the use of the word home. After everything he's put me through, after everything my aunt has put me through, the concept of home is entirely alien.

"My home?"

Fenrother gives me a narrow-eyed look, as if he's trying to work out if I'm dumb or playing him.

As he thinks my bra is a weapon brought to kill him, it could be either of those two things.

"You are my mate. You live here," he says, as if I'm simple.

If I was expecting any further words from him, I don't get them. Instead, he stalks away from me, across the sandstoneflagged courtyard and through a large archway. I look up at the imposing walls, hemming me in on all sides. In the yard, there are more glassed windows which rise up and up the walls to at least the third storey.



It feels like there are a thousand eyes watching me. As much as I'd rather not find out what Fenrother has in store for me inside this vast keep, given his recent pronouncement, I don't think I have many other options. Plus, it's started to rain again.

As the drops splash around me, I troop across the yard and through the archway. Ahead is a vast wooden door with an iron portcullis firmly in place. To my right is an equally imposing, if smaller, wooden door set into another arch. This one is open, and I see a twitch of a tail inside.

I enter as the clouds burst outside. The sound of running water is dulled within the thick walls and behind me the door slowly swings shut.

Now I am trapped.

Now I am his.

ALICE

There is nowhere to run. As if running was an option.

I'm in a vaulted ante-room. Large, dark, carved wooden furniture fills the various alcoves. A bench, a sideboard, and a huge chair which looks more like an instrument of torture than a place to park your behind. Several heavy tapestries line the stone walls. They're complex swirls of flowers and vegetation, some of which I don't recognise. Here and there, I'm sure I see figures, but when I look closer, they are gone.

Other than the door I came through, there is only one exit at the far end of the room. It's the only way Fenrother can have gone, and it means, unless there's a trapdoor somewhere, it's the way I'm going to have to go. With some trepidation and a strange

feeling of not wearing a bra, I make my way over and peer through the opening.

The door, not any bigger than the others in this place so far, opens out into a vast hall. The ceiling is a run of criss-crossed carved stone beams, dotted with ancient shields where they intersect, their once brightly painted colours dull.

The flagged floor leads the eye to the far end where there is the big brother of the chair I saw in the ante-room and a largetable, all in front of a large open fireplace, soot staining the stone directly above the opening, disappearing into the enormous wall hanging which covers the vast chimney breast.

A wall hanging which depicts an enormous dragon gobbling up what looks very much like humans, their body parts tumbling to the ground.

It is horrific.

Beneath the tapestry, slung in the throne-like chair, is Fenrother. He is eating an entire chicken carcass like it's an apple.

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“Come here,” he booms.

The last thing I want is to go anywhere near him. But this is his castle. If I get away once, I won’t get away again.

And the humiliation of earlier still burns at me. Fenrother, in either form, could snap me in half, and even though after everything I’ve been through with my aunt, I’m done with being everyone’s doormat. Still, he doesn’t seem so enamoured with having a ‘mate’ as far as I can tell, so it’s not like he’s going to hold back.

What choices do I have that weren’t made for me?

None.

And I hate it.

Dragging my feet, I make my way down the hall to where he sits in all his dragony glory.

There’s a pile of fowl carcasses next to the table, which is, itself, covered in grease and wax from the many candles which dot it. Stretched across the fire are a couple of spits, each one filled with chickens, all turning slowly by way of a pulley which runs into the stonework. They sizzle and pop as they cook, the meaty scent making my mouth water unexpectedly.

The fire is welcome, especially in my damp state. I hold out my hands to it as my jeans begin to release water vapour.

“What are you doing?” Fenrother growls.

I see he’s hung my bra from one of the ornate pommels of his throne, like an underwear trophy. My jaw drops at the sight. He spots my gaze, gives me another low warning growl and digs his huge claws into the tabletop.

“I’m cold,” I say. “My clothes are wet and”—I give him my best death stare—“damaged.”

Fenrother huffs but doesn’t say anything for a while. I feel myself gently steaming from the heat, my clothing drying on my body and becoming uncomfortably crispy in the process.

All save my bra-trophy. Probably the one thing I’d prefer not to do without and the one thing I’m clearly not getting back. It doesn’t help that Fenrother’s earlier actions also meant I got my own pee on me, or that my jeans, from the knee down, are caked in mud, so as I dry, I’m also less than fragrant.

All I’d like to do is rest and not be all on edge like I am now. But unless Fenrother is either on the other side of the veil or locked in a dungeon, there is no chance of my adrenalin falling any time soon. My stomach growls annoyingly.

I do not want to ask him for food. I have to maintain some final shred of dignity.

“Eat,” Fenrother barks from his throne.

I ignore him. He pushes himself upright in an easy movement, making his abs ripple and his scales glitter in the light of the fire as he approaches the spits, removes one of the bubbling chicken carcasses with his claws, and shoves it at me.

“Too hot,” I respond, sticking my hands in my pockets in case he decides to drop the

super heated chicken into them.

Fenrother looks particularly unimpressed and tosses the carcass onto the table instead, where it creates a hot puddle of fat. He spears the thing with a claw, and in a few seconds, he's entirely dismembered it onto a surprisingly clean pewter platter. The meat steams as he flings himself back on his throne.

I am hungry. But am I hungry enough to eat a meal off this table, with this monster watching?

I suppose he could be watching me do other things, given his behaviour so far, so the act of consuming food is probably the one I'd prefer him to concentrate on.

Picking up a piece of chicken breast, I blow on it, juggling the steaming meat from one hand to the other. I'm very aware of Fenrother's gaze, but I choose not to look at him. Finally having got the chicken cool enough, I take a bite.

It is surprisingly good. I dart a glance at Fenrother as I shove the rest into my mouth and snatch up some more. He's leaning forward, his chin propped on one fist, his amber holographic eyes missing absolutely nothing.

Which is what worries me. I put the chicken leg down slowly onto the table and take a pace back from him.

"You eat like a Hedley Kow," he says. "Hardly enough to keep anything alive." His eyes narrow and he looks up at my bra. "Perhaps it would be better if you were somewhere you couldn't cause mischief until I know what to do with you."

He snatches my arm, and I'm dragged down the hall, through a passage, and then up a wide winding spiral of stone steps, the treads worn in places, until we reach another door, one he unlocks with a huge iron key before shoving me inside.

“Fenrother...”

The door closes with a resounding crash.

“I’ll be back later, female.” I hear his muffled voice through the heavy wood.

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Somehow I don't think him being back later will bring anything good.

### FENROTHER

The female sets my scales writhing with her nibbling at the food offered and her strange clothing all too tight to her body. Her scent is something I can't get out of my nostrils, try as I might.

Having locked her into a bedroom, my heart feels easier, not like it's about to jump out of my chest and scuttle away across the floor. If she wasn't human, I'd be inclined to believing she'd bewitched me in some way.

But humans have no magic. They only have spiky things with which to spear an unsuspecting Wurm and metal cladding with which to resist a bite.

Back at my fire, I pick up her weapons holster. It is a strange piece of equipment. Mostly designed to cover the lumps on her chest, quite a lot of it is a stretchy material which is partially see through.

I give it an exploratory stretch. The long red straps expand considerably the more I drag on them, stretching wider and wider until one of them slips my claws and slams into the side of my head, making my ear ring. I snarl at the thing, flinging it away from me into the fire where it flames briefly before turning into ash.

She does have weapons. They are concealed within her garments. It is clothing which will need to be removed.

Her skin might not be scaled like mine, but it is not unpleasant to look at and touch. She will surely be glad to be rid of her garments, as I am when I shift to my Wyrn form. Further, without clothing I can have a much better look at this female whom the Yeavinger sought to provide me as a mate.

I have a yearning to look at the area where she does not have a pizzle again and to feel the large globes on her chest. The thought of doing so makes my pizzle tingle like it does sometimes when I have strange dreams or I need to piss urgently. I palm it through my trousers.

Eating usually solves any problem I have, and it has been a long, unexpected flight to and from the Yeavinger stone. I haven't done much flying in a long time, and it shows in my appetite.

There was a time when all I did was fight. Spending decades in the dark lands, doing the Faerie queen's bidding. They've not demanded my obedience for a long time, not since I last refused to bend to them and there was nothing they could do to make me.

Since then, I've been alone.

My pizzle tingles again. It's something, it seems, I cannot control. But then my pizzle has always had a life of its own, a life I usually ignore.

I stand, stretching out my wings and tail as I consume the last of the cooked meat. Such a feast was required on my return, but I remain disappointed the female did not eat much, although if I'm being rational, I'm not sure why.

Alice does not rule me. No one and no creature rules me. I made that clear to Queen Mab when I walked away from the wars in the Night Lands. I never should have given up the solitude of the Wyrn to do her bidding. She told me I would be doing my part, as my sire before me had done.



I know now that was not true.

I stalk through the castle to my study, a room I mostly prefer when I'm not eating or hunting. The smell of parchment and leather is pleasing to me after what has been a stressful and confusing day.

Sitting at my desk, I see the books I pulled out when the Yeavinging stone called to me. The books I knew which discussed mating.

None of them discussed what you do if your chosen mate wants to do you an injury, or carries a weapons holster, or has no pizzle.

I flick through the pages again. There are a few illustrations, but these are mainly of males holding out flowers to females who wear long flowing outfits. These females are nothing like how Alice appeared to me. The males are not Wyrms either, they are Faerie-like, thin, spindly, with crowns perched on their long thin heads.

Faerie adore their crowns. Monsters of the Yeavinging, like me, prefer bones.

Not for the first time, I wonder what it would have been like for my sire and dam to have been here, in the Lambton castle, with me as I grew and became the Wurm I am today. What it would have been like if, instead of being sent to fight and kill in the Night Lands from the day I could lift a sword, I could have made friends here among the Yeavinging.

I've read about friends. They eat together. Tell stories. Fight each other for dominance. Such as some of the other monsters who battled in the Night Lands with me.

I have books, my thoughts, and the nightmares. And the scars.

But the books don't tell me what I need to know about Alice, about what she is and why she is here.

It means I have to make the decision myself.

The little female will go without clothing. I can be sure she isn't concealing any weapons, and I can observe her at close quarters. After all, she is my mate, and she will surely be with young any time soon now we share the same home and bed.

ALICE

The bedroom is similarly furnished to the rest of the castle as far as I have seen. A vast four poster bed, the wooden posts carved with dragons, the curtains heavy maroon brocade and trimmed with sumptuous gold fringing, dominates the room even with the high vaulted stone ceiling.

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There are more heavy tapestries on the walls, although I'm pleased to note these are mostly garden scenes or animals, most of which I recognise, rather than like the one in the great hall. Thick rugs cover the floor meaning the entire room has a comfortable, almost cozy feel. One large window looks into the courtyard below, a comfortable seat set into the three-foot-thick wall.

I try the door Fenrother shoved me through, finding it locked, which is no great surprise. On my third circuit of the room itself, I find a breeze blowing at me between some panelling next to the bed, and when I press on it, a hidden door swings open into the biggest bathroom I've ever seen in my life.

Vaulted like the bedroom, one end is entirely taken up with a deep stone bath. As I get closer, it automatically starts to fill from a carved spout (which looks like a dragon's head, naturally), the hot water pouring to swiftly fill the bath which I could swim in.

As I watch the water and steam fill the room, I make a decision. I'm filthy, I ache, and if this bath is filling, then it would surely be rude not to take advantage.

Yes, it potentially means Fenrother gets another good look, but at this moment in time, given I'm his prisoner, I'm going to risk it. Why the hell not? If he's going to eat me, I may as well be clean, even if I'd hope he'd choke on me.

I shrug off my clothing and dangle a toe into the water. It's almost a perfect temperature, and I walk down the shallow steps before dropping below the surface to cover my entire body and rinse my hair.

Slowly, I move from the steps to the other side where there appears to be a depression within the stone and discover it fits my body comfortably, albeit it's made for something much larger. It means I can sit with only my head out of the water and take full advantage of the way it eases my bones. The bathroom fills with steam, enclosing me like a blanket.

Is this a place Fenrother uses? Somehow I can't imagine the growly Wyrms wanting to bathe, or wanting to use a bath this big and deep. He strikes me as more of a cold shower sort of male, given his bombastic, arrogant attitude so far.

The attitude which has him claiming I belong to him, and somehow, despite all evidence to the contrary, I am his mate.

For a start, terrifying me isn't the best way to begin any relationship, and while plenty of him is easy on the eye, his ability to change mood in a snap is not going to endear him to anyone, least of all me.

I've spent the last seventeen years of my life with a woman whose mood I could never be sure of and whom I had to tiptoe around like she was a fragile flower to be sure she didn't kick me out of the house or refuse me food.

Sure as hell, I'm not going to let anyone else do that to me, let alone a Wyrms from a place which is supposed to be a myth. Fenrother can do one.

I find myself smiling, despite everything, as I grow in confidence. Literally nothing can get any worse. My aunt wanted rid of me, so going back to the world beyond the veil isn't an option. If Fenrother wants to eat me, then I'm dead anyway. I'm damned whatever happens.

Does this mean I can do what I want? The thought slowly crystallises in my mind. A thought which grows in size, becoming real. Becoming possible.

I think it does. I think I can stop being the frightened orphan and instead become a woman who doesn't give a shit.

Confidence swells in my chest. I take advantage of the scented soap which is on the side of the bath to give myself a scrub and do something with my hair, wincing at the colour the water turns as I rinse myself off.

By the time my fingers have gone extra wrinkly, I'm about done with the bath. I climb the steps and look for a towel.

The steam means I'm struggling to see much at all. But as I feel around, there doesn't appear to be anything available.

I probably should have checked before I went in. I chuckle to myself, the sound ringing up into the ceiling, my heart feeling light for the first time in a very long time.

Instead I search around for my clothes. The steam is clearing as the bath automatically drains, and as it does, I find my clothing is...missing.

It wasn't like anything I owned was expensive or irreplaceable, but it was mine, and I'm rather annoyed that I'm, yet again, naked.

But it won't last long. There has to be something I can wear or wrap around myself in the bedroom. I march over to the door, yank it open, and stride out into the bedroom.

Fenrother lounges on the bed. A fire is burning merrily in the large grate.

"Hello, little human," he says with a smile he's clearly borrowed from a crocodile.

I dart behind one of the pillars of the bed, pulling the heavy fabric around me, my earlier confidence about Fenrother having already seen more than enough swiftly

dissipating.

“I burnt your clothing. You will not wear any from now on,” he says, as if he’s announcing what we’ll have for dinner.

“You did what?” I stare at him, my eyes travelling to the fire and back again.

“You do not wear garments anymore.”

“I’ll freeze to death!” Because that’s the important thing my brain can come up with at this moment, obviously.

I’m not sure I’ve ever wanted to kill another creature before, but right now, I would love for Fenrother to expire on the spot.

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ALICE

Fenrother slides off the bed in a single sinuous move, all snake-hipped like any dragon should be. His lips are lifted to show his fangs, but this is not a smile.

“The Yeavinger stone might have decided for me when to take a mate and that she should be human, but I will not sacrifice anything else.” He snarls. “You will do what is expected of you and I ask no more. But I will not place myself in the unknown.”

He pulls the hanging away from where I’m covering my body, and his eyes rake down it. I’m still damp and slightly sweaty, my hair stuck to my head, the long strands covering my shoulders.

Fenrother hooks one of my locks over his claw and stares at it. “Do all humans have this?”

“Hair?” I’m highly confused about how he can go from growling I have to stay naked to being fascinated by my hair. “Not all humans have hair, but most do.”

“I’ve never seen this colour,” he says.

My pale pink hair is a dye job starting to fade. I did it to annoy my aunt. My hair is usually a light brown, I bleached it and added the pink on top. She was shocked, and I felt it was a little win. Of course that was until she pulled a gun on me, told me she’d stolen all my money, and sold me to the Faerie to save her own skin.

“It’s a dye,” I find myself saying to the curious Wurm. “It’s not naturally this colour.”

“You change the colour of your hair? Why?” he says, deep suspicion swirling in his eyes.

“No reason,” I respond. I’m not going to tell him about my aunt. I’m not going to tell him anything, not while he continues with this humiliation.

Fenrother drops my hair but studies me once again like I’m some sort of experiment. “I will discover you, little female, no matter what you do to disguise your true intent,” he says, stepping away from me into the centre of the room.

Where he shucks off his trousers, kicking them away into a corner and giving me a very full view of his naked form.

I should, perhaps, consider this a quid pro quo, but I have no desire to ogle this monster. Even if he does have a thing between his legs I couldn’t have imagined in my wildest dreams.

And I’m going to have nightmares about what I just saw.

Fenrother, as unconcerned about his own nakedness as he is about mine, and about his pronouncement I am to stay this way, strides into the bathroom, where I hear the sound of water running.

I just know it is not the bath. He is pissing and holy shit, he has to be part camel.

Rushing over to the bedroom door, I find it locked. I race to where he kicked his pants and delve into the pockets for the key.

There is a marble with a twist of blue and red in the centre, a piece of crumpled parchment style paper with the word “rock” written on it in spidery writing with numerous splashes of ink, a piece of thin metal and a penny sized diamond, which



sparkles at me like a mirror.

But no key.

I am trapped, in here, with him. I stare into the fire at the smouldering ruins of my clothing. Unable to help myself, a sob escapes, wracking my chest with the intensity of my awful situation.

Fenrother has every intention of forcing himself on me, then maybe eating me, or possibly both at the same time. And I have nowhere else to go.

I crawl into the bed and curl up. Is it worth hiding my tears, pretending I can take whatever he throws at me? I want to be strong enough to resist him, strong enough to keep up the appearance of allowing life to wash over me, strong enough to say no.

But I can't.

Instead, the tears run down my face. Tears I always told myself I wouldn't cry. Tears which have gone unshed for all these years because little girls have to get on with their lives, and young women should be all sunshine and summer days. My aunt's voice echoes these stupid sentiments in my head as I sob.

Tears are no good for anyone, and those who do shed them are cry babies who deserve everything they get.

"Alice?" Fenrother's voice grates into my ear. "What are you doing?"

"Go away." I pull the heavy throw over my head.

He can't hurt me any more than I'm already hurt.

The cover is plucked off me.

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“Why do you cry?” Suspicion hovers in his stunning eyes, the pupils wide, almost round as he glares at me.

“Why do I cry?” I sob-laugh. “Because you’ve burnt my clothes? Because you’re keeping me prisoner in here? Because you’re going to...” I don’t want to say the word out loud. I can’t say it. I can’t make it real.

Fenrother’s face changes, softening somehow.

“You are not my prisoner,” he says quietly. “If you don’t want to be here, I won’t make you stay. But the Yeavinging is no place for a human, and there are plenty within the Yeavinging who would dislike your presence.”

“Including you.” I wipe at my wet cheeks. “You don’t want me here either.”

“Ah, but I wouldn’t eat you,” Fenrother says.

He mirrors my action, running the back of his index finger over my cheek and then lapping at the digit with his long dark tongue.

“I know about the monsters in the Yeavinging,” I say. “I can take my chances if I’m not a prisoner.”

His eyes darken. “You would leave me?”

“Absolutely, and never look back,” I say with probably more force than I intend.

A look of hurt flickers over Fenrother's face.

As much as I shouldn't, because all he's done so far is humiliate me, I feel bad for what I've said. He's a victim of circumstance as much as I am.

I'm getting the impression he doesn't know much about humans generally, other than they killed, or rather they used to kill, Wyrms which ventured beyond the veil.

"I mean, I'm not here because I want to be. I didn't come looking for you. My aunt...she forced me." The hiccupping sobs return.

Fenrother pulls the cover back over me.

"I won't keep you here, but the Yeavinging gave you to me," he says, clearly confused. "I will never make you do anything you don't want. I will take you back if that's what you want. The stone can decide."

FENROTHER

Alice is confusing. I am confused. She didn't come voluntarily. She didn't come to kill me. She doesn't want to go back.

Despite her weapons holster and strange form, I should have guessed such a tiny little scrap posed no threat to me. Most of the creatures in the Yeavinging are smaller than me in my Wurm form, but most of them either have magic or other tricks which can cause harm should they wish.

Humans need spikes and swords and armor. This little human has none.

Having used my bath, she has a scent which is very different than before, no longer smelling of the human world. I shift, filling the bed around her. I like being in my

shifted form, and I like being this way with Alice in the centre of me.

Because if she is a danger, she will struggle to harm me, but also because it feels...better.

Like I can protect her more.

Alice's fragile form shudders within my coils. For a while, her tears continue to drip onto my scales, until her breathing changes and her body goes limp against me. That she has ceased crying heals my soul in a way I didn't think needed healing. Having her in my bed makes everything right.

Despite my usual routine being completely destroyed, with the little female in my coils, I drift off into the arms of the Yeavinger which calls to me, as much as the Night Lands haunt every moment of my existence.

I wake with a jump, my form shifting back and finding my bed empty. If it wasn't for her scent, I'd have thought I might have simply magicked up the little creature or my fevered imagination born of all the time spent alone made her for me.

A soft swishing sound attracts my attention, and it seems she has decided to leave my bed and instead spend time in the window alcove. My scales flicker in irritation she did not stay with me.

Also, she has wrapped herself in a blanket she has obtained from somewhere, which also irks me.

"You should be in my bed, female." I prowl up to her.

"Fuck! Fenrother!" She looks up at me and then looks away, clapping her hand over her eyes. "Put something on, even if you don't want me to wear anything."

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I put my hands on my hips. She must be admiring my pizzle, given she doesn't have one.

"I believe if I wish to gain your trust as you must gain mine, we should remain in the same state," I say, to gauge her reaction.

"You really, really don't need to do that," Alice says urgently. "Please, put something on."

Maybe she is trusting me because she is with young? From the few books I have read which touch on mating, once a mated pair have shared a bed, the young is forthcoming soon after.

I probably don't want to stress her further if she is in this delicate state of being with young (as my books have told me). As she has also said she will not run, perhaps I should allow her to wear clothing too. My weapons are safely locked away in the armoury, and she has no magic to disable the locks.

I have much to think about.

"As you wish, my lady." I give her a stiff bow, like the ones in the illustrations.

Alice drops her hand and stares at me in alarm before she clamps it back. I retrieve my trousers, heave them on, and open the wardrobe.

It flings something at me with an annoyance I don't believe I deserve. The garment is vast, consisting of multiple layers and folds. It will cover her completely, which

somehow irritates me. The only thing which pleases me is the colour, one which matches my scales.

It seems the wardrobe has made a decision for me. I growl at it, but I already know it has no fear of me, given I have no fire.

I carry it over to Alice, holding it in one hand before dropping it at her feet. “Wear this.”

She uncovers one eye by opening her fingers slightly. It is a brilliant blue I hadn’t spotted yesterday. Her gaze ranges over me carefully, and she removes her hand from her face before she spots the dress.

“You don’t want me naked?”

“I believe what you came for has been done and”—I lean closer—“I’ve checked for weapons. There are none you can use,” I growl. “So, you can cover yourself, unless I say otherwise.”

ALICE

Waking up with Fenrother wrapped around me in his dragon form, but also being wrapped around him in turn, was unnerving, and I’m still processing the whole thing.

Fenrother took up the whole bed, and seeing his massive, dinosaur-like head up close and personal was not a fun way to wake.

I risked extracting myself from his coils, although he showed no sign of consciousness, and sat in the window instead, watching as light filtered into the courtyard. Again, I thought I saw movement in the shadows, but given this place is magic, given the whole of the Yeavinger is magic, I guess I should expect it.

The Fenrother who woke up was, initially, the Wyrms I was expecting, but then he goes and gives me this dress. It's like something out of a costume drama, and it's not like he's providing any underwear or replacement for my bra, but it's better than the alternative he was offering last night...nothing.

As for his cryptic announcement that he believed what I came for has been done, I'm not going to even attempt to unpack it. If he's giving me any grudging level of trust, while I'm not going to do the same, I'm not going to question it.

Not until I work out how the hell I can manage this situation which ranges from bad to worse to bad again like a dose of whiplash.

Fenrother gazes at me, and I know he's not intending moving an inch until I put the dress on, so I stand, and having made my way through a number of fluffy sewn in petticoats, I shove my head through into the bodice and writh my way into the garment.

It's tight on my upper half, shoving my boobs front and centre. It feels as if it's bespoke, and I shove away the question which fills my mind of why this Wyrms would have clothing made for me in his wardrobe. A wardrobe, I recall, I found locked when I checked.

I will not look a gift...Wyrms in the mouth. I'm dressed, albeit ridiculously, and that is a win.

I turn to face Fenrother, who has been watching my struggle with the dress with an extreme interest. He spots my elevated bosoms, and his eyes spin with their holographic inners, glittering in the morning light.

He reaches out a hand to touch my chest. In a flash, I slap it away, and he grunts in surprise.



“Didn’t anyone ever tell you it’s rude to touch without asking?”

Fenrother growls, looking at his hand where I touched him. “Like who?”

“Anyone! Your mother for instance?” It appears that clothed Alice is bold Alice.

Fenrother lifts his head. “Did you see anyone else in this castle?” he snarls.

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I have to admit, I did not.

“No mother, no father, no one,” Fenrother says, his voice low and dangerous. “Only me.”

Without a further word, he leaves the bedroom with a swish of tail and wings. He leaves the door open.

I am no longer locked up like the proverbial damsel. I’m free to roam. But I hesitate, turning his words over in my mind.

No mother, no father, no one.

Is he an orphan like me, only without the interfering aunt? Did he grow up in this empty castle alone?

I sit back in the window seat. Could any of this explain how utterly strange Fenrother is? I mean, he is basically a mythical creature who can change his form at will, so I have to expect and accept there are some differences. But nothing does well raised alone, even magical Wyrms.

If nothing else, at least I was sent away to school. At least I had peers around me who taught me right from wrong.

“I brought you food.”

Fenrother leans in the doorway, a pewter platter in his hand. He looks confused at his

actions, first looking at the food, then at me, then poking at it with a claw.

I leave my position and walk over to him, finding my legs tangling in the big dress and having to wrestle it into submission. By the time I reach him, something akin to amusement briefly lights his face.

“You might want to wear garments, but I don’t think they want to wear you,” he says, shoving the platter at me.

“Thank you.” I look at what he’s brought. There’s a whole chicken on it (again), but also some apple slices, a chunk of orange cheese, and a piece of roughly cut bread. “I’m sorry I struck you earlier,” I say, looking up at him through my eyelashes. “I’m sorry about your parents.”

Surprise runs over Fenrother’s face, one which is rather handsome now I’ve got used to the scales and the horns. He has chiseled, fine cheekbones along with a solid, square jaw and full lips. His beaded hair is straggly but shiny, and he has, like so many Yeavinger creatures, the pointed ears of the Faerie. I find myself wanting to touch them. But then I need to heed my own warnings about being asked first.

“Your actions are understandable. Even if the Yeavinger stone gave you to me, I should consider your needs first,” he replies. “I should...ask you what you want.”

This seems like a strange concept for him and one which has appeared all too suddenly. From the Fenrother giving orders to the Wurm handing me food and asking me what I want...could he have another agenda?

The whole idea of being his mate is still hanging over me, even if he didn’t try anything last night. Even though he promised there would be nothing unless I wanted it (although keeping his wandering hands to himself is something he needed reminding about).

I can't imagine Fenrother going on a charm offensive. He's probably the least charming male I've ever met.

He releases the platter into my grip, which I nearly drop because it's so heavy, and he turns to leave.

"Have you eaten yet?" I ask.

Fenrother looks over his shoulder, one wing drooping.

"There's too much here for me to eat on my own, if you want to share," I say.

I have nowhere else to go. I have a Yeavinger monster who has decided I belong to him, that I'm his mate. I am stuck here, but it doesn't mean I have to be alone.

And the more I know about Fenrother, the more I have a chance of finding a way out of my predicament. That is being the wife to a Wurm.

I carry the platter over to the window seat and put it down. Fenrother hesitates. I guess the lack of real trust goes both ways. He's viewed me as a threat since he met me, as I have him. That isn't going away with a bit of breakfast.

Finally, he walks over to where I'm sitting and settles opposite me within the thick walls. Picking up the chicken in one huge hand, he bites down with fangs straight out of a nightmare.

ALICE

Breakfast was uneventful. Fenrother wasn't particularly forthcoming or talkative. In fact he seemed a little overwhelmed with my, admittedly terrible, efforts to converse with him. It meant he scurried off as soon as we were done, claiming he had things to

attend to.

Turns out there is a way of repelling a Lambton Wurm...small talk.

Hitching up my dress, I go exploring. The castle is large, but given it's on a square, it's not too difficult to find my way around. I find the stairs from yesterday and wind my way up, hoping to get to the battlements above, to have a look at the Yeavinger in daylight and not from between the claws of a Wurm.

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At the top there is a small wooden door, which, when tried, opens outwards, and I find myself on the stone flagged upper ramparts. A cool wind blows my skirts around, and I'm grateful for the thicker fabric on my arms, even if my boobs are more exposed than I would like. I make my way over to the thick castellation and look out.

Mist swirls directly below me, but as I look further out, I can see rolling countryside which, naturally, is mostly moorland, but it follows a small stream down a valley towards an area which is a bright green and, although it's a long way off, it could be the pastureland we flew over yesterday.

It is a wild place, one befitting a Wyrmling like Fenrother.

As I walk the battlements, finding the view in all directions to be of the moorland, patches of heather blooming within the peaty scrubland, the sky above me darkens and the wind gets stronger, as if it wants to blow me from my lofty perch. As I'd prefer this not to happen, or at least not yet, I turn back to the door I used to enter the top of the castle.

Fenrother stands in my way. He seems taller, wider than before, his eyes almost glowing as he glares at me.

"Why are you here?" he demands. "Are you signalling other humans?"

And we're back to the distrust...again.

"How many humans did you see when you took me?" I roll my eyes. "There was no one else, and I'm not signalling anyone. I wanted to have a look from the top. I've

never been in a castle before.”

Fenrother’s heaving chest slows. His huge claws retract slightly. He is quite obviously confused by my answer.

“Humans have castles,” he says slowly.

“Yeah, and they keep other humans out of them, mostly,” I grumble.

“It isn’t safe for you here,” Fenrother rallies.

“I’m not going to jump off if that’s what you’re thinking.”

One look at his face tells me he absolutely was NOT thinking that, but he is now. His tail lashes as he closes the gap between us, hesitating only briefly before wrapping an arm around my body.

At least he thought about what I said earlier about the touching, even if he’s chosen to ignore it. But Fenrother isn’t looking at me. He’s looking at the sky.

“There are worse things than falling.” He looks back at me. “And I would always catch you.”

As he speaks, there is an almighty crash of thunder and a lightning bolt. It’s so close my hair stands on end, and I can smell ozone.

“Shit!” I exclaim. “That has to be a direct hit. We should go in if it’s going to thunder.”

I take a step towards the door, but Fenrother holds on to me. “It’s too late,” he growls.

“No, it’s not,” I respond, but then I see he’s not paying any attention. He’s looking down the battlements at something else entirely.

I follow his gaze and nearly jump out of my skin when I find, for the first time since arriving, we are not alone.

A female Faerie is approaching us slowly along the battlements. Her large crystalline wings flicker from red to azure as she moves, and her flowing clothing, a mixture of whites and reds, seems to have a life of its own, waving in the opposite direction to the wind.

“Lambton Wurm.” She addresses Fenrother in a voice which is part song and part cut glass. The tone is not friendly.

“Queen Mab,” he responds, his entire body tensed to what almost seems to be the point of breaking.

“I see you got my little gift,” she says as she approaches, her eyes not leaving him for an instant.

“Gift?” Fenrother queries.

“Your mate.”

“The Yeavinger stone gave her to me,” he growls. “Not you.”

“On the contrary, Wurm. I command the magic in the Yeavinger, and I control the stone. She is mine to give and mine to take away.”

The growl Fenrother makes is entirely feral, and he pushes me behind him as far as he can on the narrow strip of stone.



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“You have one moon month, Wyrn, to fill her belly,” the Faerie queen says, her voice quiet but still easily audible over the whipping wind. “Or both she and you will be gone forever.”

I push past Fenrother’s arm. “Hey! I didn’t ask to be brought here. That’s not fair.” I ignore the weight in my stomach at her words, all of which fit with the concept of mate and mating, even if it’s the one thing Fenrother hasn’t attempted to do with me.

“You were sold. A consideration was taken. You belong to the Faerie,” the queen says, still not looking at me.

“I didn’t agree to be sold,” I shout at her. “There are rules about what the Faerie can take and what they can’t. I wasn’t my aunt’s enemy. She stole from me and she’s stolen from you too.”

I feel the rush of the wind, the thump in my stomach which causes me to gasp in pain, the skeletal hand at my throat which shoves me through one of the castellations until I’m half hanging over the drop.

“I make the rules.” The queen’s voice has become a banshee shriek. “I take what I want, and I give what you deserve.”

I’m wrenched back from the precipice but not because she has pulled back. On the contrary, the queen flails violently until she sees Fenrother with his hand wrapped around her wings.

“One moon month,” she growls at him and winks out of existence.

ALICE

I put my hands to my abused throat as Fenrother glares at the spot where the queen was.

“What did she mean?”

“Nothing,” he mutters. “She didn’t mean anything.”

“Fuck’s sake, Fenrother, she tried to drop me off the roof!” I fire at him. “No one turns up, issues threats, and leaves if it doesn’t mean anything.” I imitate his growl.

Fenrother huffs and turns his back on me, his leathery wings, filled with iridescence, sweeping the floor. The tip of his tail twitches like a cat’s.

“It is the curse of the Lambton Wurm. We have no females, and we must mate with a human,” he says. “But the mating must bear fruit within the first moon month.”

“I can assure you, Fenrother,” I half scoff because my heart is shoving its way out of my throat in a bid to leave my body and this place. “It doesn’t work like that. Gestating a baby takes a lot longer than a month.”

He rounds on me with a half snarl. “You are already with young. Her threats mean nothing.”

I open my mouth to disabuse him of the statement, but he has already stomped off back into the castle by way of the wooden door. I watch him for a few seconds, still trying to process everything which has happened.

And the fact the flipping queen of the Faerie tried to kill me.

The Faerie never said they came in peace, only to stop the human race from dying out completely. They need our life force or something to continue. We were saved and we paid the price—learning there was another force sharing our earth, one which had more power than any politician had ever dreamed of.

Except for those who were not saved.

I chase after Fenrother, catching him as he reaches the floor below the ramparts.

“Wait, why is she doing this to you and me?” I demand.

Fenrother stops so suddenly I virtually run into the back of him.

“And I can assure you I am not pregnant.” I add as an afterthought. “The last time I had sex was at least a year ago and it was thoroughly disappointing.”

Fenrother blinks at me, slowly as if he doesn’t quite understand what I’m saying.

“I refused to fight in the Night Lands anymore. I returned to my home without her consent, and as a result I incurred her wrath.” He shakes his head a little. “I should have expected her to meddle in my mating.” The head shaking stops and he glares at me. “What is this sexy you speak of?” Hands curl around my shoulders, gripping me tight. “And we have spent the night together, in the same bed, which means you are with young.”

I open and close my mouth like a carp. There is so much which is wrong, I don’t know where to start.

“Just sharing a bed won’t get me pregnant.” I furrow my brow. “We have to do other things. Sex for a start.”

Fenrother grips me harder. “That is not true. And why do you keep saying sex?” He makes a sour face. “I dislike this word.”

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“Sex is what you do to make a baby.” I genuinely can’t believe I’m saying this to a monster who, in his unshifted form, is a veritable god on legs with his chiselled good looks and abs for days.

Fenrother lets me go. “No,” he says firmly. “I know you are not like me. You have no pizzle, and you have those”—he points to my boobs—“but even so, the texts are clear. A male and a female share a bed and a home and then they have young.”

“I have no...pizzle?” I’m absolutely struggling as none of this makes any sense at all. “Fenrother, you said you had no mother or father. Did you have anyone at all, anyone to tell you about becoming a parent?”

“A Wyrms doesn’t need anyone,” he says haughtily. “And anyway, I had my texts.”

“So, no one has explained about, um—” I hesitate, wondering how to explain. “The birds and the bees?”

“Why would anyone need to explain those to me?” Fenrother snorts. “I eat the birds, and the bees make honey from the heather.”

“Okay.” I consider an alternative explanation. “Do you know how you came to be here? How you were born?”

His furrowed brow tells me everything I need to know.

Or rather everything Fenrother doesn’t know.

He is a virgin, a complete innocent in the ways of the flesh in more than one, having never seen female anatomy before and entirely ignorant of how anything works.

And I have to decide what my next move is.

FENROTHER

My female has to be with young. I have done everything the texts told me to do. She has been fed, and she has slept in the same bed as me. A sliver of ice runs up my spine. Perhaps I was not supposed to sleep with her in my shifted form. Perhaps this is why she says she is not carrying my child already as she claims.

As sure as I was about my texts, in the face of a human who is so different from me, whom I believed (and I can't say I don't still) wished me ill, because the rest of her kind have always persecuted Wyrms, doubt is creeping in.

Alice puts her hand to her mouth in an action which causes a strange feeling in my crotch.

"Um." She looks up into the ceiling of the long gallery as if trying to find inspiration. "I'm not sure how best to explain it."

"Perhaps you should try because as far as I am concerned, my texts are clear on the matter," I say with not a little annoyance.

"The way most species have young...mate...is for the male to put his"—she hesitates and swallows as I lean forward a little despite not wanting to believe her over my text—"his, um, penis into her vagina and then ejaculate his sperm. If she has an eggready inside her, it will be fertilised by his sperm, and that's what makes a baby." She finishes stronger than she started with a rush which leaves her breathless.

“Pe-nis?” I query.

“The...thing,” she says, her face and chest, including her orbs, turning a deeper pink colour. “The thing between your legs.”

“My pizzle?” I am completely confused. “I use it to piss. Sometimes I use it to pick things up. How do I even get it in a female?”

The idea makes me feel hot and bothered, especially as my pizzle is tingling like I need to piss urgently.

“Oh god.” Alice tilts her head to the ceiling again. “This is so awkward.”

“Do I put it where you have no pizzle?” I ask with an element of triumph at my deduction. “In the slit where you piss?”

Alice wraps her arms around herself, and I feel another chill, one I can’t quite put a claw on.

“Let’s get something quite clear, Fenrother. I am not letting you put your...yourpizzleanewhere near me, let alone inside me, okay? I don’t care if the failure for you to do so results in death by Faerie queen. It is not happening.”

She pushes past me, walking away down the walk with her clothing and her hair flowing behind her, leaving a scent which makes the tingling worse.

I toy with the idea of following her, to find out more about why she is different, but I’m going to have to deal with my needs first. I sprint to my bathroom, ready to have a piss the size of a river.

Only to discover my pizzle is wildly engorged and throbbing with an ache I’ve never

felt before. I will not be able to piss with it in this state.

I grip at the thing, and a feeling shoots through me, down my spine, through my wings, through my tail. The feeling concentrates in my balls, and without any warning, my pizzle explodes with a creamy substance as my knees buckle and a grunting noise escapes my lips. It does not stop, and I don't want it to, not while my spine is shattered and my wings grow to fill the room. All my control is ripped away, and I don't care in the slightest.



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When I finally come to my senses, I have one hand on the wall attempting to catch my breath.

I am always in control of my body. It is my nature. I change from one form to another at will. This situation is intolerable, and it is entirely due to the female in my midst.

A female who will be made to explain everything. Especially what she has done to make me lose control of my pizzle.

ALICE

I had half expected Fenrother to follow me as I flounced off, as refusing to leave me alone is absolutely his modus operandi. Flouncing is very easy in a dress the size of the one I'm wearing however, so I'm rather glad I got the opportunity to put it to good use.

But he does not follow, and I'm annoyed at the part of me which is disappointed. We're being forced together, expected to have sex and for me to get pregnant at the whim of a Faerie queen, and as it turns out, Fenrother is one step to the side of being virgin, given he doesn't know what a female is at all.

But surely he's encountered other species before? He's clearly met Queen Mab and she's...well I suppose she's female as far as Faerie have sexes, but it seems unlikely he had the opportunity to do what he's done with me.

Even so, and even with his claim he grew up without his parents, no one, not even a Lambton Wurm is ever entirely in isolation. He has to have met others. He has to

understand the difference between male and female.

Or does he? Am I applying human logic to a place which is entirely not human?

Sometimes I dislike my logical brain, especially when I need to think like a Wyrn if I'm going to survive.

I make my way down the stairs and back into the great hall. I'd rather not look at the wall hanging over the fire, so instead I exit through another door and find myself in a long passage where I'm sure I can hear voices.

It's not like things can get any worse, so I follow the passage, which runs along the side of the courtyard until I reach another corner turret and a heavy door. I'm sure I can smell a wood fire and cooking, but the second I push at the door, it is as if someone has turned off a tap.

The noise, the scent—it's all gone, and as I peer in through the doorway, the room itself appears empty. Its vaulted ceiling is cold and the single slit window is high up in the wall, allowing very limited light into the room.

Confused, I close the door.

"Female!" Before I can move, Fenrother pins me to the wall. "What have you done to me?"

He blinks as I gaze up at him, then he releases me, taking a pace back and looking strangely contrite. His wings are somewhat disheveled and his tail a little limp.

"I haven't done anything," I say, but Fenrother is already stalking away down the passage.

I look again at the door, but there are no more sounds coming from behind it or from elsewhere. There is only a Wyrn who needs to give me answers as much as he is demanding them from me.

I catch up with him as he enters the great hall, heading over to the table and fireplace.

“Fenrother.” I call his name.

He comes to a halt.

“Why don’t you show me your...texts?”

He turns his face in profile, not quite looking back at me. His wings flex, then lift from their slightly drooped pose.

“You think you can interpret the texts better than me?” he growls.

“No, but perhaps I can help fill in a few gaps?”

He is silent for a while. I keep my eyes averted from the tapestry, which means I’m staring at his bottom. It’s not a bad place to rest my eyes given, annoyingly, Fenrother is carved like a Greek god when he’s not a dragon.

He really has no right to be so gorgeous and so infuriating.

Fenrother grunts and walks past the table and pulls aside another, less unpleasant wall hanging which reveals another door. He pulls a key from his pocket and unlocks it.

For a creature who lives entirely alone, he definitely has a thing for locks.

Without further comment, he walks through the door, and I follow him, finding

myself initially in a wood-panelled corridor before it opens into a large airy room, where the walls are lined with shelves. Empty shelves.

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“It’s a library,” I gasp. “Where are the books?”

Fenrother doesn’t answer me. Instead he has taken a seat at a large desk. Behind him are a row of books and in front of him are a number of open ones, dropped haphazardly on the wooden surface. There is a pot filled with quills, a stack of unused parchment sheets, and a number covered in the same spidery writing I saw on the crumpled piece in his pocket.

“These are the texts,” Fenrother says. “The ones which refer to taking a mate.” He sits back as if challenging me.

If this is all he had to learn about the world, about the Yeavinging, then it cannot possibly be enough. I peer at one of the books. It looks like an illustrated manuscript. The text is in a dense black print and covers half of the page. The rest is a drawing, in crude medieval style, of what looks like a knightholding the hand of a lady. Admittedly the knight seems to have a tail, but other than this slight anomaly, this illustrated manuscript could be something I might find in the British Library.

A long, thick, clawed finger slides over the page and taps at the text.

“Here,” Fenrother says.

I puzzle at the words. It reads as if it’s been translated badly from another language into English.

On Mating: The male and female will meet, they will lie together, and she will produce young from this encounter. The male must protect once his workings are

done.

“Is there anything else?” I ask.

“This is the main text,” Fenrother rasps. “Tell me where my gaps are.”

I look at him. A muscle ticks in his jaw.

He really doesn't want to believe me.

“Perhaps you should tell me something,” I say, turning away from him and running my hand over the empty shelves. “How long have you been here alone?”

FENROTHER

No one has ever asked me about being alone before. This could be because I am alone. I like being alone.

“I am always alone. I am the Lambton Wurm,” I respond, my brow growing tight. “It is how it has always been.”

“So, no one looked after you when you were...smaller?” Alice queries. “You don't have any friends, any family?”

I snort at her suggestion. “What would I want with any of those?”

“I don't know.” Alice looks up at the shelves which stretch to many times her height. “Company? Conversation? Assistance?”

“I am the Lambton...”

“Yes, I know.” Alice sighs. “You are the Lambton Wyrn.” She imitates my deeper voice. “That’s the one thing you keep telling me,” she adds techily. “But it doesn’t actually explain anything.”

“I have my texts and my castle.” I lean back in my chair. “I have done my part in the wars of the Night Lands. I am content.” My eye catches the silvery scars which run down my left side, and I immediately concentrate entirely on Alice, not wanting to think about them.

“So, what do the texts tell you about finding your mate?” she asks.

“It is not something I can control,” I growl. “Nor is it something Queen Mab has any say in either.”

“So, why did she do the whole lightning storm to issue an ultimatum?”

I shrug. “There has always been a Lambton Wyrn. She wishes my line to continue.”

“Absolutely nothing she said suggested she was in any way altruistic toward you or me.” Alice huffs. “And I particularly do not like being told who I have to have sex with that I’m expected to pop out a child on demand.”

Her words make my pizzle ripple again.

“Queen Mab does not dictate what I do,” I respond. “I choose, although sometimes there is an instinct a Wyrn cannot deny.”

“Well start denying it,” Alice fumes.

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I lean back in my chair and prop my feet up on my desk, staring at the ceiling.

“I do not recall my mother or father. My earliest memories are of the inside of the castle well as a young Wyrn.” I smile to myself. “Plenty of time in the water, tadpoles to eat. It was good. Then I climbed out of the well and found my home.”

“But who taught you to read? To write?” Alice demands. “If there was no one here.”

“I taught myself,” I say, feeling confused again. “Didn’t you?”

“No, I went to school. I was taught with other human children. I had parents. I grew up around other humans until the plague came and took them, before the Faerie arrived to save us all,” she says, chewing the words and spitting them out.

I tuck one arm behind my head. “I’m not sure I like the sound of that.”

“You prefer to be alone?”

“It’s served me well.”

“Right up until the moment I was dropped in your lap,” Alice says. “And you’ve been told to make a baby in a month.” Her voice tails off and she turns her back on me.

“No one forces me, or my mate, to do anything,” I growl, on my feet in an instant. “I fought for Queen Mab in the Night Lands because it is what the Lambton Wyrn has always done. She might have disliked my decision to return, but it doesn’t mean I have to do what she says.”



“Then why the whole drama? Why the threats?”

I feel my guts twist, and it's far, far worse than my pizzle reacting to her words. The female deserves to know the truth.

“When a Wyrmling takes a mate, he has but one moon month to get her with child or there will be no other chance,” I respond. “His line will die out.”

“And what about the mate? The queen said I would die too.”

“Without a Wyrmling to protect you,” I sigh, “a scrap like you would not last long in the Yeavinging.”

“So, I don't get to go back beyond the veil if I don't get pregnant?” Alice says quietly. “You just abandon me in the Yeavinging instead.”

A growl sits in my chest. For all this female is weird, soft, apparently without inbuilt weapons, and has a scent which sets my heart pounding.

I will never, ever abandon her.

ALICE

Fenrother growls to himself when I mention being abandoned in the Yeavinging. If I thought I was going to get answers, all I have are questions.

It's clear he's been in isolation for most of his life when he wasn't being used as some sort of dragon mercenary by the Faerie. Given most of what he knows comes from books which are simply not fit for the purpose, I'm wondering if he knows wrong from right at all.

Especially now I've explained to him exactly what sex is. Well done, Alice.

Fenrother's tail flicks behind him as he watches me. I can't avoid the predator behind his eyes. I can't unsee the dinosaur which I woke to this morning.

"The Yeavinger cannot have you, Alice," he says, his voice dangerously low. "You are mine."

I'm not sure why I run, but I do. Back out into the great hall, up the stairs, and into the bedroom, through to the bathroom where I shut the door.

I have no control over the locks in this place. Hell, I don't have any control over whether I'm clothed or not. But I am damn sure I'm going to have control over whether I do anything with Fenrother.

And as for Queen Mab, she can go fuck herself. Admittedly I'll probably end up being turned into an earthworm, or worse, but given my only living relative pulled a gun on me and then sold me to the Faerie, at least I'll live out a quiet life ingesting soil.

As I slump on the stone floor and drop my head on my raised knees, I have to ask whether all of this is SO bad I would want to be an earthworm.

Yes, Fenrother has acted like a monster, but then that's because he is one. A monster raised in isolation with only a handful of terrible books for company and instruction. He knows what he has been allowed to know, and I can't imagine Queen Mab hasn't had some sort of skeletal claw in the process.

I can still feel her bony hand around my neck and the terrible draught whistling past my hair from the long, long drop onto the hard ground below the battlements.

## Page 21

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The door to the bathroom opens, and a blue-scaled hand curls around the wood, thick claws tapping.

“Go away,” I say, extreme tiredness flooding through me and knowing it won’t make a shit of difference to Fenrother.

The hand stills, then it is withdrawn.

He actually did go away? Fenrother did as I asked? I’m not sure whether to laugh or cry. And weirdly, yet again, I feel bad for him.

How is he supposed to know what to do if he has zero reference for his behaviour?

I get to my feet, cursing under my breath as I stumble over my skirts and go into the bedroom.

There is no Fenrother.

I go down the stairs, into the great hall. The fire is burning, and there are chickens on the spits, but no Fenrother.

Taking a deep breath, I go into the library, which is, surprisingly, unlocked. He’s not there either. There is, however, a piece of parchment with fresh ink in the spidery handwriting I know belongs to him.

It appears he has been copying something out from one of his texts.

The Wyrn protects, the Wyrn provides, the Wyrn does as he does until his mate ripens and flowers. She is his to claim, his to hold, his to pleasure.

And underneath this passage, Fenrother has written:

What if the Wyrn knows not of these things? What if what the Wyrn knows is nothing at all?’

My heart flips over in my chest.

He is not a monster. Not at all.

And I told him to go away.

ALICE

I have checked everywhere in the castle. Behind every door, every wall hanging. I’ve been up on the battlements looking out every side. The only thing I haven’t been able to do is leave the place. It seems you need wings to be able to do that.

There is no Fenrother.

There has been no Fenrother for the past twenty-four hours. Day merged into evening, into night and then day again.

The solitude is absolutely getting to me. As is the magic of the place. Food appears. I hear pattering feet but never see anyone, and the figures in the tapestries still move.

All except the one in the great hall. Those figures remain resolutely still, frozen in a time when a Lambton Wyrn came calling and no one escaped his wrath.

I don't eat in the great hall.

By the evening following my exhortation for Fenrother to leave me alone, I have retreated entirely to the bedroom, the fire flickering in the darkness. I've found other bedrooms, but I'm drawn to the one Fenrother uses. The bedclothes smell of him, and occasionally I find a shed scale. It's utterly idiotic, and probably the start of Stockholm Syndrome, but I...well, I miss him.

How can I possibly miss the big monster with the fixation on my lady parts and yet who had absolutely no idea what they were for? Maybe because I am genuinely going mad from the silence and boredom. To endure this for decades...longer...I can't imagine what I'd be like.

Although perhaps I don't have to look far.

There's a swish, like silk over stone, only it's a sound I recognise without needing to see anything. I'm off the bed and have yanked the door open to see the tip of a blue-scaled tail slide past in the passage outside.

"Fenrother?" My voice cracks with lack of use and I sound like an old lady.

The tail has already disappeared down the stairs, but my ears thump with an external pressure, and Fenrother in his humanoid form comes back up the last few stairs to peer at me.

As if he's never seen me in his life.

## Page 22

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 6:39 am*

For the first time since I got here, entirely involuntarily, anger bubbles up within me. I run at him with a roar, slamming my fists into his broad chest.

“How dare you leave me here on my own without even saying goodbye!” I yell as I pound on the unyielding flesh. “You can’t do that. You can’t bring me here and leave me alone.”

A growl ripples through his chest, and I feel a hand wrap around my waist. Which is when I remember the towel.

The one I found in another room. The one I wrapped around myself instead of the big dress which was getting on my nerves. The one which clings to my every curve.

“Female, desist,” Fenrother rumbles. “I have been out hunting for meat. And where is your garment?”

“It’s...I...oh!” I exclaim as I lift my head to look at him and spot the old woman out of the corner of my eye.

An old woman dressed in grey and brown, her clothing is shapeless, covering her from head to toe. She leans on a short, stubby stick, the handle of which is intricately carved with designs I can’t quite make out. Her long, curly hair, white peppered with grey, pokes out from a rather natty printed scarf in direct contrast to the dull colours of the rest of her outfit. She has a kind face, crinkled with age.

Of all the creatures I’ve met so far in the Yeavinging, she provides by far the best impression. Although she might yet offer me a shiny apple from the woven wicker

basket she carries, so I decide to reserve judgement.

“I came because I thought I was needed, but perhaps not?” she says in a rheumy voice with a glint of mischief.

Fenrother nearly jumps a foot in the air, his body flinching badly as he too sees her.

“You,” he growls. “What are you doing in my castle?”

“Oh Wyrn, you don’t need an answer to that question,” she says with mirth infusing her voice as she gazes around.

“I do,” Fenrother snarls. “And I will have it, or I will bite you in half, crone.”

“Less of the crone, I’ll thank you.” The old woman straightens and puts her stick in front of her like a weapon. “Meg of Maldon, if you please, as you well ken, Fenrother.”

Fenrother lifts his lips to reveal his fangs. “No witches here. Leave, now.”

He has not released my waist. If anything, he clutches me tighter.

“I am here to help you, Wyrn, and your female.” She turns, inspects a stone shelf behind her, and then sits like she’s here for the duration. “Although, perhaps I am not as needed as I thought I would be.” She eyes where Fenrother has hold of me.

And the towel which is slipping under pressure.

“The last thing I require in my life is another Faerie, even a half Faerie,” Fenrother growls. “I have brought food for my mate, and I intend on feeding her.”

I look between him and her. “I am here, you know.”

Fenrother’s attention returns, mostly to where the towel is slipping. “I know,” he rumbles.

His voice goes right through me, reverberating in my core and making parts of me tingle. It’s probably because I’m gripped tightly to him, no other reason, and nothing to do with the fact being left alone in this castle for twenty-four hours has driven me half mad.

“You need me, Wyrn.” Meg sighs. “If you’re to do as the queen requires.”

At the mention of the queen, a snarl is ripped out of Fenrother. “She sent you?” A set of vicious claws appears on his free hand.

Meg laughs, and it’s about as far from a witchy cackle as I could imagine. Instead it tinkles through the air like music.

“I do not bow to the queen,” she says, and her words carry an element of danger which I think Fenrother can feel as his body tenses. “I am beholden to no one save myself.”

“Worse than being beholden to the queen,” Fenrother says, almost as if he’s oblivious to the threat she poses and the way the air seems charged. “A rogue Faerie halfling has no place in my domain.”

“Ah,” she says as some of the threat dissipates, “but you’d know all about the rogue Faerie, wouldn’t you?”

Fenrother wrinkles his nose. “I did what was required of me in the Night Lands and nothing more.”



Meg grunts ambivalently and gets to her feet painfully, using the stick to assist.

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“You will welcome my visit, in time, Wyrn. I have left you both something to ease your passage with your mating.” Sheeyes me with a half smile. “Although I’m sure you’ll work it out very soon. I’ll be where you need me, when you need me.” She winks at Fenrother who lifts his lips to reveal his fangs.

Before I can point out I am a pawn in this game the queen is playing and the last place I want to be is here, she disappears as if she was never there at all.

And on the stone ledge behind her is a new book.

### FENROTHER

Finding food for my mate took longer than I intended. I wasn’t sure what she might enjoy, so I brought all the meat I could find within the Yeavinging.

My pizzle seemed to like the fact she was no longer wearing the garment supplied by my wardrobe even if I was somewhat irked she had decided to take it off. Especially when she wanted it in the first place.

It appears my pizzle preferred her without the garment, given the way it is swelling...again.

I’m going to have to stop it from behaving in this manner. It is distinctly distracting.

Especially when a halfling Faerie witch invades my home.

“I thought you were raised here alone?” Alice demands. “So, who the hell is she?”

She's pointing to where the witch stood. Where there is now a text which is not one of mine.

"I have been alone, but that doesn't mean I don't recognise a witch, or any other inhabitant of the Yeavinger," I say. "I go out. People know of the Wym."

"Obviously."

"But it wasn't always the case. For many years, I was too small to leave," I add. "And Meg of Maldon provided assistance on occasion."

Alice goes very quiet. Her little hands are by her side, not pounding on my chest like before.

I rather liked it.

"What did you do in the Night Lands?"

"I killed demons." I keep my eyes open because I know if I close them, I will see the battles and smell the blood.

"Just demons?"

"I killed what I was supposed to kill."

I don't want to discuss this anymore. I want my mate to try the food I've brought. I want her to put the garment back on, although...

The fabric she has wound herself with has slipped, and the lumps on her chest, including the bright pink peaks which adorn them, are slightly exposed. I find myself wanting to consume them, which is very odd.

Alice follows my gaze.

“Oh!” she exclaims, her mouth making a perfect ‘o’ and for some reason my pizzle jerks further up, harder than ever.

She pulls at the towel, but I have my claws in it, and instead of it covering her more, it unwinds, and she’s left clutching it to herself, with much of her creamy skin exposed.

And she still has no weapons, which I am pleased about. I probably should check her for weapons every time she takes the garment off. For reasons I can’t quite fathom, I want to inspect between her legs.

I pluck the fabric away from her.

“Seriously, Fenrother!” She pulls it back against herself and glares at me. “Don’t do that!”

I like her defiance even more than I want to go between her legs, as does my pizzle, which has taken on a life of its own since yesterday.

I release the towel, and by association, her, and Alice flounces off back towards my bedroom with a stare over her shoulder at me. Or at least until she realises I’m looking at the other globes she possesses, the ones on her rear. Then she shoves the sheet over them, and I release a disappointed grunt.

## Page 24

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 6:39 am*

Inside the bedroom, Alice makes a shriek which causes my wings to flare and my shift to nearly happen on its own. Within a wing beat, I am in the room and ready for anything the Yeavinger might wish to bring down on me or my mate.

Alice is stood at the side of the bed, her hand spread out on the covers as she makes another squealing sound.

“She’s left underwear!” she finally says as I heave my breath behind her.

“What is underwear?”

Alice turns with some tiny garments in her hands. They do not look like anything I’ve seen before. Some parts are spun like spiders’ webs, and some are solid but made out of what looks like silk. I feel my body heat like I’m about to go into battle.

“Look!” she exclaims. “Knickers!”

I growl. I’m not sure about these knickers. Could they be weapons? Their flimsy nature suggests otherwise, but then I did discover this female wearing a weapons holster undergarment when she was given to me.

Even as I contemplate the underwear, the door to the wardrobe pops open in a way which has my wings nearly flapping out of their sockets. Alice runs over to it before I can stop her and makes yet more noises which could be her being killed.

I grab the door of the wardrobe, ready to wrench it off, only to discover it is filled with garments, unlike its usual disposition which is to provide me with what I need

when I need it. Which is usually a pair of trousers when mine have become too uncomfortable with blood and dirt to wear anymore.

Now it is filled to bursting with fragrant smelling items and Alice is running her hands over them with undisguised glee.

I would rethink my garment policy for her, only she seems excited and something else, something I haven't seen before. Not from her or from anyone around me.

She seems happy.

And so am I.

ALICE

Fenrother jerks the wardrobe door open, snorts at the interior, and stalks out of the bedroom. I'm too happy to care. The discovery of underwear and then this cupboard filled with clothing is the best thing which has happened to me in a very long time.

And I'm including the time I was beyond the veil from the Yeavinger. All my clothes were secondhand, and none of them were made to fit me like these seem to be.

But also, knickers!

I'm back by the bed, pulling on a pair and delighting in them.

"I'm never taking you for granted again," I tell the scraps of lace and silk which impressively do a good job of holding everything in.

However, I hesitate before going back to the wardrobe, and instead of selecting a new dress or anything else I've spotted in there, I find myself pulling the dress Fenrother

gave me back on.

I accept the underwear is the doing of Meg of Maldon, given Fenrother hasn't a single clue, but the dress was from him.

And as it's rapidly becoming obvious my being here, in the Yeavinging, had nothing to do with him, I consider we're going to have to try to get along.

Even if the whole mating thing is up in the air. Despite old ladies appearing out of it to proclaim their assistance. The chances of Fenrother getting the concept of what mating actually means seems a million light years away. And the chances of me wanting to do the horizontal mambo with him...

Not going to happen.

Absolutely not.

It doesn't matter I missed the big lug. It doesn't matter that seeing him again made my heart leap into my throat or that he really is easy on the eye.

He's damaged, untrained, unworldly. Doing anything with Fenrother would be a huge mistake, no matter what other ideas my body might have.

For now, perhaps I should make some peace with the Wyrn who, despite everything, wanted to protect me from meddling little old ladies.

And knickers.

And apparently went out hunting for me, the reason he did a disappearing act.

## Page 25

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 6:39 am*

I make my way down the stairs, and although I'm beginning to hate that damn tapestry with a vengeance, I take a deep breath, push down my fear and all my other emotions, and walk into the great hall.

Fenrother is sat in his usual position, albeit slumped rather than upright, and depressed looking rather than his rambunctious self. I make my way down the long hall until I reach him.

An entire pig carcass is roasting in the fire.

A. Whole. Pig.

Fenrother looks at it with disinterest. I see the book Meg left is open on the table next to him as I lean against it and fold my arms.

"Any good?" I ask, nodding at the tome.

Fenrother huffs. "Like all witches and warlocks, they meddle where they are not needed," he says, dismissively.

"I see the result of your hunt." I turn to the pig. "Where did you learn to cook?"

"I don't. The Duegar do it."

"The Duegar? I haven't seen anyone while I've been here except you and Meg," I say, confused.



“They are not to be seen.” Fenrother sighs, as if he’s explaining something to a child. “To be seen means death to a Duegar.”

“But they’re your servants?”

Fenrother makes a swift hissing noise. “They live here. This is their home. I protect them, and they share their meals with me, and you, it seems,” he grumbles, pointing to the various dishes on the table. “They have made you these.”

I stare at the various covered pieces of crockery.

“How do you know they’re for me?”

“I eat what I catch,” Fenrother growls. “I do not eat sweets.”

I lift the cover on the first dish. Despite his protests, the large tart which smells of apple and cinnamon has a Fenrother-sized bite taken out of it. It’s warm, and it smells delicious. I pick up a two-pronged fork and dive in, groaning with delight as the perfectly crunchy pastry meets the sharp, spiced apple.

A strangled sound at the other end of the table lifts me away from my tart-induced reverie. Fenrother’s entire attention is on me, his hands on the wooden surface, his massive claws curving into the top, the tips burrowing down into the thick wood and varnish.

His eyes are spinning holograms of fire as he watches me. I put down the fork.

“If you don’t want me to eat in front of you, I won’t,” I say.

“I want you to eat,” Fenrother growls, but this one is different. This one is so low in his chest I can hardly make out the words. “Eat while I watch.”

I shouldn't let him order me to do anything, but there's something about his tone, something about his demeanour I can't refuse.

I want to do what he wants me to do.

I lift the fork, cut a slice, spear it, and put it in my mouth. Fenrother's eyes do not miss a single moment, unblinking, the slit pupils mere lines within the sparkling holographic iris. This piece of tart tastes even better than the last, and despite myself, despite my audience, I hum my approval.

At the end of the table, there is a crack. Fenrother is leaning further forward and has driven his claws far into the wood top. Every muscle in his body is straining against some hidden force.

"The text," he says through teeth which are very sharp. "The text said about this."

"What did it say?" I fork another slice into my mouth because, damn, this tart is good.

"It said, for mates to get to know each other, they should eat together."

"And you arranged this?"

"The Duegar did," Fenrother says.

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“So, you’re telling me”—I eat another piece of tart and chew thoughtfully—“the things in the walls which I can’t see arranged adate nightfor us?”

“I do not know what sort of a night that is,” Fenrother says. The table makes another splintering sound as I lick the tines of the fork. “But I know I like to watch you eat.”

“I don’t think I can eat this entire tart to your order. It isn’t good for humans to just eat sweets,” I say, eyeing the rest of the crisp pastry and filling.

I mean, I probably would, if my life depended on it.

“Eat,” Fenrother snarls, the noise going straight to my core.

Maybe my life does depend on it.

I consume another forkful, and as before, it’s even more delicious than the last, eliciting further noises of approval. I’m acutely aware of the destruction being wrought to the tabletop at Fenrother’s end, but I’m also equally intrigued as to what he’s going to do about it.

He ordered me to eat after all.

I get to about the halfway point in the tart, and I know I can’t possibly fit any more in, good though it is. It seems like Fenrother has won this one. I lay the fork down and pat my stomach.

“I can’t possibly eat another bite.”

“I can,” Fenrother growls.

ALICE

I might have been doing what he asked, but perhaps I took it too far. Fenrother’s eyes have gone from sparkling to darkness as he pulls his claws free, one by one, from the table. His gaze is hungrier than anything I’ve ever seen, his scales rippling in the flickering light of the fire. His tail is uncustomarily still, and his wings appear to have expanded exponentially.

He breathes audibly.

I may have overdone things. I didn’t mean to tease him in any way. He knows nothing, and all I’m doing is riling him up.

Actions have consequences, Alice.

I know, right here and right now, I am going to regret the consequences of my actions. Or, at least, my head is going to regret them. My body on the other hand has distinctly other ideas.

With the slow, jerky movements of a hunting cat, Fenrother rounds the end of the table and moves towards me. I consider running, but he is one enormous predator who will catch me probably before I trip over this stupid dress and go flying.

“The text mentioned something else females like,” he says. “Other than eating.”

He breaks off a piece of the tart and wolfs it down like he’s a creature starved.

“What?” I’m interested, afraid, and strangely, strangely, I’m...turned on?

“It’s about putting my mouth on yours.” He flashes me a set of teeth which would not be out of place on a great white shark. “Females like it.”

“Females like it if it’s done properly,” I counter.

That stops him in his tracks.

“Have you put your mouth on another male before?” Fenrother growls, his eyes glittering with menace.

I contemplate my answer. I don’t want to be untruthful, even if the number of kisses I’ve had is not numerous.

“Yes,” I say, folding my arms, teasing the beast once again. “So, I know how.”

A snarl steals through Fenrother’s chest, and for a second, I think he’s going to demand names and addresses. Instead he throws his shoulders back and glares.

“Show me.”

“That is no how this works, Fenrother,” I say, exasperated.

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“I don’t care. Show me how to put my mouth on you,” he demands. “There were no diagrams in the text.”

He towers over me and my stomach squirms.

“Do you always need diagrams?”

Fenrother puts his face close to mine with a guttural growl. “Show me.”

Annoyance at this big, brash, handsome idiot swells in my chest.

“You want to be kissed?”

“Yes.” His brow furrows.

“Are you sure you’re not going to think I’m trying to attack you?”

“Yes!” I can see the uncertainty flit through his eyes, and the annoyance becomes anger.

“Fine!” I put my hands either side of his face and pull him into me, my lips landing on his.

Fenrother rears away, but I have hold of him, and the resistance lasts all of a nano-second as I keep my lips on his.

His hand pushes through my hair as he closes his eyes, and I continue with the kiss,

slowly parting my mouth, and to my surprise this time, his tongue sweeps my lips, soft, warm, almost like he was made for me with his pillowy lips and the way his eyelashes brush his skin.

Skin which feels so smooth to the touch, not scaly or bumpy.

Fenrother's tongue gets bolder, and his kiss deepens, one arm around my waist, one in my hair. He takes over, dominating me as he kisses the breath out of my body.

Until I am released.

"I don't need diagrams," Fenrother says, his voice low and sinful. "I need a mate."

Actions have consequences...Alice.

ALICE

My entire body is trembling, and for some reason, it would rather Fenrother still had hold of me.

Because that isn't an absolutely terrible idea.

The closer I get to this monster, the more likely it is we'll...and I can't think about that. Not because Fenrother isn't easy on the eye but because of what might be the end result.

I can't think straight, not after that kiss. Not after the way he finally opened his eyes, staring deep into mine, his claws pricking at my scalp, his sinuous body pressed against me.

He made me feel things. Things I should not be feeling here in the Yeavinging. Things I

never thought I'd feel for anyone because my life was a total and utter disaster.

Things which were not made for this world, not if I want to survive it. Or not survive it and get very quickly to the end point.

So, which is it?

Fenrother stands in front of me, arms by his sides, his chest moving up and down as he makes a poor attempt at pretending the kiss didn't affect him.

Given the different colouration of scales on his shoulders and neck, I'd say it did. I'm pretty sure I'm red from toe to hairline after such a scorcher.

Fenrother, as it turns out, is a great kisser. A natural. I didn't even have any dead fish vibes like my very early kisses with human men.

What isn't clear is what he intends doing next. Which is, I suspect, because he doesn't know. The way the book has been dumped, pages down on the table, suggests he hasn't finished it.

My Wyrms remain entirely in the dark about next steps.



Good.

“I’m...I’m tired. I’m going to go to bed.” I stumble over the words, pushing them out as fast as I can.

The corner of Fenrother’s mouth quirks up. “I will accompany you,” he says.

“What about...” I flail for an excuse. “What about your meal?” I point at the carcass still slowly turning over the fire.

“I already ate,” Fenrother says.

A shiver runs through my body. A shiver which is different to all the others I’ve felt here in the Yeavinger. It’s a shiver I should not be having. A reaction I should not give in to.

“Oh,” I respond, not looking at him, but my eyes drifting to the tapestry above, where I quickly tear them away.

“An ancestral portrait, of sorts.” Fenrother catches my gaze. “The seventh Wyrn commissioned it, so the Duegar tell me.”

“I don’t like it,” I blurt out.

Fenrother says nothing. He continues to look at me. His gaze is somewhere between his scientific stare and confusion.

I take my chance, turning on my heel and quickly making my way down the hall to the stairs. I know I'm going to Fenrother's bedroom. I know he's entitled to sleep there, and given his complete lack of awareness, he will probably insist on it.

I mean, I don't dislike the idea.

The thought gets shoved aside as I grab handfuls of material, hike up my skirts, and climb the stairs. No historical drama or movie ever explained how bloody difficult it is to get around in one of these huge dresses. It's something I'm going to have to practice.

When I get to the bedroom, it is, mercifully, empty. Only my heart seems like it has strained a little in my chest, a pain spearing through it, albeit briefly. I pull the dress over my head as quickly as I can and grab an oversized shirt from the wardrobe before hurrying through to the bathroom to do what I need to do. My stomach is cramping from eating too much tart in one go, so I resolve not to do that again.

Even if it was the tastiest thing I've had in a very long time.

A bit like Fenrother.

My internal monologue is not helping this situation at all. I'm completely blindsided by my reaction to my big monster.

I liked the kiss. I liked it a lot. I didn't want it to end and in fact...

Shoving the erotic thought away, I shrug on the shirt. The thing has to be Fenrother sized, even if I've never seen him wear anything on his top half.

It's almost like a challenge for him.

I exit the bathroom, and sat on the bed propped against the carved headboard is Fenrother. Fortunately, he is still wearing what little clothing he bothers with. His eyes widen as he sees me, carefully looking over what I now have on.

Something he's probably going to complain about, I'm sure.

"You left," he says simply.

"You found me," I respond, pulling back the bedclothes and climbing into the big bed.

I try not to think about the last time I was in this bed with Fenrother, naked against his Wyrms form.

"I found you," he repeats before there is a small sigh. "I...liked you putting your mouth on mine."

"You liked the kiss?"

"Kiss." Fenrother touches his clawed fingers to his lips. "I liked the kiss."

"As I'm supposed to be your mate, I'd be surprised if you didn't," I say, turning on my side away from him.

Fenrother says nothing for a while. Instead I hear his breathing, like the huge creature he is, the air whooshing in, then out of his lungs, as I study the stonework on the other side of the room.

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“May I stay with you, here, tonight?” he asks.

My body flinches involuntarily.

“It’s your bedroom,” I respond, my heart in my mouth. “You can do what you want.”

“Only if you agree,” he says. “The text says you have to agree.”

“And you follow the text?”

“My texts were not wrong. They were merely scant on detail,” Fenrother replies. “So, I follow the text.”

Despite myself, despite everything, a smile curls my lips at his way of thinking. Merely scant on detail.

“It’s your bed,” I say. “I’m not going to make you sleep elsewhere.”

The sigh I hear this time is one of pleasure.

“Then I bid you good night, mate,” Fenrother says, and all the candles gutter out.

ALICE

I’m not sure how long I lay in the dark staring at the flickering lights which bob past the windows. All I know is, I fall asleep, and when I open my eyes again, I’m half covered by an enormous body and it’s morning.

For a second, I freeze. Fenrother was clear last night he wouldn't do anything if I didn't agree to it. Then I feel a sleeping whoosh of breath in my hair, and, it appears he is doing a starfish impression across the bed, meaning I've got caught within it.

One arm is flopped over me, along with one leg and his tail. I turn my head to see exactly what's going on and find the face I saw last night, only this one is completely unguarded—a half smile on his face, those long dark lashes pressed against the soft iridescent scales under his eyes. He looks like butter wouldn't melt between those luscious lips of his. Lips which took mine by storm.

Fenrother is hopelessly, terminally confusing to me. Although, apparently not to my body, given the rush of heat between my legs.

His eyes open. Huge, dark pupils contract to mere slits as the light hits them. Fenrother stares at me and inhales.

“Blood.” He growls the word as he exhales, his eyes predatory.

It's then I realise why the feeling between my legs is so familiar and why, at that exact moment, the cramping hits. I leap out of bed, the long white shirt stained scarlet where my period has soaked through, and race into the bathroom, shutting the door behind me.

What the hell am I going to do? There's nothing I can use, no pads, no tampons, nothing to stem the flow as I pull off the shirt and moan at the pain.

I've never been particularly regular, ever since my periods first started, but what is regular is the pain and the heavy bleeding at least once in every three menstrual cycles.

I guess this one is one of those.

Lucky me.

The bathroom door slams open, and Fenrother holds it against the wall, his muscles bulging.

“Who hurt you?” he bellows, eyes raking over me and the crime scene the bathroom is starting to resemble. “I will kill them. I will rend them limb from limb and chew up the remains,” he snarls.

He takes a step towards me, and then in a rush, I’m scooped into his arms. Only when I’m there, he seems to realise he doesn’t know what to do with me, and I’m put back on my feet.

“Alice,” he says helplessly.

“It’s okay.” I put my hand on his arm. “It’s okay. No one has hurt me. I’m going to be fine.”

I grit my teeth as my womb does the fandango of all the cramps.

“There is blood. You are in pain.” Fenrother looks down, drops to his knees, and grabs at my hips, pulling my fannyright into his face. “The blood...it comes from where you piss? Someone hurt you there?”

His eyes are wide, wider than I’ve ever seen them as clearly his brain is trying and failing to understand the situation. I’m squirming against his grip, hot with embarrassment as he inspects me ever closer.

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“It’s my period, Fenrother. I’ve got my period.”

“Period?” Fenrother shoves his nose right into my apex, and I shriek in response, but this doesn’t deter him. “What is that?”

“Once a month, my womb sheds its lining, if there’s no fertilised egg.” I gabble out the first explanation which comes into my head. “That’s what’s causing the blood. It’s completely natural, I promise.”

I try to pull away from him, but instead he spins me around and shoves my back against the wall, lifting one leg to hook over his shoulder, my toes touching the soft leathery skin of his wing.

“You are shedding because there is no young inside you?” Fenrother growls. “You should stop. I will put young in you.” He continues his inspection, one finger sliding through my folds and it comes out bloody.

I want to die and the ground to swallow me up.

“I can’t stop.” I grit my teeth at both the sheer awfulness of the situation and the cramping which is ramping up to be one of the epic levels of period pain.

“Of course you can.” Fenrother, to my abject horror, licks his finger. “When I piss, I can stop.”

“This is not the same. I don’t choose when my period happens, and I can’t stop the flow,” I snap.

Fenrother pauses in his inspection.

“So, even if I put my pizzle in you, right now, you will not have young?”

“It’s extremely unlikely...” I pant with the pain. “If you can just...I need to get more comfortable...”

I try to lift my foot from his shoulder, but he has hold of my ankle and is still regarding my pussy like he wants to...eat?

Fenrother presses his face right into my bleeding slit, his tongue lapping at the blood, twitching over my clit and making me gasp.

“Fenrother...do you...?” I’m not sure what it is I’m feeling but I’m absolutely sure it’s not what I had in my mouth last night. “Do you have two tongues?”

He looks up at me, licking ruby red lips with the flicker of a forked tongue before diving right back where he was. He presses my thighs further apart with his huge hand, and as he licks, he slides in a thick digit, slowly circling it as he explores me.

With another flick over my clit, I see stars, groaning without thinking as he hits the sweet spot with his clever tongue. The cramping doesn’t lessen, but the touch of Fenrother on my clit and the way it makes me feel take my mind from the pain. I shouldn’t be allowing any of this, but I can’t deny, it makes me feel...good.

Better than good. There are so few men who wouldn’t be put off by a period, finding the things dirty and shameful, but Fenrother is working some sort of magic down there where anyone else might have run a mile.

He was willing to battle my period to the death, and now he’s eating me out to within an inch of my life.



## FENROTHER

Alice shifts under my touch, her breathing fast, then slow, then fast again. My pizzle throbs in my pants, but my mouth is too occupied with the slit where her pizzle should be. It reminds me of the time I found the huge honeycomb and ate and ate until my stomach was too full to move. The sweetness was too much for me to enjoy such a thing ever again.

Until now.

She is delicious, and while I get to eat from her, I can also explore her slit, finding it goes deep into her body, like my anus, only she has one of those too. One my tail seems like it would like to probe.

My pizzle is more than interested in what I'm doing. It is hard like before, aching against the fabric of my pants, and it means I have no option but to rock to gain some friction over the tip, to flood my body with all the strange feelings it gives me.

As I clean her up, as I enjoy my work, Alice's breathing increases, her entire body heaving until, out of nowhere, she grabs hold of my horns and yells, her slit clamping down on my finger, pushing out more of the blood I want to consume, and then pulsing and pulsing as she floods me with more than just the blood. Something which smells like it was sent by fate. Something delicious.

My pizzle explodes in my pants.

For a moment, the only sound in the bathing room is one of our ragged breathing as we both attempt to take in the air enough to get our lungs working again. I lift Alice's leg from my shoulder, but she struggles to stay upright.

Perhaps this inability to stand is a result of the blood coming from her. I pick her up,

marvelling at the softness of her skin on my scales, and carry her to the bath, ripping her clothing from her body. It has filled with hot water, and I gently lower her into it before partially shifting into my Wyrn form, the one I usually prefer to bathe in. I slide in next to her, allowing the warm water to cleanse my pizzle of the mess it made before it slides back into its sheath.

As for my Alice, she will need more cleansing.

“You don’t have to do this, Fenrother,” she says, her voice hoarse. “Perhaps we shouldn’t...”

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I swirl the cleaning sponge around her slit before moving it over my sheath to remove any residue. I like the thought it has been on her and on me.

“Shouldn’t what?” I ask, cradling her body against mine.

Her eyes fall on my sheathed pizzle and she looks at it for a while.

“Is it...where is it?” Alice swirls her hand over the water in the direction of my sheath.

My pizzle pushes at my sheath insistently.

Alice’s eyes widen.

“It’s inside?” she asks.

“It is in this form,” I respond, puzzled by her reaction. “Where else do you suggest it should be?”

She makes a slight snorting noise. “You’re right, where else should it be?” she says, her eyes still on where the tip is protruding.

And I don’t need to piss, so it is a little strange.

“What happens if I touch it?” she asks.

“No one has ever touched my pizzle, other than me,” I say confidently.

“Can I touch it?” Alice asks.

The tip pushes further out.

“Yes.” The word is a hiss of breath.

Her hand slides through the water, and her long pink fingers, magnified under the surface, trip over my sheath. It’s all I can do not to shove myself into her touch. Not that it bothers my pizzle. It happily emerges and puts itself right into her hand.

Alice squeaks. My pizzle has to be wider than her wrist and as long as her forearm.

“Is it...always like this?” she asks.

“It has yet to swell, little mate. But be not afraid. It rarely swells.”

“Does it get...” She swallows hard. “Bigger when it swells?”

“It does,” I say proudly. “Look.” My pizzle bobs in the water, twice the length it was a second ago. “Your touch did that, mate,” I inform her. “It only does this when you are close by. And twice now it has produced an emission of great quantity.”

ALICE

I marvel at Fenrother’s cock, or pizzle, as he calls it. His description is accurate. The thing is hard, incredibly hard, and dear lord, it is enormous. Thick and long, if it fits at all, he won’t be able to get it inside me. But that’s not what I’m concentrating on. It’s the fact that, as I run my finger down it, scales rise and fall like feathers, and the tip, when I reach the broad head, grasps at my digit like a sucker.

Sometimes I pick things up with it.

Fenrother's words come back to me, only I suspect the reason for his cock to have such an odd function is not what he has been using it for. A slight frisson runs over my body at what it could be used for.

Especially as he's proved he has a tongue which can split into two and do things to my pussy which are probably illegal...somewhere.

The warm water is helping with the cramps, easing the pain in my back and stomach. Fenrother is silent save for his breathing as I slowly explore his cock, the thing straining under my touch.

"Alice," he says quietly.

"Yes, Fenrother?"

"My pizzle is going to produce another emission if you continue."

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My eyes fly to his face. His jaw is set tight and the muscles in his upper body are straining.

“If you gave me an orgasm, I should give you one,” I respond.

“Orgasm?”

“An emission.”

“I emitted in my pants when you made some noises before,” Fenrother says as if it’s an everyday occurrence. “You gave me my orgasm then.”

I don’t want to withdraw my hand, partly because I want to see what happens—call it scientific curiosity—but partly because I like having control of this huge monster, or part monster, under the water.

So, I smooth down the rippling scales, imagining how they would feel inside me, and Fenrother’s hips flip up at me, his cock pulsing alarmingly, swelling in my hand as he groans under his breath. The tip stretches out, and a great cloud of creamy cum streams from it into the water.

It is a lot.

Fenrother shudders under me. Having experienced the third orgasm of his life, I’m pretty sure he’s probably done.

But I would be wrong. Instead strong arms lift me up, and I’m carried out of the bath.

A towel appears from somewhere and he wraps it around me.

“I’m going to make a mess,” I say, feeling completely weary. “My period doesn’t stop because I’ve been in the bath.”

“I will clean you up,” Fenrother says emphatically.

Out of the water, the pain is creeping back, not as bad as before, but not great. All I want to do is curl up in bed and try to sleep.

As if responding to my wishes, Fenrother ushers me through to the bedroom. The wardrobe door is open, and he stops dead with a low growl, pushing me behind him as he stalks toward the open doors.

He reaches slowly into the imposing wooden wardrobe and then turns back to me with a puzzled look on his face and something in his hands.

Something which looks suspiciously like period underwear. I send my thanks to Meg of Maldon who has, simply, thought of everything. I whip the knickers from Fenrother’s outstretched hand. They’re soft and clearly absorbent as I pull them on.

It’s then I remember the bed. I have to have made a mess, and as my eyes travel to the sheets, I see the whole thing has been made.

“Duegar.” Fenrother shrugs, looking at the made bed.

“They’re good to you,” I say, lifting the bedclothes and crawling into the cool interior as the pain in my middle back ramps up again.

“I don’t ask them for anything. I hunt and I protect,” Fenrother says. “I am glad of their assistance.”

The way he says it, almost fondly, causes my heart to do a flip. He grew up here with an invisible force caring for him. At some point, he became useful, but there must have been a time when they were almost his silent parents.

What a way to come into the Yeavinging.

I wrap my arms around myself and curl up in the bed. If I sleep, then potentially the worst of it will be over when I wake.

ALICE

“For you.” My shoulder is nudged by something hard and sharp.

I open my gummed up eyes to see Fenrother standing over me with a platter.

“I don’t think I can eat anything.”

“This is a tea. You must drink it,” he says firmly.

I drag my bloated, uncomfortable body up into a sitting position as Fenrother puts the platter on the bed. It’s light outside, so it must be morning. There’s no sign the bed next to me has been slept in, and it gives me an empty feeling.

Why would Fenrother not sleep in his own bed? Perhaps he is, ultimately, disgusted by my period, by the fact I’m lethargic and swollen and full of pain.



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“Tea,” he says, before retreating to the window seat, flinging himself down into a nest of blankets and propping up his feet.

He opens a book. It’s the one left for him by Meg.

There is a small white teapot dotted with painted pink roses on the platter, along with a matching cup. I pour out the tea which smells like tea and nothing weird. I add milk from a tiny jug which is painted with ivy.

Lifting the cup to my lips, I risk another glance at Fenrother. He’s deeply engrossed in the book, clawed hands clutching it like it’s the most precious thing he owns. Very occasionally, he blinks. Hard.

If that book contains the information I think it does, I’m surprised he’s not turned red rather than his usual blue-green. But then nothing is embarrassing for Fenrother. He has no filter, no shame, and no concept of discomfort.

Everything is new to my great Wym. And I’m the newest thing in his life.

The tea is good, strongly flavoured, and I’ve drained the cup in no time, pouring out a second and rather wishing the teapot was larger.

“Is it good?” I ask to break the silence. Fenrother lifts his head, eyes unfocussed, as if he’s forgotten where he is. “The book? Is it good?” I say as he comes out of his reverie. “Any diagrams yet?”

He snorts. Could that be a hint of a smile?

“No diagrams,” he says. “Do you have a clitoris?”

I nearly choke on my tea, having taken a mouthful a moment earlier, as he hisses the word.

“What does your text say?”

“It says human females have a clitoris and a Wyrn should endeavour to find it, to bring her pleasure.”

“Does it not say where the clitoris is?”

Fenrother goes back to his book, and I watch him read on, his eyes widening slowly until he glances back at me, down to the book and again at me. “It does.”

“Do you think you could find it?” I’m trying to contain my mirth.

“I could,” Fenrother says confidently. “I think I already have,” he adds smugly. “And I know your bleed goes on for five days.”

“Oh, do you?” I sit a little straighter.

“And the moon month for your breeding takes place after it is done.”

Okay...so I should be horrified by his sentence, but I’m not. If anything, it makes me shift a little in the bed. The concept of breeding—it’s at once wrong and right.

Or at least a part of me thinks it’s right. A part which I should not be using to think.

“So, we get longer than the queen gave us?”

Fenrother nods enthusiastically. “I also know your bleed can make you grumpy, require sweet treats, and cause you pain,” he says, clapping the book shut in triumph. “What is grumpy?”

I honestly want to tell him to look in the mirror, but at this moment in time, Fenrother is anything but grumpy. He’s filled with passion for this new thing.

Me.

Is this any better than when he thought my bra was going to kill him?

“It’s where you don’t tolerate much without it annoying you. And then making everyone else know how you feel,” I respond. Grumpily.

Fenrother furrows his brow, looks briefly at the book and then at me.

“Not everything can be found in a book. Some things you have to find out for yourself,” I say.

His lip hitches up on one side, revealing an impressive fang. “Like a clitoris?”

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My entire body flushes. “Not necessarily...” I say, but before I can get any other answer out, Fenrother is caging me on the bed, sending the empty cup and platter containing the teapot clattering away from us both.

“I think I know where it is, little mate, and I want to pleasure you.”

FENROTHER

Alice has a scent I can't ignore. It is partially of the blood which flows from her and which I desire, and there's something else.

Perhaps she likes the idea of me finding her clitoris as much as I do.

Having her under me is also good. I like looking down on her. I like the way she looks back at me without fear. She has never looked at me with fear since the first night I took her from the stone.

Most fear the Lambton Wurm. Those who don't fear the Wurm are the ones who die first. But not my Alice. Her lack of fear makes my entire body vibrate with the need to shift into my other form.

Only I don't want to. Not here, not now. I want to feast on her bleed, find her clitoris, make her call my name like she did last time.

I liked it when she did that. It made my pizzle go off and my mind go blank. My head has never been a nice space, and it made me like it, and her, a lot more.

I want to give her pleasure, a concept my text insists human females like, and one I have to perfect if I am to fill her belly.

Because lying beside her is not enough. Nor is sharing the same room. As Alice has told me, I have to sheath my pizzle in her and release my emission. The concept, initially odd, is growing on me, aided by my new text.

“Fenrother,” Alice breathes, “you don’t have to do this just because your text tells you.”

“My text tells me about you. It doesn’t dictate what I do about it,” I growl. “No one tells me what to do.”

I snuffle at her hair, following the long tresses spread over her shoulder down to the shirt she wears. One of mine again. I like that.

Peeling back the sheets, I see her legs are bare, and the scent of her gets stronger. The garments the wardrobe gave up for her are containing her bleed but not for long.

“I don’t want to make a mess,” Alice breathes as I pull them down and spirit them away.

The magic included within the things has ensured her bleed is captured, which I think she prefers.

“You won’t make a mess,” I rasp as she is exposed to me.

Her slit is still strange, her lack of pizzle less concerning now I know she is required to take mine. It has a little strip of fur above it, fur which is different from the hair on her head. I stroke a finger over it and Alice shudders.

I press her thighs further apart so I can inspect her for this clitoris. It is at her apex, or at least that's what the text told me.

Alice releases a soft breath, and even though my hands hold her open, she shifts her position.

I run my tongue through her slit in an exploratory manner until I reach the top. There is a noticeable bump which feels good as I lap at it.

Alice grabs my horns.

I think I might have found the clitoris. Her hands on my sensitive horns make my pizzle strain against my pants, worse when she grips at me. Worse in the best way possible.

I twirl my tongue around the pearl of flesh. I nibble on it, enjoying the cries of delight from Alice, readily, greedily lapping up her blood and relishing the tang of something else she is producing.

My mate is delicious. A dish which I could consume over and over. Even better than the hogs or stags or chickens I eat. If perfection had a flavour, it would be Alice.

Her hips dip, and with a groan of my name, they fire upward as her body convulses, forcing more of her into my mouth. So much more.

"See, no mess," I respond, wiping the back of my hand over my mouth. "Why would I let any of you go to waste?"

ALICE

Fenrother's attentions certainly help the cramps, and the tea he provides for me is

welcome, as it seems to have some pain-killing properties. He keeps his distance for the remainder of my period, sleeping in the window seat and not following me to the bathroom, although I get the impression he wants to but is holding back. Initially he wants me to stay in bed while I have my monthly blood, but he acquiesces to my suggestion that moving around is good for me.

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I'm not sure he believes I am correct, still caught by the idea that any blood is bad. So when I have a wander around the castle, I have a Fenrother-shaped shadow who follows and says little.

He's been alone so long, he doesn't know what to do with some other sentient, visible creature in his space, and I need to get used to my new reality. Without knowing it, I welcome this transition period, where we warily exist together.

The day the bleeding stops, around midday, he goes missing. Or at least he isn't in my part of the castle. I hear noises elsewhere as I walk down the long gallery on the top floor. Mist swirls through the inner courtyard. I've been out on the battlements without incident since the queen came calling, but there was nothing to see, and the dampness wasn't pleasant. Instead I'm spending some time studying the tapestries which hang in the gallery which continue to intrigue me.

They are intricately woven, and many of them are of landscape scenes, possibly inspired by the Yeavinger itself. There's one of the coast and a sea shore. Rolling dunes which disappear into the distance around a long crescent bay. Clouds roll through the sky, and I can almost smell the ozone.

Another is of a high bluff, a sheer cliff on one side and along the top is what appears to be a wall, stretching out into the distance filled with greens, browns, and the purples of heather.

On the opposite wall is a castle, maybe even the one I'm stood in, sat high on a fell. Beneath it are massing an army of creatures I cannot quite make out as the stitching is dark and worn.



The only other one which features figures is at the very bottom of the gallery, half hidden by a large carved dresser, the wood a coal colour with age.

From what I can see, there is a human female in a long cream dress, in a style similar to the ones I've seen in medieval drawings. She has a kind face, and the dress billows out from her, making her look almost pregnant. She is putting her hand out to something I can't see because it's tucked tight behind the dresser. Above her, the sky is dark and behind her, in the woodland, I'm sure I can see eyes.

There's something about it which makes me shiver. If anything, perhaps it's worse than the one in the great hall.

That tapestry is blatant about the threat a Lambton Wyrn poses. This one is far more subtle and exudes far more danger.

"Alice," Fenrother growls from behind me.

I spin around, feeling guilty as if I've been caught looking through someone's underwear drawer. (And I know Fenrother does not wear underwear.)

"Yes," I squeak.

"I have something for you," he says cagily. "If you will come with me."

This is not the first time he has said he has something for me. The first time it was a rather large spider which he was quite proud of.

I was not impressed. Although it was probably worse when he released it to scuttle off into a corner and presumably plot its arachnid revenge.

This place is magic after all.

The second time it was a large chunk of stone in the courtyard which he happily informed me had fallen from the battlements. It didn't much fill me with confidence. But Fenrother seemed quite excited about it.

So, this time, I'm not holding my breath, and also I'm preparing myself for another spider when he leads me into the great hall.

It's not a place I go to, if I can help it. So far, I've managed to persuade Fenrother to eat with me in the bedroom, and it seems to have been a plan the Duegar have been happy enough to go along with, given food has appeared on a daily basis.

I let him tow me through the stone archway, and I brace myself for the tapestry. Fenrother stops dead, and I nearly trip over his lashing tail. He turns and gives me one of his sharp-toothed grins.

I can smell cooking meat, which means I have little option but to look down to the far end of the hall where the fireplace is situated. For a short while, I concentrate on the table and the fire before my eyes are inexorably drawn upwards to the tapestry.

Which has gone.

In its place is stonework and a large carved relief of a Wurm coiled around a hill multiple times until, its head comes to rest on the summit, which is topped with a columned temple. Underneath in heavy script words are carved.

Fyr-bæth - Here-Wulf - Wuldres Thegn - Gast-Bona - Sund-Hengest

"What does it mean?" I ask, my words wondrous whispers.

"They are the bringers of the light."

“They?”

“There is a legend, one which I found in my text, of the five who will release the Yeavinger from the Faerie,” Fenrother says, then he snorts. “I doubt very much if it is true, given it talks of isern-scurand the war to end all wars.” A growl rips through him. “I have had my fill of war.”

I see the silvery scar which runs down one side of his scaled body, and not for the first time, I wonder how he received it, although now doesn’t seem a good time to ask.

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“If you don’t like it, cover it up again. I don’t mind,” I say.

“No.” Fenrother takes my hand and leads me down the hall to the fireplace. “I did not like the tapestry either. I have nothing else to replace it.”

I’m not entirely sure I agree with him, but I am distracted by the sight of the table laid in front of the fire. And when I say laid, there are candles, cutlery, and a second chair for me. Platters containing meat, vegetables, and fruits are laid out along the length of it, the tabletop free of grease and candle wax.

“Date...night,” Fenrother says, a slightly puzzled look on his face. The words are completely unfamiliar to him. “I want to eat you, but this is something my text says you will like almost as much, and with clothing on.”

ALICE

Isit down at the table as Fenrother does his usual and throws himself into the throne chair at the opposite end. The Duegar have outdone themselves on this occasion. Not only is the table groaning with food, but it’s all presented in the most pleasing manner.

Fenrother watches me closely from the far end. He’s waiting to see what you do ondate night.

Given the way the last one ended, I suspect he is hoping for more revelations.

“Why don’t you come up here?” I call out to him and point to the empty space beside

me.

He doesn't need asking twice, dragging the huge chair behind him like it's a matchstick until he is next to me, and he sets it down, dropping back into place.

"Eat." It's my turn to exhort him.

A creature his size must need a lot of feeding. I don't imagine the pig went to waste after all. Plus, even though there's plenty on the table, none of it is in Fenrother proportions.

"My lady first," he says.

I snort out a laugh. "Where did you get that phrase?"

I know exactly where, but I'm going to make him tell me.

"My texts..." Fenrother narrows his eyes. "Do you not like it?"

"I'm not a lady," I say, spooning a large dollop of mashed potato onto a spare platter, followed by some thick slices of rare roast beef, a large Yorkshire pudding, and some greens, which look like they've been boiled to within an inch of their life. "I'm Alice." I hand the platter to him.

"What if you're my lady?" Fenrother asks as he pours out gravy. His attention has turned to the food and away from his odd books.

"I thought I was your mate?"

He grunts, stabbing a two-pronged fork into the roast beef then folding it into his mouth. I add beef, potatoes, and vegetables to my plate, but in a lesser quantity, and

dig in, the nausea from my period having finally left me.

Just in time too. The beef melts in my mouth in an orgy of meaty goodness. I wouldn't have wanted to miss this, especially given I've eaten so little since I arrived here.

Fenrother and I eat in relative silence. It feels...familiar and somehow nice. Just me and this monster, enjoying a meal together like an old married couple.

Behind Fenrother, the fire crackles, the light from it flickering over his scales and giving him a glow in the relative gloom of the great hall, lit by many candles and yet hardly lit at all. I could be at any point in history, only I am in the Yeavinger where no rules apply.

Fenrother finishes the food on his plate and picks up a small roast bird, a partridge I think, and eats it in a single bite.

I think we're back to normal.

Or whatever passes for normal around here.

Once I'm done, Fenrother pulls an apple tart across the table to me and looks hopeful.

"Are you going to try some this time?" I ask, holding out a clean fork to him. He shifts on his chair, looking doubtful.

"Sweet," he says, as a terrible explanation.

"You don't like sweet?"

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He wrinkles his nose, and it may well be the absolutely cutest thing I've ever seen. Even if it's on a Wurm the size of Fenrother, with his fangs, claws, and ability to turn into a dragon.

"Why not try some, see what you think?" I cut a chunk out of the pie, spear it on the end of my fork, and hold it out. Given I already know he is partial to a bite of tart.

In a move I didn't see coming, Fenrother leans forward and captures the chunk in his mouth directly from my fork. A strange double beat rocks my heart.

He chews, considering what I've just fed him. Then he swallows with a slight wince.

"You didn't like it?"

Fenrother shakes his head, a hint of sadness in his eyes. "Never liked sweet, until you," he says. "But you like it. You eat." He hitches a lip over a fang, which is a Fenrother smile, as far as they go.

"I can't eat the whole thing." I dig in with my fork. "Although I'll give it a good try."

Given this tart is as good as the last, I will very much attempt the eating challenge. Fenrother consumes another couple of small roast fowl and then pours himself out a goblet of wine, swallows it in a single gulp, and pours out another for himself and one for me.

He sits back in his big throne and throws one leg over the armrest, leaning back as he cradles the goblet in one large clawed hand.

“I finished the text,” he says.

I pause, a fork full of tart on its way to my mouth. “You did?”

“I did.”

“And your verdict?”

“It’s better than my other texts.”

“Even without diagrams.”

“I don’t need diagrams if I have the real thing,” Fenrother counters with a smile bordering on the sinful. “But I need more of the real thing.”

“And what do I get?” I query. “Out of this arrangement?”

He looks at me, an innocent look. A look which tells me he has no doubt I belong to him and that is enough. “My protection.”

“And what is the dragon going to protect the damsel from?” I ask with a laugh.

“All the other monsters,” Fenrother growls. “The ones who also need mates.”

“Believe me, Fenrother, you are all the monster I would ever want.” I chuckle as I put more tart in my mouth.

He growls low in his chest, his wings flexing behind him, the fire still visible through the delicate membrane which stretches between the individual struts, like fingers. They have an ethereal shine which draws me.



“Can I touch them?” I ask.

“Touch them?” he echoes.

“Your wings.”

“I...” Fenrother hesitates, his stunning eyes searching my face. “My wings are sensitive.”

“I won’t hurt you,” I say quietly. “I think you know that now.”

Fenrother unfolds himself from his chair and turns to the fire, leaning one hand against the great stone mantle. I realise he’s turned his back so I can touch his wings.

But also because he wants to prove he trusts me.

FENROTHER

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I can hear Alice get up from her chair. My body tenses as she does. There are knives on the table, forks, spoons. Any of these could be used against me. For all I've enjoyed taking her blood and giving her pleasure, what exactly do I know about this human?

Humans kill Wyrms. It's a well-known fact. It's why my great-great-grandfather commissioned the tapestry she didn't like. Humans and Wyrms have a relationship which is as complicated as it could possibly be.

I know I'm holding my breath as she approaches. I have good reason to be on edge with a human in the room.

Only this human is Alice. She is my mate. She has touched other sensitive parts of me. And yet, having her touch my wings...

A soft hand slides down the outer strut, and instantly a calmness descends on me. Out of the corner of my eye, I watch as she gently places the tips of her fingers on the membrane between.

If I thought my pizzle being touched by her was something incredible, it is nothing compared to her touch of my wing.

My mind goes blank. A completely unwritten text. A sheet of parchment yet uninked. I can't think of anything. I don't want to think of anything. All I want to do is breathe in the scent of her. The faint tang of blood and her particular perfume, somewhere between blooming heather and dripping honey.

Against my will, my knees sag, and I release a long lungful of air, my claws gripping at the stone over the fire. I concentrate on the flames, the ones I should be able to produce, only I never have.

The fire is everything. Alice's touch is everything. I stretch out my wing so she can see it all. It belongs to her.

I belong to her.

Without a word, she continues to slide her hands over the membrane until she reaches the areas where it is thicker with scars. No part of my body is without scars. Her fingers feel incredible as she slowly explores the knotted area, making it feel less tight than it has done in the decades since it healed.

This female has no magic, yet she has bewitched me entirely. She could plunge a knife into my heart at this very moment and I'd thank her.

"So sensitive," she breathes. "So beautiful."

"Not as beautiful as you," I hear myself say.

"How would you know?" Alice asks.

"I've seen a sunset," I respond, as she moves to my other wing, the one more ragged, more scarred. "I know what beauty is."

ALICE

Fenrother's pronouncement stops me momentarily in my transition from wing to wing. It is not what I expected from him at all.

He thought I was something almost from another planet not so long ago. He didn't understand my anatomy or what I was. Only that as a human, I posed a possible danger to him.

But now I am a sunset, a thing of beauty. I'm not sure what to make of it all.

Fenrother holds his other wing tightly to him. I've noticed before he favours his other one, using it to hold open doors or the thick clawed hook at the shoulder to take hold of things. I know he can fly—after all that's how I got here—but he does not want to show me his other wing.

I trace my fingers down his back and over the muscles where his wing joins the rest of his body. I can feel Fenrother weaken slightly, and I press my advantage. If he can be spellbound by me, surely I get to look at all of him?

Like before, when I press lightly on the outer edge, he swings it open, almost as if he cannot help himself. This one does not rise like the other. There is resistance. Fenrother is resisting me. I smooth my hand over the pretty membrane. It has a sheen like his scales, and I love the way I can see my hand through it, the thin veins which spread like a map of who he is livid under my touch.

But as he expands it further, I see what he doesn't want me to see, even if he is unable to help himself. The bottom portion is ragged, and the centre is criss-crossed with scars, making the wing significantly thicker.

“What happened to you?” I whisper as I trail my fingers over it.

Fenrother snaps the wing shut. “Nothing I couldn't handle,” he growls, pushing away from the fireplace.

“I didn't say...”

But he's already backing off, the look in his eyes similar to when we first met, guarded and angry.

"I have to go check on the defences," he says, swirling away from me in a swish of wing and tail before he becomes the Wurm, huge, even in the great hall, swarming out and into the courtyard. I see him through the large arched windows as he climbs up and up towards the roof of the castle.

Fenrother is gone, leaving a Wurm-shaped hole behind him and my head deep in confusion. I know all of this is new to him. I know he learnt from books and more recently by following his instinct, but I still don't know what he wants.

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And what's worse, I don't know what I want either. Other than to be told I am as beautiful as a sunset by a big idiotic dragon who hasn't a clue.

ALICE

I think he might be sulking. It started raining after he left the castle and even after the torches in the courtyard lit themselves, he didn't return.

I guess I fucked up. The scarring on his wings was not up for discussion and I crossed the line. Fenrother is not exactly a male who has been used to sharing his feelings, or anything.

I suspect any conversations he's had with me in the last few days are all going to be longer than anything he's had for months, years, maybe even decades.

And, who knew, this makes him a very difficult character to get to know.

Lucky me.

I pick at the remains of the meal for a while, waiting, running over an apology, an explanation, and finally an angry monologue about how he shouldn't keep himself to himself, before I give up, and listening to the rain pounding on the windows, I make my way up the stairs to the bedroom.

He is not there and my heart hits the floor.

I'm not sure why I thought he might have retreated here or that I would see his

sombre face light up when I entered. Fenrother is Fenrother. It's too late to change this grumpy monster into anything other than what he is.

Lonely, alone, and damaged beyond repair.

I can't fix everything.

No matter how much I might want to.

Fixing other people's problems was always my *modus operandi*. I fixed all my girlfriends' problems at school, whether this was to do with homework or boys.

I stare at the bed for far too long, until something grips at my chest. Something I'm not sure of, but something I can't ignore. It means I'm halfway to the battlements before I realise what I'm doing.

I'm running towards the monster, not away from him.

The last few stairs are interesting to say the least because I have a big dress and the rainwater has soaked the stonework. I slip and grab for the wall but go down heavily on one knee with a grunt. It hurts like hell.

I pick myself up, tears of pain hovering in my eyes, and get to the small, heavy wooden door, under which water is flowing like a river. I push it open, and the rain is torrential, coming down in sheets which flow over the tops of the castellations. Light just about reaches up from the interior courtyard, but otherwise the battlements are in darkness.

I put my hand up over my forehead against the weather, instantly soaked.

"Fenrother!" I call out, but the name is whipped away by another slash of rain and

wind.

The cold stone seems empty. Nothing living, nothing with any sense is out here in this weather. Except me.

And then something moves. Something huge. Something which sits like stone upon stone.

It is him.

Sat like a carved gargoyle. Waiting until the end of time.

I find the rain lessening and finally, at least where I stand, it stops.

Above me is a huge wing, stretched out like a living umbrella. Fenrother doesn't say anything. He remains as still as a statue, his massive dinosaur head staring into the dark and the rain.

I don't know what to say. I don't know what to do, so I stand under him until the cold and the wet takes its toll. My body shakes back and forth as I wrap my arms around myself.

"You should not be out here, little mate," Fenrother says, his voice deeper, booming from his huge form. "The Yeavinger does not do weather to suit humans."

"I want to be with you," I respond. "You shouldn't be alone."

The noise he makes is a hissed, harsh laugh. "I was alone long before you, mate," he says.



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“But you’re not alone now. The queen gave you a gift without knowing what she gifted,” I respond, my teeth chattering.

It feels like a vacuum opening up, and although there is still a wing over me, instead of a Wurm, there is Fenrother, water running down his face, his head cocked on one side as he studies me.

But not like a science experiment. Like he wants to know who I am. Who this creature is which has been dropped into his life, upsetting everything he knows.

“A gift?” he queries. “What is a gift?”

My heart squeezes against my ribcage, as if it wants to leave my body. It hurts with the power of a thousand suns.

“You don’t know?”

Fenrother shakes his head.

“It’s something given from one to another. Mostly because they like the person, even love them. But sometimes it’s because they think the gift will cause a problem.”

“What sort of problem?”

“An inconvenience.”

“You are not an inconvenience, Alice.” Fenrother runs a large, scaly knuckle down

the side of my face.

“I’m not? I’m pretty sure you think I am.”

“I didn’t know what you were, but I do now.”

“You do?”

“You are a gift. One which shines bright in the darkness.”

ALICE

I’m not sure I’m ever going to get warm as I shiver under the bedclothes. Fenrother might have followed me into the castle, but he didn’t hang around, doing one of his impressive disappearing acts as we reach the long gallery.

I just want to get warm, but even with a fire burning merrily in the hearth and a bed heaped with blankets, it’s not working for me. I’m shaking so hard I think I might rattle my teeth loose. What a stupid idea it was to go out in the rain, even if it has reminded Fenrother we are in this whole thing together.

For a beast who has no idea what together is, I hope the pneumonia I’m about to catch will be worth it in the end. Or I’ll get killed by a vengeful Faerie queen, whichever comes first.

A warm, hard body slides into the bed next to mine. Perhaps I should think about it first, but all I want is warmth, and without thinking about it, I flip over and wrap around Fenrother like ivy.

I expect him to tense, possibly even push me away. After all, I must be like an ice block and he’s a sort of reptile. If reptiles are warm-blooded and irritating. But

Fenrother doesn't tense, and he doesn't push me away.

"You are cold, little mate," he rumbles.

"You got it in one," I respond because it's all I can get past my chattering teeth.

Yes, in a move which surprises no one, Fenrother is quite clearly entirely naked. My body does not care in the slightest. It wants heat, it needs heat, and if that means cuddling up to a nude Wurm, then so be it. It's not like either of us have much to hide anymore.

Although, in his current form, Fenrother's cock will not be hidden. It will be very much front and centre. The shiver I have this time is not to do with being chilled to the bone. It's a very different reason entirely.

"You have a scent like the stars," he says, his chin on the top of my head and one arm wrapped around me.

"Stars have a scent?"

"Everything has a scent."

"Everything?"

"Everything. But yours is the best."

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“I didn’t mean to upset you earlier,” I say. “You don’t have to tell me anything you don’t want to tell me. I’ve dropped into your life, and I know this is all new to both of us, but...” I trail off, not sure if my garbled, shivering, speech is intelligible.

“But?” Fenrother rasps.

“But...I guess we have to make it work.”

Fenrother is silent for a while, his warmth slowly infusing into me. It’s a comfortable silence, not awkward.

“I went to the Night Lands because it was my destiny, but what I found there was not the battles I was promised. There were creatures there which did not want to fight. There were demons, that part is true, and there were battles, but the more time I spent there, the more I wasn’t sure what we were fighting for.”

Fenrother sighs like he’s been holding it in his breast forever.

“And when I refused, the Faerie made sure my disobedience was punished.”

I think of the scar tissue on his wing.

“They sent me into the fire, knowing I wasn’t ready,” Fenrother offers. “But it taught me I didn’t have to obey them. It was the reason I left. It is the reason the queen seeks to control me.”

“Through me?” My voice breaks. I don’t want to be a vessel to cause Fenrother pain.

“I am what I am, and I do what my instinct tells me,” he says. “But beyond that, I am at the mercy of you.”

“I don’t want that,” I respond. “I don’t want to be your chore.”

“Believe me, little mate, you are not a chore.”

“I’ve turned your life upside down, Fenrother. I’ve dropped into your world, upset everything. You even had to get a new book to understand me...”

Fenrother’s lips hit mine, cutting off my words with a kiss. It’s a kiss he owns, not the first hesitant one we shared when I wasn’t entirely sure about his fangs and he didn’t know what a kiss was. This is confident and possessive.

Could it be all he needed was the right book?

“I am not upside down,” Fenrother says when he finally releases me. “I am the right way up.” His eyes glitter in the candlelight.

Rain hammers at the windows.

“And I know what I want, regardless of instinct,” he adds.

Something presses insistently at my thigh, and I know it’s not his tail. Heat, once wanted, now an indicator of something entirely different, floods through me.

“If you’re sure,” I whisper, “because there’s no going back.”

Fenrother hitches up his lip on one side. “You make me feel strange, Alice. Good strange. You make my pizzle do things I didn’t know it could do. I want to put it inside you.”

“Even without a diagram?” I can’t help myself.

The hitch on his lip goes higher. “I have explored you enough I don’t need a diagram. They’re overrated,” he responds, cocking his head on one side, some of the scientific look entering his gaze. “But perhaps I should check again.”

“Perhaps you should.”

“Not if you remain cold,” he says, curling his arm around me further.

“I assure you, Fenrother, I am anything but cold.”

ALICE

Fenrother plucks at the shirt I’m wearing, one of his, naturally.

“I like you in my clothing, given I have no use for it. But I want it off,” he says.

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I squirm, and he huffs, an obsidian claw sliding through the linen over my stomach and up to my chest, splitting the garment in two and exposing me to him. Fenrother parts the ruined fabric and traces a claw over one of my breasts until he reaches my nipple and it swells into a little peak.

The way his eyes widen is delightful. The way he puts out his tongue and then laps over it is even better. The two parts entwine over the sensitive end to pull slightly and make me gasp.

“You make the best sounds,” Fenrother says, sweeping a thumb over my breast. “They set me on fire.”

I feel a flush rise up me from my toes. No one has ever said I wasnoisybefore. Except Fenrother likes it.

“I like your tips,” he says, teasing my other nipple. “They’re good and my text says they produce milk.”

He fastens his mouth over the second one, sucking hard.

“Not all the time!” I exclaim as the suction becomes painful. “I’m not a cow.”

Fenrother makes a grumbling sound deep in his chest. “When?”

“When I get pregnant...if I get pregnant. I will produce milk for the baby.”

The way his eyes light up absolutely should not make my core clench as tight as it

does. Fenrother is experiencing all these things for the first time, and yet, he knows what he wants.

Everything.

His fingers slide down my front, over my mound to where he has been before. One slides through my folds, finding my clit and circling slowly. My hips lift into his touch, unable to stop myself.

If we have sex, that will be it. I will have given myself to the Wurm and there will be no going back. Without any birth control, any pregnancy if it is, indeed, possible, will happen.

Only, what I have nudging up my thigh can't possibly fit inside me.

"Spread for me, little mate. I want to see you," Fenrother says. "I want to explore what I have claimed."

I do as he asks, unable to refuse. He nestles his massive bulk between my spread thighs and stares a heated stare before pushing a digit deep inside me, his thumb massaging my clit and...to my surprise, another finger pressing at my bottom hole.

"Fenrother!" I pant.

"I like it when you call my name," he rasps. "I like you have two holes. I want to be in both of them."

"I haven't...ever done that before," I say, before realising the folly of my words.

Fenrother wants all of me, every single inch. He isn't going to stop until he does.



And I'm not going to prevent him.

He dips his head, and removing his hand, he shoves his entire face into my pussy, making the worst possible sounds as he uses that incredible tongue on me. It's all I can do to hang onto his horns as he eats me out with a level of gusto no human male has ever done. I feel my orgasm rising, rising until, with little warning, it crashes through me, fluid rushing out and straight into his mouth.

Fenrother rises, licking his lips covered with the evidence of my enjoyment. "This is good, but I need more."

"More?" My mind is ablaze with the climax, fogged with pleasure, unable to function in its entirety.

"More of you. You are too small, and I want to sheath my pizzle in your slit," he says, teeth gritted. "I need you to give me more."

"I don't think you're going to fit, Fenrother," I say, remembering the feel of him in my hand, the heft, the length, the girth.

The scales. The head which opened, grasping at my fingers. The complete and utter Yeavingness of his cock.

"We are destined to be together, my mate," he says, "and my venom will assist."

"You're venomous?" I grab his horns and pull up his head, staring him dead in the eye.

Fenrother opens his mouth, sharp fangs protruding like needles on either side.

“Only for you,” he says.

I want to ask how he knows all of this, but it has to be the book, a book I’m clearly also going to have to read.

“And you’re going to kill me?”

“I’m going to mate you, Alice, and I’m going to make you scream.”

ALICE

Fenrother presses his mouth to my thigh, and I brace myself for the pain of his bite.

It doesn’t come. Instead there is a bloom of warmth within my pelvis which is significantly more pleasant. Fenrother lifts his head and stares down at my pussy.

“You are swelling for me,” he says. “I will be able to sheath my pizzle and make my emission.”

The way he looks, with an unbridled lust, sends shivers down my spine. No matter what this means, no matter what the outcome, I know I’m going to do it. I have no control, none whatsoever, not where this crazy, mixed up monster is concerned.

Fenrother has done so many things in the short time I’ve known him. Things which would be unforgivable for anyone but him. And yet his desire, his need, his want for me hasn’t changed, and in the here and now, he is waiting for me to let him loose.

The heat which blooms in my abdomen slides lower. There's a throbbing, not unlike the cramps I've recently experienced but without any pain, and Fenrother's nostrils flare.

But he doesn't move.

There were no diagrams.

I reach up and tug on his shoulders, pulling him down over me before reaching down and down until I take hold of his cock.

Holy shit. It seems even bigger than I remember. The scales on it ripple in my hand in time with the throbbing in my blood. Fenrother groans as I take him in hand, his hips rocking as he thrusts himself further into my grip.

"I want to be inside you, Alice," he rumbles.

His eyes open, and the spinning holographic irises have turned from the usual greens and pinks to fiery reds and oranges.

His body swirls as he hitches up, and his cock moves from my hand to my entrance, the head nudging at me. I feel the suction over my clit, and it's my turn to release a guttural sound as it is so good.

So good there is a rush of moisture from me, a veritable slick of the stuff. I can't stop it and I don't want to. Fenrother flicks his hips forward, and it drives the head inside.

He releases a short, harsh breath and looks down at me before he lifts himself up on strong arms and drops his head.

"We are joined!" he exclaims, circling himself and sliding deeper, watching with

wide eyes.

There's even more fluid coming from me, easily lubricating his passage. Fenrother gazes down, his eyes entirely concentrated on where he is entering me. It's all I can do to hold onto him as he stretches me wider and wider, the feeling of being full incredible. His scales create a friction which is overwhelming.

The entire experience is overwhelming for me, and for my Wyrms who are breathing heavily as he tears his eyes away and back to my face.

His hips swing again, and with a grunt, he is seated in me. I'm not sure I can move, impaled as I am on his enormous cock.

"I am within you, Alice," Fenrother growls.

"You are within me." I gasp out the words.

"I am going to breed you, little mate." Fenrother withdraws and slides back inside me.

"I won't break," I say with a confidence I didn't realise I had.

After all, he's managed to get that huge thing inside me, somehow.

Fenrother releases a feral growl, one which tingles at me from the ends of my hair to the tips of my toes.

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“Good, because my instinct means I have to claim you,” he says, the words only just forming around his fangs.

This time his thrust shakes my entire body. I expect pain, I clench for it, except it’s impossible to do anything with Fenrother inside me.

He groans my name.

There is no pain, there is just him and me and our entire worlds full of each other as his movements increase and Fenrother doesn’t hold back.

He is plundering my body as if it is made for him. I grab at any part I can and hold on, struggling to breathe, struggling to make any sense at all of what is happening to me because I am as light as anything, rising up to meet his every move.

When it comes, my orgasm is something entirely different, reaching a crescendo at the very top of pleasure and the very edge of pain, then it blooms. My pussy convulses, clamping down on Fenrother. He grunts with the intensity of what I’m doing, but I’m already gone, carried away on a wave of utter, complete bliss as my channel continues to pulse and flutter.

Only I’m not sure if it’s me, I think, in amongst all the fog of desire. Some of this is Fenrother, his cock rippling within me.

Fenrother roars, his final thrust deep within me. I gasp as if woken from a dream as it clamps around my cervix. There is no pain, only the sensation of pulling and a sharp pinch, followed by a complete bliss as his shoulders heave and his huge form

trembles like a leaf.

“I have you, little mate. I have all of you,” he rasps hoarsely. “And you have me.”

FENROTHER

So many sensations. So many scents. So many sights. My senses are overloaded. I want to sleep more than I ever have in my life, but instinct drives me to stay awake.

“Fenrother?” Alice says my name, and it is even better than when she was calling for me.

I bury my face into her hair, still unable to do much other than scent her.

“Are you...stuck?” she asks.

I make a noise which I hope sounds like I agree. Words are beyond me. I am buried inside her, and it is the best feeling I’ve ever had. If my body doesn’t want to let her go, I don’t blame it.

I have never felt like this.

I always want to feel like this.

Beneath me, Alice shifts her body. I roll onto my back and take her with me, loving every second of the movement of her skin against mine and the pull of her on my pizzle.

Can things get any better?

She drapes herself over me, and I realise better is possible. A mate sheathed, her hair

within easy reach of scenting and touching. I pulse inside her again and she moans.

“If you continue to make such noises I don’t think my body will ever let you go,” I murmur.

At least I think I say the words. I might just have answered her with a low groan of my own.

Alice brushes her lips over my jaw, and it’s possible I might have found my new favourite thing. If I thought hunting and eating meat was good, breeding my mate is infinitely better.

I think I want to do it all the time.

“How long?” Alice asks.

I swell my chest with a great breath. “As long as it takes for your breeding, mate,” I respond.

She shivers.

I cover her with a wing, like I did outside in the rain. I can’t have my mate being cold. She should most definitely be warm, given she has no scales or ability to shift.

My pizzle continues to throb inside her. Each time, it makes my heart pound and my head swim with pleasure. It seems my mate enjoys it too, a soft sigh coming from her from time to time until her body goes limp, and I hear her breath coming in gentle waves.

Does she sleep? I want to sleep, but my desire to do so is halted by my desire to...

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Hold her, care for her, protect her.

I cannot sleep, not while I have Alice in my arms. I cannot sleep while the rest of the Yeavinger might want to take her from me.

I cannot sleep while she is at risk. While she might already be carrying my young. While she sleeps and while she is defenceless.

I can never sleep again.

ALICE

Fenrother is sprawled beneath me, his eyes closed, his long lashes sweeping the iridescent scales on his cheeks, and his chest rising and falling as he slumbers.

I guess I must have virtually passed out at some point after discovering I couldn't move from Fenrother's cock. It was trapped inside me and every movement tugged on my insides. We were locked together somehow. I can't imagine Fenrother knew how either, although he seemed fine with it. Even if it quite clearly isn't an everyday occurrence to him.

While I was out, Fenrother cleaned me up. I feel dry and not even slightly sticky down below. Maybe that's the reason for the smile on his face.

His gorgeous unguarded smile, not his strange hitched fang-revealing one, not a grimace. His entire face looks different in sleep, softer, more handsome in an ethereal way. Definitely not dinosaur. Definitely not Wyrn.



Of all the things there are in the Yeavinger, I just slept with a Wyrn. A monster who is one because of the way he was raised.

Fenrother snorts, bats his hand at his nose, and his eyes flicker open.

“Hi,” I say.

“Alice,” he replies. “You are not a dream.” His voice rasps with sleep.

“I’m very real.”

The smile on his face broadens as he stretches beneath me. “I know.”

He didn’t know. He expected to wake alone. My heart patters in my chest, drumming as if it wants to soothe my great Wyrn. To reassure him he is not alone, not anymore.

Does this mean...I want to stay?

I can’t make any decisions right now, or any decisions at all. The Yeavinger has taken me, the queen wants me here. I don’t have a choice.

“I’m pleased you’re real,” Fenrother says.

“I know you are,” I respond. “My lady parts know you are.”

I thought I might feel more uncomfortable this morning, given Fenrother’s size, but other than knowing I’ve had something big in me, there’s no real pain.

“Lady parts?” Fenrother queries. “Your slit?”

“If you want to call it that,” I huff.

“Cunt?”

“Where did you hear that word?” I gasp.

“My text provides me with a number of terms for your slit. I like that one the most.” Fenrother grins. “And I expect to be in your cunt often, mate. It was better than I expected.”

“It was better than you expected?” I grind.

He looks smug.

I want to punch the Wyrn.

Instead I throw myself off him and march into the bathroom, shutting the door firmly behind me.

It was better than he expected.

I'm pretty sure Fenrother is probably unkillable, but I'd very much like to strike him dead. He might not know much...anything...about relationships, but some level of effusiveness would have been nice.

"Better than expected," I mutter to myself, sliding into the bath and quickly washing.

I don't want to linger. I don't want Fenrother to get the wrong idea or to think he can join me. I don't want anything from him.

I've given the Wyrms enough, and all I get is better than expected. Has he learnt nothing?

Opening the bathroom door, having completed my ablutions, I march out, ignoring the bed and the huge monster sitting there. Instead I jerk open the wardrobe, pull out some underwear and a gown, both of which I wrestle on before, without a backward glance, I leave the bedroom.

I leave the Wyrms to his own devices. Fenrother will do what he will do, and I want a good look at that book Meg of Maldon gave him. I need to find out what it has been teaching him. Perhaps make some notes in the margins.

In the great hall, the table is laid for breakfast. Unlike the previous mornings, rather than the stodgy porridge offerings, today there is bread, pastries, and...coffee!

The sharp, dark scent reaches me, and I pull up my skirts in order to practically run to

the far end of the vast hall to confirm if my nose is telling the truth.

There's a large pot, and as I flip the lid, the smell of coffee confirms it is absolutely what I think it is. I pour out the fragrant liquid into a flagon and add some milk. The first sip tells me this is good coffee.

"Thank you," I say out loud to the invisible Duegar. "This is really appreciated."

If they hear me, if they even care, they don't respond.

"What is that smell?" Fenrother is wrinkling his nose and lifting his lips like a cat.

I am not going to let him spoil my enjoyment. I take another sip of the drink and savour it. "Coffee."

Fenrother's chest rumbles as he swipes up the jug, flips the lid, and sniffs at the liquid.

He lifts it as if he's going to drink directly from the pitcher.

"NO!" I say, pulling it from his hands.

He releases it in surprise.

"You do not drink coffee like that," I admonish, pouring him out some into a tankard and adding milk, plenty of milk.

"Coff-ii?" Fenrother queries, confirming what I already thought—this drink is not for him.

"It's a hot drink made from roasted beans which humans, like me, enjoy."

He snorts, glaring at me as if I've introduced a rodent infestation into his castle.

"Try it."

I hold out the tankard. Fenrother stares at it like it's an unexploded bomb. It's my turn to make a frustrated noise. He takes it, and I can return to mine, sinking down into the chair and doing my best to block him out as I swallow down the beautiful nectar.

Of course, I can't ignore the Wyrms in the room. He dominates it. And, of course, I'm invested in what he makes of the coffee, even though I shouldn't be.

It'll probably be better than expected.

Fenrother sniffs at the coffee and lifts the tankard to his lips, taking in what can only be the tiniest of sips.

He's a very careful Wyrms.

He doesn't wince but instead raises his eyebrows, and his wings open and close a little before he takes a larger mouthful. I find I have a coffee convert.

Who knew?

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ALICE

“I want to see the book Meg gave you,” I say as Fenrother polishes off the last of the breakfast bacon.

He’s covered in flakes and has the half-lidded look of someone who has ingested more butter and sugar than he’s used to.

“The text?”

If he’s playing dumb, he’s not doing a good job.

“Yes, the text. The one giving you all the great ideas.”

Fenrother looks cagey.

“Look, I already know most of what’s in it. It’s not like I’m going to be surprised by the contents,” I point out. “But maybe there’s something in it for me.” I fix him with a stare I hope is authoritative. “Something about how to mate a Wurm. It might make things easier for both of us.”

“I liked what we did,” Fenrother says, taking a swig of his coffee.

“Yes, you made that clear. It was better than you expected.”

I admit, I’m being salty. I know what Fenrother is, how he was raised, but I still can’t quite get past his description.

Fenrother drains his tankard and gets to his feet, walking through to his library and returning with the book, which he plonks on the table. I pull it toward me and open it up.

The pages are blank.

“What the hell is this?” I flick through, but there’s nothing there at all. Each page is empty.

“It is the text.”

“There’s nothing there.” I tap the page.

Fenrother’s brow furrows, and then his face brightens.

“Looks like the text is for me alone,” he says.

“What do you mean?” I continue flipping through the pages. Fenrother has explicitly referenced this book in his recent dealings with me. It’s not stuff he’s made up.

“It is an enchanted text. Bewitched for a single reader. Me,” he says, filled with smugness.

“You can read it?”

Fenrother places his finger on a page and slowly, spreading across the parchment like a stain, words appear. He grins at me with quite a lot of teeth. “I can.”

He removes his finger and the words fade away.

“What is the point of that?” I grumble.

“You’ll have to ask Meg.” Fenrother shrugs. “If I could make this book so you could read it too, I would.”

If I thought this was a victory for him, I was wrong. Every time I think I know Fenrother, I find out I am wrong.

I think of the beast on the battlements, the way he covered me with his wing. The way he stared out into the driving rain.

The sadness in his eyes.

Maybe better than expected is all he knows.

Maybe better than expected is how I should view my situation, here, with him. It’s not like there’s any going back, and despite Fenrother’s otherworldliness, he’s, well, growing on me.



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“What is the Yeavinger like?” I close the book with a thump, hoping Meg can feel it somehow. After all, she thought it was amusing to give Fenrother a book on mating which only he can read.

I guess she thought I like surprises, and frankly, I’ve had enough to last me a lifetime in the last week. I’d curse her, but I’m in the Yeavinger, a place filled with magic and a place I know nothing about. It would probably turn out to be real and come back to bite me.

The only creature in the Yeavinger who is biting me is going to be Fenrother.

“Like?” he queries.

“Yeah, I didn’t see much of it when you brought me here. All I can see from the battlements is heather. What’s the rest of the Yeavinger like? Are there more people like Meg?”

“More witches? Yes,” Fenrother says. “There are Faerie, but they keep to their hills. The Yeavinger is filled with magic and life.”

“So, you go...out?”

“I hunt,” he says, examining his claws. “I do not mix.”

“But Meg knew you.”

“She...knows all,” he says, teeth gritted. “I could not keep her out if I wanted to.”

“Do you have magic?” I ask.

“Some.” He shrugs. “I need little.”

“Because you’re the Lambton Wyrn?”

Fenrother nods.

“I don’t have any.”

“I know. But you have me.”

“I’d like to see the Yeavinging, or at least other parts of it, if I’m to live here.”

I expect Fenrother to growl, or snarl, or say something like I belong to him and I don’t get to leave these walls.

“I said when you arrived, you are not a prisoner. But you cannot go into the Yeavinging alone,” he says, and it’s all I can do to swallow my shock at his words. “I will take you, if you wish.”

“You’ll go out there and meet...others?” I’m beginning to wonder if leaving the castle is such a good idea.

“For you, I’d leave the hunt. I have enough game stored so the Duegar will be happy for a while,” Fenrother says, staring into the fire.

I can’t help thinking there’s something else, something he’s not telling me, but the prospect of leaving these four, admittedly thick, walls and exploring a brand new world are too much.

I didn't get to travel beyond the veil. My aunt would never let me go anywhere, and as she controlled the purse strings, striking out on my own would have been nigh on impossible.

But here, in the Yeavinger, I have a personal guide who can fly. Fenrother can show me everything. I can experience everything.

“When can we go?”

FENROTHER

I dislike leaving my ancestral lands. As a wyrmling, I was at risk from all others within the Yeavinger looking for a snack. As I grew, as I took more game, they forced me back here, insisting I stay within my bounds.

Until the Faerie queen came calling and tempted me with notions of glory.

Yet there was only death. And Wyrms know all about that already.

The queen may believe she is driving my desire to take Alice as my mate, but she is wrong. It is not something I can stop, regardless of the true cost, to me, to my Alice, and to any wyrmling she births.

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Instinct is more powerful than any magic in the Yeavinging, and now the course is set, nothing can change it. Not even leaving the castle or my lands.

If Alice wishes to see beyond, then she may see, although should any male even look in her direction, I will remove his head from his body.

“You do know you’re growling, don’t you?” Alice says.

She has removed the long flowing garment and is, instead, in some close-fitting, light coloured pants, boots which reach up to her knees, a white shirt similar to mine, save for this one fits her better, and she has a jacket to match her boots. I’m not sure why, but I like these garments.

I also like the garment I have in my pocket. The item she refers to as knickers and which smell strongly of her.

Having it close means I can scent her any time I want, even if it does make my pizzle jerk into action.

I want to scent them right now, before I take her out of the castle. It makes me growl.  
“I know.”

“If this is upsetting you, Fenrother, we don’t need to go,” Alice says.

I contemplate her words for a while.

“I am not upset. I don’t want you to meet any other males.”

“I’d call that upset.”

“Upset is where I eat things,” I respond, considering the last time I went into a rage.

“I do not wish to eat anything. But I will remove body parts if I have to.”

“Okay...there’s quite a lot to unpack there. Perhaps if we could keep the limb removal to a minimum. I’d rather like my introduction to the Yeavinging to be a bit less bloody if possible.”

“Not promising anything,” I growl.

Alice shrugs. “Best I’m going to get, so I’ll take it.”

She stares up at me. I stare down at her. Neither of us moves.

“So...” she says.

“So?”

“Shall we go?”

I can feel my lips lifting, but I think of the garment in my pocket and force myself not to snarl. Getting back into my Wyrms form is a relief, and I hold out my hand to Alice, who steps into it nicely.

Actually, maybe this won’t be so bad after all. Not if I get to be the Wyrms and she nestles in my palm the way she is right now.

“Ready?” I rumble.

“Ready,” Alice says confidently.

I swarm up the inner courtyard wall and onto the battlements before spreading my wings and beating into the cold air. Mist sits over the moors, huddled in hollows and spreading its thin fingers into the heather as we rise up above it. Alice grips at my claws, looking back at the castle, which sits in its own bed of cloud as if it has nested.

I swing around, dipping lower so I can trail a wing into the mist, sending swirls of it up and over me. In my hand, Alice laughs.

She likes this. She likes being with me. My heart booms, my lungs burning with the fire which is never there. I climb sharply upwards until we're above the clouds and the sun is shining down on us.

A sun which touches her hair, sending it translucent as the strands fly through my claws in the wind of flight.

Alice might have come into my life without my asking, but she is my everything, and should anyone challenge that, they will regret it.

ALICE

Flying with Fenrother is singularly one of the best things I've done in my entire life. I can almost forgive the last time we flew given the situation and especially as this time, I'm willingly caged within his claws and able to take in the Yeavinger itself without fear for my person.

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Below us, the terrain changes from heather-filled moorland to marsh and on to pastureland, bright green after all the purples and browns. Fenrother stays higher up above these areas than he did over the moors, but he executes one or two perfect circles so I can see more of the landscape below.

Here and there are dotted little cottages, their chimneys exuding white smoke. I see the occasional form of something...presumably an inhabitant of the Yeavinger, but mostly they hurry inside as we fly over.

A river valley catches my eye, the broad, shallow bed winding its way through the fields and woodlands which are springing up. Mist comes and goes, some of it looking less like a weather phenomenon and more like something unworldly, as if to slam home that I am beyond the veil, and the Yeavinger is not like anywhere else.

It is the place everyone has heard of and virtually all humans have no concept of what is here. The Faerie guard it well and I can see why. It is unmarked, clean, rich, unpolluted. Why would they want us here? We nearly did for ourselves with the viruses we unleashed on each other. No wonder the saviour of the human race came at the price of non-interference and a permanent place for the Faerie in every government in the world.

And the lottery. The one where the Faerie take humans for their own purposes. The one thing which doesn't make sense at all.

The valley swings around a tight curve, revealing a large castle sat magnificently on a high cliff, its walls extending a distance and encompassing a small town, tightly packed save for a market square festooned with multi-coloured flags.

I tug at one of Fenrother's claws.

"Can we go look?" I ask, giddy with the flight and the clear air.

Fenrother rumbles. It's difficult to discern any emotion on his huge dinosaur head. I suspect it's the teeth.

"Please?" I plead as the smell of food rises up to us, along with the chatter of many voices.

I want to experience so many things, now I'm away from my aunt. I want to have what I would never have had with her. I want freedom.

Fenrother's huge flanks huff out a sigh, and he turns in a slow circle before dropping down to the ground some way outside of the castle town, his form swirling from Wyrn to his other shape as he sets me down.

"You want to go to Moranik?" he says. "I have to warn you—I am not welcome there."

"Oh? Why?"

"I was accused of taking sheep."

"And did you?"

"Yes." Fenrother strides away down the road filled with car-wheel ruts.

At least he's honest. Probably too honest. No filter and the unvarnished truth, that's what Fenrother is. I catch up with him as the road incline increases up to the imposing walls of the town and the impressive gatehouse with a portcullis entrance.



There are carts ahead of us, loaded with produce. Fenrother pushes past them, and other than the occasional zip of magic, no one stops us until we reach the entranceway, the sandstone flags heavily worn with all the traffic.

“Wyrms.” An armoured creature bars our way. “You know the law.”

Although the rest of him is armoured, the creature wears a red cap on his head, plastered to his elongated skull. His skin is a green-grey, dull and sickly looking. His speech exposes crooked, yellowing, needle sharp teeth.

“The law does not stop me from coming here in this form,” Fenrother snarls as the first guard is joined by a second.

They look at each other.

“What the Wyrms says is true,” a man behind us in the line says. He wears a pointed hat, a pipe clamped between his teeth and his face crinkled like a walnut. “He cannot enter as the Wyrms, but he can as the man.”

He doesn’t look like a farmer, even if his cart is filled with boxes of vegetables. The smoke coming from his pipe is a purple colour, and his eyes have flashes of silver within them.

The two guards look disgruntled, but with further grumblings up the queue behind us, they reluctantly stand aside, and Fenrother stalks past, eyeballing the pair in a way which would make a human run for the hills.

“What were they?” I ask as I eventually catch him up.

“Redcaps,” he rasps. “And they know what I do to them,” he adds with a level of menace I’ve not come across before, even when he thought my bra was a weapon.

“Okay,” I respond, deciding against further questions because I’m genuinely not sure I want to know.

“They work for the Faerie mostly,” Fenrother says. “Moranick belongs to a Faerie lord.” He nods towards the imposing, rambling castle. “Guyzance,” he adds. “Not the worst of Faerie. Not the best either.”

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The town bustles around us. The street is wide, pavements on either side raised up by several steps to keep the long clothing out of the mud and dirt. It's lined with shops, the bottle glass studded windows filled with wares.

"So, the inhabitants are Faerie?" I ask.

"The inhabitants are witches and warlocks," Fenrother replies, scanning the area as if he's expecting someone. "The offspring of Faerie and humans."

My blood runs thickly in my veins. "Faerie and human?"

Fenrother looks down at me. "The Yeavinger cannot survive without humans, even if they are not welcome here."

I feel my internal organs chill.

"But no one will touch you, mate," Fenrother adds and continues walking up the street towards the open square. "Provided you stay by my side," he says over his shoulder.

He doesn't have to tell me twice. I double my pace, duck my head, and catch up with him.

If there's any trouble, Fenrother is going to be at the heart of it, and my only hope is to stick with him like glue.

Perhaps this wasn't such a good idea after all.

ALICE

The marketplace is a hive of activity, filled with the scents of woodsmoke and produce. It surrounds a permanent stone structure, open sides and solid roof, divided roughly into stalls which then spread out around it in a haphazard fashion.

My eyes are practically on stalks as I take in my new surroundings.

There are stalls piled high with a mixture of vegetables I recognise and plenty I don't. Clothing stalls flutter with fabrics in various hues, a lot less black than I'd have expected. There are stalls with huge tubs filled with multi-coloured powders. Anywhere else these could be spices, but here, in the Yeavinger, they have to be something different.

I give Fenrother a nudge. He's on edge but as yet nothing has happened, so I'm beginning to have hope we might not bring about market-geddon.

"What are those?" I ask, pointing to the piles of powder.

"They're spells, my dear," a woman from a nearby stall says.

She's tall, pretty, and her dress is close fitting, emphasising her natural...assets. I feel like a frump next to her in my warmclothing. Her eyes are anything but human though, dark spots which seem to see into my soul.

"Human?" she queries.

"My mate," Fenrother snarls.

I think if she could have backed up, she would have, but the stall behind hers means she has nowhere to go.

“Our natural magic is limited, depending on our sires or dams,” she says, keeping her voice even whilst eyeing my Wyrn, “so we require spells. Some Faerie provide these for us, at a price.” Her pretty face sours as she says the words. “Those who peddle them, no better than thieves.” She spits, glaring at the stall holder who has the spells.

He huffs and folds his arms.

My head reels from this knowledge. The Yeavinging has remained a mysterious place to humans, and I’m beginning to see why.

I’m beginning to understand why the Faerie saved us. And I’m beginning to see why they keep us out.

Fenrother growls low in his throat, catching my attention. He’s staring down a line of stalls at another creature, this one heads above the rest of the crowd.

A centaur. His chestnut flanks shine under the sun, muscled torso on display. He moves his bulk through the throngs easily as they part ahead of him.

Given Fenrother is also head and shoulders above most of the inhabitants, it’s no surprise when the centaur spots him and, to my increasingly anxious stomach, he makes a beeline for us.

Fenrother tucks me behind him, his wings extending and his tail wrapping around my right leg, as the centaur approaches us. My heart beats swifter as the great creature’s hooves ring out against the stone flags, witches and warlocks scurrying out of his way.

I spot the large sword strapped to his side, and the bandolier which runs over his impressive chest is filled with daggers. He is as weaponised as Fenrother is not.

“Warden,” Fenrother rasps.

“Fenrother,” the centaur responds with a brief, almost imperceptible dip of his head.

“Your presence here is...unusual.”

“You mean I used to come here for food and I am no longer allowed,” Fenrother says starkly.

“In your Wyrn form, yes.” The centaur inclines his head and studies Fenrother, almost with the same interest as Fenrother studied me. “But then you are rarely in your present form, here or in the Night Lands.”

At the mention of this place, Fenrother lifts his lips, exposing his fangs. “I thought you were remaining there, per your orders,” he rasps.

“My orders changed. I did not desert my post.” The centaur growls.

“Neither did I. My work was completed.” Fenrother glares at him.

The centaur does not wilt. Instead he huffs out a hot, horsey breath. Which is when he spots me.

“Your work was completed?” He cranes his neck around Fenrother to get a better look in my direction.

Fenrother growls out loud, causing any inhabitants of the market to make a very swift exit from our local area.

“Do not,” he says, his voice low and menacing, “look at my mate.”

“You have a mate?” The centaur brays, his front feet stamping, sparks flying from his hooves. “You?”

Fenrother extends his wings further, knocking into one of the stalls. The stall-holder exclaims, and as if he’s remembered where he is, Fenrother shrinks them back, a little.

“I have a mate.”

The centaur leans to one side in order to get a better view of me.

“Hello, mate of Fenrother. I am Warden,” he says, dipping one of his front legs to execute a stately bow.

“Alice.” I push under Fenrother’s wing, and he instantly clamps an arm over my chest, pulling me up against his hard body, tensed to the point of vibration.

“Alice is mine,” he says, his words still a growl.

“She is,” Warden replies. “I am sure she will knock off your rough edges. Protect her well, Lambton Wyrn.”

He spins on the spot, his huge withers only just missing various stalls, and trots away.

“Friend?” I ask Fenrother.

“I have no friends. We fought in the Night Lands.”

“And he thinks you deserted?”

“He is wrong.”

Fenrother stares after Warden for a while until the centaur disappears.

“He lost a mate,” Fenrother says. “I heard him talk of her. It’s probably the one reason he didn’t attempt to separate my head from my body.”

“Could he have done that?” My heart is seized by something with hooks and claws, buried deep and painful.

A fear, for my monster.

“No,” Fenrother says. “No creature can kill me.”

ALICE



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If Fenrother is bothered by Warden's appearance, he doesn't show it. I'm dying to ask more questions about how they know each other, about Warden's lost mate and what he and Fenrother did together in the Night Lands, given he didn't mention having to fight with anyone else, but I don't get a chance.

"Wurm." There's a group of six Redcaps, all with large pikes, stood at the end of the row we're in. "Lord Guyzance wants you."

"Lord Guyzance can jump off his battlements. I have no wish to see him," Fenrother replies, striding at their ranks.

They close up, pikes pointed at my Fenrother, their silver spikes glinting dully in the light. I catch up and put my hand on his arm. He flinches before seeing it is me holding onto him. There's something in the light of his eyes which catches me. It's not fear. I don't think Fenrother fears anything in any way I might. It's something else, something feral and ancient.

"Fine," he grunts, backing down. "I'll see Lord Guyzance."

The pike party lift their weapons and part to allow Fenrother and me to continue past them, before forming up behind us. The buzz of the market resumes as if it was collectively holding its breath.

We're marched away from the square and up a wide street, initially flanked with grand looking houses before the stone turns into a high wall and I feel like we're in some sort of box.

Ahead is a huge wooden gate, studded with golden spikes. It swings open at our approach, and we walk through a set of arches, Redcaps on either side as we enter the main courtyard of the sprawling castle.

The yard is probably about as different to the one in Fenrother's castle as he is to Warden the centaur. Here, we've walked straight from the main gate into a formal garden. Low box hedges make a fragrant mini maze. Butterflies flutter from various flowering bushes, clipped to within an inch of their lives. But there is a tension in the air, something which appears to be holding all of this together.

Straight ahead are a set of eight shallow steps leading up to yet another enormous door, this one is intricately carved, inlaid in places with what looks like bone. There are symbols I don't recognise along with creatures which might have come from a nightmare.

Fenrother sighs as we walk up the stairs.

"We could just leave," I whisper. "We don't have to stay or see this Lord...whatever."

"You wanted to see the Yeavinger, mate, and I cannot keep it from you," Fenrother replies. "If a Faerie Lord wishes to see us, then he shall see us, and we can take our leave after." He sounds resigned.

Behind us, the Redcaps rattle their weapons. My heart drifts to my boots. I wanted this. I wanted to see the Yeavinger, and now we're in danger. It doesn't seem worth it. This place might be my new home, but I can already see the reasons Fenrother stayed away from the rest of the population.

Why would you, as an outsider in the extreme, put yourself in this position? Fenrother had no reason to, so he didn't. But I came along and changed everything

for him. I made him do people things.

I was wrong.

I slip my hand into his and he looks down at it, then at me.

“I’m scared,” I admit.

Fenrother’s eyes flare, and a growl rumbles in his chest. “Do not be.”

Together we walk up to the door, which swings open as if electrically operated, although it will be magic, and into a hall even larger than Fenrother’s.

Long banners hang from the wooden vaulted ceiling. They’re yellow with a green curling, swirling creature, not dissimilar to Fenrother, embroidered up on them. Each one swings slightly in the breeze we’ve created.

Underneath them are groups of people. As we enter, they stop what they are doing and stare.

I recognise the pointed ears, the way they hold themselves, the long unnaturally straight hair hanging to their waists, male or female. The rich fabrics which they wear are like silk but better.

These are all Faerie folk. If nothing else was a giveaway, the look of sheer disgust on their faces tells me what they are.

A look they couldn’t even disguise when they appeared to save the world. As if they were doing us the greatest of favours that could never be repaid.

Fenrother ignores them, walking us slowly to the far end where there is a great throne

set up high above the rest of the court.

It is surrounded by a high gallery, and I'm sure I spot a pair of red eyes gazing down on us, but they quickly disappear.

"Fenrother, Wyrms of Lambton," someone calls out, "and Alice Graham of the Beyond."

It's shocking to hear my full name said in this context, but also the strange reference to where I'm from throws me. My name is followed by a long, low, hollow howl which echoes somewhere in this castle. It sends a shiver up my spine like nothing I've ever felt before.

Fenrother ignores everything, instead ambling easily over to a table to one side of the ornate throne platform which groans with food. He starts eating without asking, taking bites out of chunks of meat and putting them back.

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Absolutely zero manners. I should be wanting to fall through the floor with embarrassment, but I rather like his no fucks given approach, especially when everything in this hall is designed to intimidate.

Fenrother is not intimidated, and when he offers me half a bread loaf, I take it, nibble at it, because my stomach is filled with butterflies like the ones we saw outside, and then I put it back.

The liberation is like downing half a bottle of wine. My head spins with it, with the freedom of not giving a shit.

“Wyrml!” The voice wants to be commanding, but Fenrother isn’t interested, and he isn’t responding.

I want to risk a peep but instead stick close to my Wyrml, waiting to see what he will do. Pissing off a Faerie is not usually advised, but apparently, this memo hasn’t reached Fenrother.

“Wyrml!” The voice is a little more insistent, a little more on edge. “Fenrother!” it finally grinds out.

Fenrother turns, licking at a sticky bun which he slowly and carefully puts back on the platter behind him. It takes nearly every atom in my body not to laugh at his clear and calculated action.

But any laughter I might have had drains away when I see the Faerie sat on his ridiculous throne glaring down at us.

Thin, pale to the point of vampire, with long, greasy black hair falling either side of his pointed ears, Lord Guyzance is the very definition of deadly.

And we're in his sights.

FENROTHER

I do not like the food the Faerie lord has set out. Most of it tastes of the magic which was used to create it, not even the meat is fresh. As usual, the lord wishes for us to see his power, but if it consists of making food badly from magic, rather than having hunters bring it to you from the lands, it shows no power at all.

I eat because if I don't do something with my mate at my side, there will be violence. All the male Faerie are looking at her and Alice belongs to me.

She is my mate.

They cannot look and they cannot covet. Which is why I do not respond to Lord Guyzance until he uses my name.

I am not a faceless creature of the Night Lands. I fought there, until my fight was done. I returned when countless have not.

I am mated.

I also dislike the fact Guyzance has prisoners and there is an assassin included in his court. None of these things are palatable. Rather like his food.

"What do you want?" I say slowly, taking the steps up to his throne.

Guyzance's Redcap guards move forward, but he holds up his hand in a louché

movement to stall them.

“Fenrother.” Alice pulls at my wing.

I pull her into my arm, inhaling her scent and wrinkling my nose at the bitter fear which tinges her usually delicious flavour.

“Don’t worry, I won’t eat Lord Guyzance,” I tell her. “Faerie are unpleasantly crunchy.”

I’d like to kiss her. I’d like to scent the garment I have in my pocket. But I do not wish to do either of these things with a Faerie lord close by.

Lord Guyzance sits back on his throne with a disgruntled huff of air.

“You come to my kingdom and you want to know why I summoned you here.”

“I am not in Wyrms form,” I respond. “My mate wishes to see the Yeavinging and this is part of it.” I shrug.

“You are treading a fine line, Fenrother. You know how the Yeavinging perceives you.”

“I know the Faerie consider me their servant, which is far from the truth, as well they know.”

Lord Guyzance leans forward. “You should be grateful for our patronage, Fenrother.”

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“You owe me,” I say emphatically. “Your queen owes me. All Faerie folk owe me and yet what do I get?”

“You have your mate.”

Anger rises within me as surely as my fire should but does not.

“She belongs to me. Fate provided her, not Faerie.” I snarl the words out.

Lord Guyzance moves back on his throne, resting one elbow on the carved arm as he contemplates me and Alice. “Not what I have heard.”

Out of the corner of my eye, I see movement. It is the assassin, but he isn’t here for me or for the Faerie lord. He slips from the gallery.

“What you have heard is incorrect.”

Guyzance stares at me as if he’s trying to see into my soul. In one hand is a scroll, a scroll he shouldn’t have. Then, because he can, the scroll disappears.

My heart pounds in my chest.

I feel Alice’s grip tighten on my arm.

Perhaps I should have told her about the curse. She is part of it after all. But with finding her, with mating, with instinct, it has not been uppermost in my mind.



I can tell her later.

“Did you want anything else?” I glare at the Faerie lord.

“Only your company and that of your little mate,” Guyzance says with a smile that could kill.

“You’ve had it.”

I take Alice’s hand, like she did mine earlier, and walk down the steps, my tail swishing across the rough stones.

“Be sure to give my best to Meg of Maldon,” Guyzance calls out.

I growl low in my throat. He wants me to second guess the assistance from the witch because she is one of his progeny, but I already know Meg of old.

She does nothing to benefit the Faerie.

Without looking back, I walk with Alice to the doorway into the courtyard and breathe in the sweet air as we exit.

“He knows Meg?” Alice says quietly. “Does that mean he sent her?”

“Meg is one of his daughters, but she is no friend to the Faerie. Meg has...helped...in the past.” A frisson of pain runs over my scarred shoulder.

“So, you do have friends then?” Alice asks, linking her arm with mine in a way I rather like.

“Friends.” I snort.

“Like Warden? Is he a warden of something, somewhere? Like a prison?”

“You ask a lot of questions.”

“You’ve just presented me with a whole new world to ask questions about,” Alice says.

I never should have left my castle.

ALICE

I liked the way Fenrother stood up to the Faerie lord. I always felt the Faerie were up themselves, and so far all I’ve seen is solid proof that, not only do they think they’re wonderful, but their arrogance is endless.

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But my Wyrn is not intimidated. It's as if his isolated existence has made him impervious to, well, almost anything.

The Redcaps ignore us as we make our way across the courtyard. The scented garden seems overly strong, almost artificial, and I'm pleased when the wooden doors open and we can leave. It seems like a weight is lifted as soon as we step outside of the castle boundaries. I never want to go back there.

It seems highly unlikely Fenrother tunes into my concern, but rather than striding off, like he has done all day, he sticks close by my side as we reach the market. I'm still interested, but the stares we're getting and the way people move out of Fenrother's way, as if he is contagious, are starting to grate.

Is it possible to see enough of a place before you've even begun?

"I think I want to go home now," I say to Fenrother.

He dips his head, gently nuzzling at my hair. "Home?"

"To your castle."

Fenrother's chest rumbles, a deep, comforting sound.

"Whatever you wish, my mate," he says.

Next to me, even though I'm trying to ignore everyone, a witch smiles, although as soon as she sees my gaze, she goes back to studying the cauldron she has in her hands

with additional care.

“Come,” Fenrother says. “Lord Guyzance may be the back end of a hind, but I am prevented from being my Wyrn here. We will have to leave these walls before I can change.”

He says this very loudly, far louder than necessary, before closing his hand around mine and towing me through the market, down the wide street, and, with no regard for the Redcap guards, we’re outside the walls once again.

I feel like I can take a breath. Happily, Fenrother strolls on, having reduced his rather punishing pace, and we follow the road away from Moranik which I am not going to miss.

The dusty pathway winds around the contours of the hills, cut into the earth on the higher side in order to keep an even base, and we turn a corner, out of sight of the main gate of the town.

Fenrother transforms without a word. But rather than holding out his claws for me, he beats down his great wings, lifting into the air, and I find myself flattened against the bank where the road is cut into the hillside by the down draught.

He’s leaving me.

Except, he stalls immediately above a small copse of trees, clustered around a stream which runs down a steep, skinny valley ahead of us, the leaves swirling wildly as he hovers there for a brief moment before dropping down with the sound of breaking branches and a loud, terrifying thump.

I don’t even think. My legs are pumping as I race down the road. Something is happening. The remaining trees are swaying violently. As I get closer, a shape

tumbles out of the copse and onto the dusty surface. There are too many limbs for a brief second, and then Fenrother and Warden split apart, both scrambling to their feet, or hooves, in Warden's case. He huffs out several hot breaths.

"You dare to lie in wait, Brag?" Fenrother snarls. "Your tricks will not work on me."

"Brag?" I pant out, finally getting close enough to the pair, my lungs burning.

Both pairs of eyes land on me. Fenrother instantly puts out a wing and shoves me behind him.

"Warden is a Brag, a trickster who likes to surprise the unwitting traveller, pushing them into the water."

Warden snarls. "All lies, as well you know, Wurm." He spits a mouthful of blood on the road, wiping the back of his hand over his lips. "We have never done such things, and any ambush has been on our enemies."

"And I am your enemy?" Fenrother responds with far too many fangs.

"I should consider you as one, given you left us in the Night Lands," Warden says, his back legs dancing, hooves ringing on the stones.

"But you escaped." Fenrother isn't backing down, even if his voice has a weary edge.

"I escaped the demon prison," Warden growls, a shudder wracking his body. "To become it's governor."

"Then your time there was fortuitous." Fenrother growls.

"You don't know what it was like in there." Warden stills, and his lack of movement

is more terrifying than his movement, all flashing hooves and blades. “I did...things...I hope to never have to do again to get my position.”

His dark eyes are wild. His flanks heave, and sweat pours from them, foaming white against his chestnut hide.

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 6:39 am*

“I am...” Fenrother looks at me, sidling slowly to protect me from Warden, “sorry.”

He probably could not have sounded less sorry, but the words calm the great centaur some, and it looks like no one is getting eaten today.

“Queen Mab wants us all under her control,” Warden says, his voice low and deadly.

“No one controls me,” Fenrother snarls. “Not even the queen. I have a mate. My fate is set.”

At the mention of a mate, it looks like Warden has been kicked in the chest. A dangerous, feral look comes over his face.

“Your fate is still open, Warden,” I say. “If you want. No one’s fate is set.”

Both monsters swivel to stare at me as if I have sprung from the ground.

Warden snorts a hot breath, pawing at the ground briefly. His eyes dart between Fenrother and me, then he turns around and gallops away from us.

“What did he want?” I ask, given I wasn’t party to whatever went on in the now pretty much destroyed copse.

“He wants to know his place in the Yeaving,” Fenrother grumbles. “He was once an enforcer for a Faerie lord, not Guyzance, but his experience in the Night Lands...it has changed him from one who knew his future, and now he knows nothing but violence and battle. He will never know peace, not while he returns to the Night

Lands, governor or no.”

FENROTHER

I release Alice as we land in the courtyard, changing back from a Wyrms as I do so. I used to prefer my Wyrms form, often spending months in it, but around her, I find I like this form almost as much.

Probably because this form has pockets. Pockets which mean I can carry her garments around with me, scenting them at will. In fact...I pull out the red fabric and I take in her scent from her garment as she walks ahead of me into the main vestibule.

It is delicious and it makes my pizzle instantly hard.

Although fighting with Warden whilst she was present had a similar effect, albeit briefly. I fought for her and my pizzle swelled.

Mating is very strange.

I wonder if there is anything in my text which might explain what is happening.

“Fenrother...” Alice looks over her shoulder at me as we enter the main hall, and her eyes widen as she sees what I have in my hand, her previous sentence forgotten. “Are those my...knickers?”

“Your undergarments? These?” I tuck them back in my pocket. “No?”

She puts her hands on her hips, and my pizzle nearly pokes its way out of my trousers without any assistance.

“They were! Why do you have my knickers in your pocket?” she demands.



“I don’t know what you mean.” I’m not entirely sure why I don’t want to tell her about the garment, but I do know I want to keep them.

In a blink of my eye, Alice is next to me, arms around my waist and one hand delving into my pocket, pulling the garment out.

“These are mine!” she exclaims, waving them in the air and filling it with her scent.

“I think you’ll find they are mine,” I growl, clamping her to me with one arm and snatching the garment from her. “You are mine.”

I need her kiss, so I take it. For a brief second, Alice resists, but then she kisses me back, not attempting to dominate, but instead she is with me in the moment, giving and taking as my tongue sweeps her mouth. I wasn’t sure if my pizzle could get harder, but it has. It aches in my pants, needing to be free.

Needing to be inside her. It’s the only place I want to be. The only place I ever want to be, with Alice, inside Alice, curled around Alice.

“You can’t carry my dirty pants around, Fenrother.”

“There is nothing dirty about this garment, I assure you.” I finger the fabric in my pocket, and the mere touch sends heat flowing through me. “It smells like you, and I like you.”

“You like me?” Alice’s face breaks into a smile, a little like the one I saw on her face as we were walking around Moranick when she was looking at the goods on offer.

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Perhaps I should have let her have something from the market. I need to check my text about that sort of thing.

“I...like you...on my pizzle,” I say, not entirely sure where the words are coming from.

“I’m sure you do,” she laughs.

“Do you like being on my pizzle?”

Alice laughs harder. “You really have no filter at all, do you, Fenrother?”

“I don’t know what you mean.” I rub my aching hardness against her, looking for some relief.

“Do you want something from me?” Her mirth continues as she looks up into my face, her hand cupping my cheek.

It’s against my nature, but I lean into her touch, revelling in it, her skin on my scales, the amusement dancing in her eyes. Amusement I put there, pleasure I put there, enjoyment I put there.

“I want to sheath myself in you, little mate. I want to hear you scream my name again as my seed explodes within your tightness,” I rasp.

I don’t know if this is mating. I don’t know what any of this is, but I do know I need Alice more than I need my shift or my wings.

Without her, I am just the Wyrn. With her, I am everything.

ALICE

I have far, far more questions than I have answers from today. The market, the town, the Faerie lord, the centaur and his ambush on the road. None of it makes sense. The atmosphere at Moranik castle, the hollow howls seeping into the hall, the strange glowing red-eyed creature who didn't want to be seen...

And the Brag, Warden, with his deep, brooding eyes, filled with pain.

The Yeavinging is a magical, mystical, dangerous place, and I feel like it's chewed me up and spat me out.

Then there's Fenrother, rubbing himself against me, my used knickers in his pocket which he was less than subtly sniffing.

Fenrother who likes me.

The fact he likes me sends a warmth spreading through my lungs. I'm not sure in my rather pathetic time on this earth anyone has said they liked me, other than my departed parents. Not in the way Fenrother means, not in a way which makes my stomach dip and my heart soar.

But despite the fact humans have always been hostile to Fenrother, he likes me.

From what he's packing (other than my knickers) in his trousers, I can tell he likes me a lot.

I think Fenrother requires a little teasing today. He has so many lessons to learn about humans, about what it means to like one, about what it means to be in a relationship.

Teasing him will be fun and fun has been in short supply...

I slide down his front. He grasps at me, unsure of what I'm doing until I reach his crotch and undo his trousers. I'm impressed they can contain the monster within because it nearly pokes me in the eye as I release it.

Fenrother's cock is magnificent. I still can't quite comprehend how he got it inside me, given the girth and the length, and as I stroke it, the rainbow scales which cover it lift in a slow, easy ripple, following my fingers, catching up to them and rising between them until I reach the tip.

He groans as I slide my thumb over his slit, hips thrusting at me. The slit parts into three as pre-cum pours from it, silky and translucent. I cup Fenrother's balls as I'm spellbound by the end of his cock, which sucks at my thumb, the ends clasping at me like lips.

My Wurm shudders as I gently pull down on his balls. One of his hands goes around the back of my head as I take a dainty lick over the tip, which sucks at my tongue. I pull back a little and see three slim tentacles emerge, swirling in the air as Fenrother rocks on the spot, his eyes closed. Once again I press my thumb over the end of his cock and find the tentacles gently caress it. They make my thumb go slightly numb.

"Are you...stinging me?" I ask hoarsely.

Fenrother hums, seemingly in a trance.

"My venom," he says in a voice which is not here at all. Fenrother appears to have gone to his happy place.

I guess this is one way to tame the Lambton Wurm.

I'm not entirely sure I want my mouth stung by the tentacles, so I keep on stroking him and they recede. I risk giving him another exploratory lick and his pre-cum fills my mouth.

“Alice.” Fenrother rasps my name.

He’s on the very, very edge. I know no one has touched him like this before, no one has taken him in hand, and certainly he has never had a blow job. I’m edging the Wyrms, and it’s clear from the dazed look on his face, his jaw tight, he is loving every second of the attention I’m giving to his cock and balls.

I think he’s loving every second of the attention full stop.

With every stroke of my hand, he’s covering me in more pre-cum. I lap at the tip and then carefully take as much as I can into my mouth. It’s not much, but as my tongue swipes over his slit, Fenrother moans, his hips firing forwards, shoving himself at me because he can’t stop himself.

“Alice, I am going to spill...” He doesn’t get the words out before his cock erupts with a tremendous amount of cum.

In hindsight, probably something I should have expected. There is so much, it’s still coming and coming, his entire cock rippling with the effort of expending it all. His breathing comes in rasping, ragged pants as a pool collects between us.

It couldn’t be any more clear he really hasn’t done anything like this before. Every single sensation is new to him.

“Mate.” He growls the word.

I hadn’t realised how wet this entire process has made me. I am absolutely soaking,

and not from his emission.

“Remove your garments,” Fenrother says, fangs making his speech blurred. “I need to mate you.”

Despite everything, he’s still hard. I’d have thought an orgasm of the size I’ve just witnessed would have emptied him for a week, but it’s not the case. Fenrother is ready to go. He needs no recovery time.

I take off my upper clothing. Fenrother watches with hungry eyes, cum dripping from his jutting cock to the pool below. Toeing off my boots, I turn my back on Fenrother to shimmy out of my trousers, and that, it turns out, is a glorious mistake.

I’m instantly lifted from my feet and pressed face first against the heavily carved dresser in the vestibule.

“Little mate,” he snarls in my ear, a voice dripping with sin as he presses the tip of his cock between my buttocks, his tail flicking in my vision before my legs are kicked apart. “You smell like you need my pizzle.”

“Fenrother!” My cry is lost as he thrusts into me in a single slicked movement which takes my breath and my ability to speak instantly.

All I can do is moan with his invasion, with the exquisite stretch, something I can’t quite understand how my body can take, but it does. It takes all of him.

Which is when I feel something swirling around my bottom hole.

“Is that...your tail?” I ask, forcing the words out because my brain appears to have turned to complete mush.

“Little mates get impaled,” Fenrother says, pulling out of me just enough to allow his tail to breach my tight ring and make me gasp even more. “And good mates get all their holes filled.”

I’ve gone from having this Wyrmling literally in the palm of my hand to being entirely at his mercy. Fenrother is no longer a virgin, and his dominant nature means he’s taking control. He begins to drill me, thrusting in slow, easy movements, one huge hand spanning my belly and the other pressed on my left buttock. With every pumping action, he grunts my name with pleasure and my climax rises.

I am here for the ride only. I teased my monster, and now he is punishing me by giving me a climax which rises, rises, and when it hits, I’m not sure I’ll survive. My pussy pulses over him, making Fenrother moan. My head goes blank, filled with the exquisite ecstasy of my orgasm, my senses overloaded, my vision gone, eyes screwed up and mouth open as Fenrother plunders me and I release a tsunami of moisture.

It runs down my legs. He continues to thrust into me, his rippling cock scraping my channel, his tail doing terrible, beautiful things to my bottom hole. A second orgasm hits me at the point Fenrother roars and erupts, a tug and a pinch within me, and we’re locked together as his body shudders its climax.

I drop my head, attempting to get my breath and see my stomach swelling. All the while, Fenrother circles his hips, his body pressed to my back and his lips murmuring words which don’t make any sense.

He is filling me, something he said he would do but something which doesn’t even seem possible. Except it’s clear, his cum is making my womb expand. It should be painful, and all I feel is bliss.

If I thought I was getting to grips with the Yeavinger, with Fenrother, with any of this, it throws me a curve ball, and I know nothing all over again.



I thought Fenrother was the one without knowledge, but it's very clear the one who knows nothing is me.

ALICE

Life within the four thick walls of Fenrother's castle is surprisingly easy. Since our trip to Moranik, I've not asked my Wurm to take me anywhere else, nor have I pressed him on the questions which have been running around in my brain.

Instead I've concentrated on getting to grips with a magical castle and with having a Wurm as a mate. Every few days, Fenrother goes out hunting for fresh meat, bringing back multiple carcasses which he dumps unceremoniously in the courtyard. I have no idea where the Duegar get the chickens from, nor any of the other ingredients which means they produce several large, tasty meals a day to fill a Lambton Wurm's belly.

Fenrother likes to eat. Admittedly he likes to eat meat, rare if it's venison or any large beast, whole if it's fowl. He'll taste the occasional vegetable but in the main he wrinkles his nose at virtually anything else, making it clear he's only trying for me.

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 6:39 am*

“How well did you know Warden, in the Night Lands?” I ask over breakfast, having made the decision to take matters which bother me slowly.

Fenrother has accepted me as a mate, he enjoys holding me through the night, and there’s no way I could sleep alone even if I wanted to, regularly waking up wrapped in the coils of a Wurm, but he’s not talkative, presumably because there has been no one to talk to.

I’m no recent stranger to overwhelm, and given he’s still carrying my used knickers around with him like a security blanket, I’m going to have to break Fenrother in gently to a two-way relationship as well as myself.

Fenrother growls over a large chunk of venison.

“Warden was an enforcer. He liked the fight and the Night Lands,” he says cryptically. “That’s why he doesn’t agree with my decision to leave.”

“So, he ambushed you?”

“He can’t get into the castle.” Fenrother shrugs. “Not that many creatures bother to travel here.”

I contemplate his reply, spreading sweet heather flavoured honey on a hunk of bread and taking a bite.

“We fought together on occasion. He was a good fighter,” Fenrother offers. “As was I. We turned the battle and the battle was what he lived for.”

“Because he lost his mate?”

Fenrother shrugs again. “I’d rage if I lost you,” he says simply. “But I wouldn’t stay in the Night Lands. That’s the difference.”

“I got the feeling he wanted to talk to you about something else,” I say carefully.

“Probably about the assassin in Guyzance’s palace. Or the Barghest in the dungeon,” Fenrother says, as if he’s discussing the weather.

“What?” I put the bread down.

“There was a Bluecap assassin in the gallery, trying not to be seen.”

“I saw him,” I say and Fenrother nods sagely. “But what is a Barghest?”

“Black dog of death. Doesn’t surprise me he ended up in a dungeon. No one likes a harbinger,” Fenrother says. “Especially the Faerie.”

“Why would Warden want to speak to you about them?”

“Because they fought in the Night Lands too.”

So, if I was trying not to overwhelm Fenrother, it’s backfired on me completely. I’m the one whose head is spinning.

“What were you fighting in the Night Lands?”

Fenrother snorts and stares into the fire.

“You don’t want to know,” he says, getting to his feet and walking towards his study.

I contemplate his swishing tail and his flexing wings as he goes. Should I follow him, or should I give him space? Everything I do with this monster is brand new for him and me. Have I pushed him too far? Does it matter, given we're stuck together anyway?

My desire not to upset anyone meant my aunt walked all over me, up to the point she decided she could take my inheritance and hand me over to the Yeavinging. I didn't want to be a doormat, but grief, the failure to deal with grief, the refusal by those around me to let me grieve—it turned me into something I was not.

I don't have to be that person with Fenrother. I don't have to be that person at all. My chair scrapes on the stone floor and I follow him.

“Did it occur to you I might want to know? Because apparently we're mates and that means we're stuck together,” I demand as I enter and find him sat at his desk, feet propped up and a book in his hand.

There are also more books on the shelves than last time I was in here, and I'm pretty sure Fenrother hasn't been out hunting for them.

“Fate put you here for a reason,” Fenrother says without looking up.

Anger boils in my stomach. Arrogant Wurm.

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“For you to breed me? Doesn’t mean we exist in isolation though, does it?” I growl at him. “Or you wouldn’t be in the bed with me every night.”

Fenrother puts the book down. “You belong to me. I desire you in my bed.”

“If there’s desire, then this is more than fate, isn’t it?” I demand.

Fenrother puts his hands on the desktop, his claws extending, digging into the wood and leather. He lifts his head and scents the air. “It is time,” he growls.

I see the book he has put aside is the one Meg of Maldon gave him.

“Time for what? To tell me the truth?” I retort.

The rumble in Fenrother’s chest seems to go straight to my core, making it clench like never before. A dull ache sits in my pelvis.

“The moon month begins,” he says, hopping over the desk like it’s hardly there and sliding his hands around my waist.

My stomach cramps like hell, and I double up against him with the agony. My body flames up, but at the same time I’m deadly cold.

“What’s happening?” I gasp, clawing at my clothing which feels like barbed wire on my skin.

Fenrother’s beautiful, scaly skin is sheened with sweat in a way I’ve never seen

before. He smells absolutely divine—spicy, masculine, and desirable. I grind myself against him instinctively before I realise what I'm doing.

“You are fertile, my mate. You are going into heat.”

FENROTHER

The scent I'm getting from my Alice is intoxicating in the extreme. I can't think straight, let alone see straight. The text mentioned her fertile period would announce itself but wasn't clear on how.

It is announcing itself loud and clear. My body knows if I don't spend the next twenty-four hours buried in her, I will surely die. My scales itch like I need a bath and to slough. Only I know I don't because I sloughed just before Alice came to me. There's a fire raging in my belly and my pizzle is hard.

Alice is bent double and moaning. My Wurm form wants to take her here and now, but if we are going to mate for as long as the text says, then she'll need to be comfortable.

My delicious mate will have the best of everything.

I scoop her up and carry her through the hall.

“Fenrother, wait,” she pants. “I'm going to have to...” Alice clutches at her dress. “I have to take this off. It hurts...”

She wriggles in my arms, and I put her down, helping her strip off the long dress. As soon as it comes off, I'm hit with a wall of scent which makes my knees buckle. Her knickers are soaked, and they come off too, her thighs glistening with her moisture. Unable to help myself, I'm on my knees, pulling her legs apart to lap at the sweetness

which belongs entirely to me.

Without her garments, Alice is breathing easier although as my tongue swipes through her folds, she gushes the salty deliciousness into my mouth. I do my best to clean her up as much as possible before pulling her against me and continuing up to our bedroom. My pizzle has already poked its way out of my trousers and is nudging at her entrance. Alice shifts from left to right, trying to get me inside her.

“Fenrother.” She groans my name. “It hurts.”

“I will be inside you soon, little mate. I will take the pain away with my pizzle.”

She drops her head back, her skin covered in moisture which smells like I should be able to eat her up. I kick open the bedroom door, slamming it against the wall in my haste to get her to the bed.

“Here.” She moans in the doorway. “I need it here.”

Are we close enough? My brain, previously resisting the rest of my senses, gives up the fight. In one swift movement, I’m buried in my gorgeous mate, her back pinned against the stonework, my tail uncoiling as I am unable to contain some of my Wyrms form. It feels glorious to be within her. She is slick, hot and moaning as I withdraw and slam into her. Every scale on my pizzle wants to feel her, my claspers releasing their venom as I go deeper.

Alice sighs my name, her channel rippling around me, more and more of her slick pouring over me. Her pain is easing as my venom takes effect, but there is only one way to be entirely sure her fertile window is closed around my seed.

“I need to claim you, little mate,” I murmur in her ear. “You need to take my bite to become entirely mine.”

Her half-lidded eyes lift to mine. “Your bite.”

“I need to give you my venom outside as well as inside. You have to take it all, Alice.”



## Page 62

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 6:39 am*

“Will it be painful?” she asks, her body shuddering as I continue to plunder her.

“As it would be to touch the stars, but beautiful too.”

“I want it,” she breathes, her eyes closing as I thrust into her once more, circling my hips so my pizzle can feel every single shiver from her hot channel which flutters over me, soaking me, desiring me.

“Once you have my venom, there will be nothing to stop my seed from filling your womb,” I respond, as the text has taught me.

Females require choice, even when fate has thrown mates together. I’m not sure I’ve ever wanted anything more than to give my Alice a choice, a reason, a life. And she will get all of these things regardless of what the queen insists, regardless of any young she conceives.

But it is her choice.

I hope she chooses me, even if it does mean the curse comes to fruition.

“Bite me,” Alice breathes. “Bite me and mate me before I melt.”

Her little body is on fire as I gently trace my claws over the flushed skin around her shoulder. I haven’t thought much about where I want to bite, but I know I want it to be clear for every being in the Yeavinger to see for time immemorial.

My fangs extend, and my pizzle throbs in her heat. The second I bite her, I am going

to erupt with an emission greater than ever. But my Alice is so deliciously pliable, so needy, so ready for all of me, I don't hesitate any longer. My venom fangs extending, I bite down into her soft flesh.

Alice arches her back, pushing herself into me, her heels digging into my tail as the venom enters her body. I hold my bite as she moves under me. I hold it to make sure I can taste her blood, mixed with the bitter taste of venom as I continue to pump both my pizzle and my venom into her.

A pizzle which grasps her entirely as my eruption follows, seemingly turning my insides into outside as every inch holds on, my balls contracting as they expel my seed.

The curse is in motion.

I cradle my sweet mate in my arms, lapping over my bite mark until the blood stops running, before taking her over to the bed and lying down with her, still embedded in her warmth.

"Fenrother." She breathes my name, and I think it's the best thing I've ever heard in my entire life. "What is all this?"

"Your heat and my rut, my mate."

"How long does it last?"

"Until you are filled."

ALICE

Fenrother curls around me on the bed, his cock buried deep inside with the familiar

pinch telling me we're locked together.

I don't feel as weird, or as hot, as before, and my pelvic region hurts less, but there's still a dull ache and a hunger which I can't shake.

A hunger for my monster who claims I'm in heat.

Fenrother's lips brush over mine, and my super sensitive skin means my entire body shudders. He groans as I ripple over him.

"Your heat should last a day," Fenrother rasps. "My rut? The text wasn't so clear."

"Does it hurt?" I pull him hard against me, needing the touch of his silky scales, needing to have as much of him close as possible.

Fenrother chuckles. "Hurt? This is the best place I could possibly be, little mate, buried in you, biting you, breeding you."

He slides out of me, a great rush of moisture following, and he nuzzles at my neck.

I feel the loss of his cock intensely. It's as if he should always be inside me. I want him back more than anything.

"Please," I whine, not caring it sounds bad. "Please mate me some more."

Fenrother grins, and it's a smile filled with joy and pleasure, a smile I've never seen on his face.

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 6:39 am*

“It would be my honour,” he says, pressing his lips to mine in a kiss I would normally enjoy, only now all I want is his cock.

He laps his forked tongue down over my neck, my skin shivering at the touch, down over my chest to my nipples where he sucks on them until I cry out before moving far too slowly down my body.

I’m trapped in his coils, but it doesn’t stop me attempting to grind myself against his scales, but each time I do, he shifts, and I growl in frustration.

“I am here for you, Alice, but you get my pizzle when I say,” Fenrother responds.

I can see the tightness in his jaw, but the heat in my body, the sensitivity of my skin, the desperate need to have him within me—it all makes me more selfish than I have ever been. My hands grasp for it with an annoyed growl, and he grabs both of my wrists, lifting my arms over my head as he stares down at my body.

“I should eat you to teach you a lesson,” he says. “But instead I’m going to make you come before I take you in my Wyrms form.”

The shudder which runs through me, causing moisture to gush out worse than before, is one of delight and horror.

Fenrother spreads my legs apart, his tail hooking around one ankle as his coils trap the other, holding me open as he inspects my pussy which leaks more at his studied gaze. A single swipe of a finger through my folds has my back arching, desperate, begging for more as I’m pinned in place by my huge monster.

He slides in a digit, the pad of his thumb rubbing over my clit, my overstimulated nerves sending me to the stars almost instantly, my channel attempting to grip his thick finger but finding it not as good as his cock. Although my body still responds, it still tips over the edge, and I'm orgasming over him, flooding him with my fluid as he rumbles at my enjoyment.

I'm released and I groan with disappointment.

"More," I whinge. "More."

"You will be getting more, needy little mate," Fenrother rasps, his voice deeper, more hollow.

I find myself flipped onto my aching stomach, spread out on the bed, and yet again, my legs are jerked wide apart, my ankles trapped in warm scales.

A giant claw slides under my abdomen, lifting me up, and something huge presses at my entrance.

A set of huge jaws touches my back.

"More than you can handle."

Before I can take a breath, before I can scream his name, Fenrother surges forward, his cock stretching me wider than ever, the stretch both painful and delightful. I feel every scale as he buries himself within me, my pussy producing so much slickness to ease his passage, as he withdraws to pound back again, the noise it makes is deliciously obscene.

"Mate," Fenrother growls, his voice alone making my stomach cramp and my channel pulse. "So tiny and so stretched."

He sets up a demanding pace, and my body responds. It needs this. It needs him and the harder he fucks me, the more I need him. There is only Fenrother. There can only ever be Fenrother.

As my climax slams into me, he roars my name, scales gripping my channel, the oh-so-familiar pinch as he somehow latches inside me, his hot cum swelling my stomach, my body welcoming every drop, craving it, needing it.

I need Fenrother. I want him and I know this is only the start.

ALICE

I have Fenrother buried in me.

He hasn't left my side, and I think it's been a whole day and a night where he's plundered me over and over. During all this time, he's made sure I've eaten, drunk water, and he has ensured my heated body has everything it needs. What it needs is his cock, his seed, and most of all, him.

Presently, his even breathing tells me he's sleeping, even though he insisted he did not need to sleep while I required his attentions. His slumber hasn't affected his cock, which remains as hard as ever. It pulses inside me, and I clamp down on it in response.

"Alice," his sleepy voice murmurs in my ear as he performs a lazy thrust.

I moan. I'm sore, despite all the fluids. I'm also sticky with my own sweat.

"I need a bath," I say, not entirely sure I could make it on legs which feel like they're made out of jelly.

“Bath.” Fenrother’s deep voice is a raw burr.

He unfolds himself from the bed with me in his arms, his cock slipping free and causing yet more floods. With a sinuousease, he carries me through to the bathroom, where the huge bath steams gently, as if it’s been waiting for us.

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Maybe it has. This place is magic, after all.

Fenrother lowers us both into the water. I hiss as my sensitive parts come into contact with the hot water, and he buries his head in my hair, crooning softly.

“Good mate,” he says. “You took my pizzle so well during your heat.”

“Is it over?” I ask as he sluices the water over me and my painful parts begin to ease.

“It should be.”

“What about your rut?”

“That doesn’t end until the moon month is up. Your heat makes it easier for me to fill you, but my body will not rest until it is sure,” he says with some considerable enthusiasm.

Exhaustion, rather tension, flows through my limbs. The dull ache in my stomach has been replaced by the soreness between my thighs and deep within me where I have been repeatedly stung around my cervix. My shoulder burns in a slow pulse where Fenrother bit me.

All in all, it’s been a wild ride.

I lean my head against Fenrother’s chest. It moves up and down with his even breathing. My big bad monster is asleep once again. Despite everything, it seems mating for a full twenty-four hours can take it out of any male, including Fenrother.



His ruggedly handsome features are softer when he sleeps, taking on an innocence which I know I've taken from him with my mere presence. Fenrother was untouched, and within a short time, he has discovered what a female is and has done things he probably hadn't ever thought about.

I gently stroke a finger over his strong jaw. The fine scales there glitter under my touch. I didn't expect my heart to open for him, but it has. What we have done has nothing to do with instinct or the countdown the queen believes she has imposed.

It has far more to do with two souls finding each other. Fenrother is funny, both intentionally and unintentionally, playful, growly, and sweet in varying measures. Above all, he's as lonely as I was, trapped in a life he didn't understand and which he didn't ask for.

Beneath me, my great Wurm flinches, his hand flapping at his nose and spraying himself with water as his eyes open in alarm. For a brief second, I see terror there until they fall on me and instead a smile spreads over his face.

"Alice." He rasps my name.

"You were somewhere else."

"I was, but I'm here with you now." He sighs deeply, one hand playing under the water, sweeping from side to side in a rocking motion. "I always want to be with you, Alice."

I wish I knew how much of this is Fenrother and how much of it is his instinct, the part of him he cannot control. For the time being, I don't want to think about it at all, simply enjoying the moment when he is calm and I am calm and the bath is hot.

Whatever happens next, it's in the lap of fate, and if there's one thing I've discovered

in my time in the Yeavinger, it's that fate will do what fate will do.

ALICE

Fenrother's rut manifests as a compulsion to have sex often and anywhere. In the long gallery, my hands pressed against the wood panelling as he takes me from behind, growling in my ear and sending my orgasm sky high.

Afterwards, he insists on cleaning me up, mostly with his tongue but often by carrying me to the nearest bathroom and then using his tongue.

I'd stop wearing knickers, but he likes the challenge, and I still haven't been able to stop him from carrying around a used pair with him. A pair I regularly find him sniffing, his face buried in the fabric and his eyes closed in ecstasy.

I'm sort of getting used to it, to him, to everything Fenrother is. To the fact his tail has a habit of curling around my ankle whenever he gets the chance, almost like a comforter. To his desire to follow me around, yes, even to the toilet, something which still fascinates him despite everything we've done together.

But most of all, it's having his huge, bombastic presence in my life. Fenrother does everything with gusto, whether it's hunting, eating, or stalking me around the castle.

As for me, I've gone from no one giving a single shit about my existence to having a very large, very scaly shadow. One with a penchant for undergarments which he keeps stuffed in his pockets.

And Fenrother is scaly. I pick up another of his shed scales from the bedroom floor as I'm dressing. This one is about the size of my palm and has a delightful iridescent sheen on its translucent surface. I add it to my collection, the one I keep in a wooden box in the wardrobe. I'm getting quite a pile. I like them because they smell of him.

I like the fact that slowly, this situation is making more sense. Yes, I was thrown into it without a choice, but since then there have been far more choices than I thought I would have.

Even potentially being pregnant with Fenrother's child is less of a threat than it was.

“Come see the moors,” Fenrother says, extending his hand to me after breakfast. “The heather is blooming.”

“How do you know?”

“I was out hunting long before you woke, my mate.” He gives me what has become his default smile, part grimace, part fang but with all the best intentions. “I scented it and it made me think of you.”

He has a pair of my knickers sticking out of his pocket, so I expect he probably checked. The image of Fenrother scenting the heather and then comparing it to my used underwear, like wine tasting, fills my head and I shake it away.

“I don’t think I’ve ever been compared to heather before.”

“Then it is about time you were,” Fenrother says as I take the proffered clawed hand and he walks with me through the great hall, into the main vestibule and out into the courtyard.

I expect him to change into his Wyrms form, as he so often has when we go out onto the moors surrounding his castle, but this time he does not. Instead he walks towards a door I always thought led into the Duegar area of the building. It opens ahead of him, and as we step through a short, dark passage, we are suddenly outside in the sunlight.

“What?” I exclaim. “Has this been here all this time?”

“If it was, would you have used it to escape me?” Fenrother says.

“Could I escape you?” I tease.

He leans into me, all of the Wyrms visible on his face. "I'd like to see you try."

Excitement runs through my veins. With the fresh scent of the moor in my nostrils, I feel like I could do anything, go anywhere, and in particular, I feel like running.

I grab my skirts and take off at a pace I know won't outrun Fenrother, especially if he cheats and turns to his Wyrms form, but it's still fun. It's still wonderful to fill my lungs with fresh, clean Yeavinger air and bound over the heather in a big floaty dress like some character in a romance book.

Overhead, the sky darkens, and I know exactly who it is, the Wyrms thumping down ahead of me and becoming Fenrother once again, his arms folded and sunlight playing over his scales. His tail lashes behind him, light flooding through the soft membrane of his wings.

I run past him, laughing like an idiot, and I'm rewarded by his deep, resonant chuckle, a set of claws trying to catch me and failing.

A soft, fragrant breeze blows as I run further up the hills away from the castle. Behind me, I hear Fenrother crashing through the heather as he easily outpaces me, running ahead and clearly hardly even breaking a sweat.

As for me, I'm flagging in my constricting dress and with the heather getting deeper the higher we go. I'm not sure I've seen the sky so clear since I've been here, nor such an azure blue. It's a colour reflected in Fenrother's wings as he beats them out at the top of the fell.

I collapse onto the heather bed as I reach the top, my lungs burning, my leg muscles screaming at me, and I stare up at the sky attempting to get my breath back.

Fenrother's face pokes into my vision, staring down at me with a half quizzical, half

amused expression.

“What?” I query.

“I wanted to know why you are so beautiful,” he says. “Far more beautiful than the sky or the heather.”

“I can’t answer that.” I’m already flushed from the exercise, but his stark, sweet words make me colour deeper.

“I can,” Fenrother says confidently. “You are my mate.”

“Well, that explains it.” I laugh as Fenrother hauls me to my feet and slides an arm around my waist, pulling me against him.

“It doesn’t explain anything. You were not here and the sky was beautiful, but now you are and you eclipse it.”

“Doesn’t your text give you any indication?” I ask.

In the past few weeks, some pages have become visible to me, mostly the ones on how to handle a rutting Wurm. It’s the reason I haven’t given up underwear completely.

“No.” Fenrother looks out over the heather, over the fells, towards the river valley which winds its way towards Moranik. “All I know is my chest hurts when I look at you, and my Wurm would kill to keep you safe.”

ALICE

If Fenrother’s chest hurts, my heart has pushed its way into my mouth, all too eager

to see the monster...the man...who is stealing it away and claiming it as his own.

I can't really speak. The overwhelm of emotion isn't something I was prepared for. My life before the Yeavinging was simply a process of existing and drifting, not knowing where I was going, not knowing what would happen. I maintained a hope my aunt might accept me, perhaps once my trust paid out. But it wasn't anything tangible. What happened after I came into my money was as distant as the hazy purple heather at the top of the fells rolling away from us.

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But the sharp relief of Fenrother, larger than life, scaly, tail lashing, lifting his wings so the warm breeze ripples the membranes, which flicker like flags hoisted high—he is far more real, far more tangible than anything I had back beyond the veil, before the Yeavinger stone took me.

Or did I let it steal me away?

I'm not sure I didn't let it, and not because I had a gun pointed at my head.

Fenrother shoves his face into my hair, the pink colour now faded and my natural auburn starting to show through. He inhales, like my scent is better than what surrounds us. The sky, the heather, the earth, all which combine to make me feel more than alive.

“I think you carry my young, my Alice,” he says, deep voice rumbling through me.

“You can't know that.” I laugh.

“It has been more than a moon month, and your blood has not come.”

I twist to look into his face, which he pulls from my neck. He is solemn, as he often is.

“You've been keeping track?”

“Time is something which is not on my side,” he says.



“What do you mean?” I ask. Despite the warmth of the sun, I feel deathly cold.

“You are my beginning, Alice, and you are my end,” Fenrother says. His stunning eyes are soft, the glitter within them a mere bokeh. “But with the start of the life within you, the curse is complete.”

“Curse? What curse?” My heart races.

“There can only ever be one Lambton Wyrn,” Fenrother says. “When you birth, I cease to exist.”

“What?” I pull away from him, my body cold and hot at the same time. “When I give birth, you die? No!”

“It is the curse of the Lambton Wyrn.” Fenrother hangs his head. “As ancient as my lineage.”

“This is the reason you were brought up alone? What happened to your mother?” My world is closing in, shutting down as I attempt to process what he has said.

What it means.

What I’m going to lose.

“She died birthing me,” Fenrother says, “or so I was told. The Duegar provided the assistance I needed to make it to adulthood.”

“Fenrother.” I stare at him, unable to take in all he is saying. “Why?”

He shakes his head. Either he doesn’t know or he doesn’t want to tell me.

Reality slams into me. It's a reality without Fenrother. It's a reality where the child I might be carrying ends him. It's a reality where I cannot do anything other than watch until the creature I love becomes dust.

I can't look at him anymore. I turn and run, not caring if he tries to follow me. Not caring about anything other than to put some distance between us. I think I hear his voice carrying on the wind, carrying my name, but I don't look back.

All I want is for this not to be true. For Fenrother to be wrong and for there not to be a curse.

But my heart knows he is not wrong. Not this time.

Wind whips at my hair, and a cold rain falls, soaking my skin as I make it into a shallow valley between the fells, where a small stream tumbles through a set of boulders and scrubby bushes which cling to life in an inhospitable place. Thunder rumbles over the hills.

A familiar thunder.

"Human," a voice hisses in my ear.

I spin on the spot, but there is only mist which clings to me like a spider web, wrapping around my wrists and waist.

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“Let me go,” I say as I recognise the rain which is falling like icy shards. “You’ve done enough by forcing him to be my mate.”

The chuckle which echoes over the stones is pure evil. Not that I was expecting anything else.

“The Wyrms disobeyed me, and I will never be disobeyed.” The queen materialises next to me, pulling on the mist around my wrists which goes taut, slicing into my flesh like metal.

It has become chains, binding me to her.

“Humans,” she sneers. “You think we came to save you, and yet what did you offer in return?”

“Aw,” I pout. “Did you want a thank you card? Flowers? Perhaps a box of Milk Tray?”

Her beautiful face flashes with the demon within, twisted and dark.

“We wanted you. Without humans, the Yeavinger cannot continue. You have been taken since time began for our needs, our pleasures, our whims.” She snarls at me. “And you provide the vessel for a new Wyrms, one which will be loyal to me and only to me.”

“No.”

The queen throws her head back and laughs.

“It’s too late for refusal, human,” she spits. “You have already rutted with the Wyrn.” Her mouth twists in disgust. “You have taken his seed, and you are with young. Nothing can stop nature from taking its course. Your child will be mine and the days of the Wyrn are numbered.”

Wind whips violently at my hair, at my wet clothing, pulling and writhing. I’m lifted into the air, my limbs wrenched upwards on the chains which bind me. I think I scream but I’m not sure. I don’t want to give the queen the satisfaction, but I cannot help myself.

But I don’t scream his name.

Because he should have warned me, and he chose not to. Now I have no choice at all.

FENROTHER

I want to follow her, my Alice, as she flees from me, but my guilt holds me back.

It sits in my stomach like a stone, and that is something I know all about. Not the first time I’ve swallowed a stone, although this one is of my own making.

I should have told her. I should have said about the curse. About the way it ends. My text told me all about choice and I gave my mate none.

Alice disappears into a gulley, and having her out of my sight tears at my heart. She belongs to me. I shouldn’t have to lose her.

But a curse is a curse. I have not the magic to break it. Mine comes from the earth, not the air, the strongest of the elementals. I am but a Wyrn.

And I hate being powerless against such a force. The Faerie could have stopped the wars in the Night Lands in a single glance, a flick of their delicate wrists, but instead they chose to send wave after wave of us into the breach, as if it was a game.

A game I refused to play, and this is the result.

I roar out to the fells, to the heather, to the creatures within, but no one listens. No one ever listens to a Wurm. I am silenced.

A crack of thunder spears me from behind. I become the Wurm in order to resist, but unease settles within me. If the Faerie are close, I should have Alice by my side.

The queen gave us a moon month, and it has been longer. I had held hope in my heart she might not come, she might have lost interest, but I was wrong.

I am hopelessly wrong wherever my Alice is concerned, save for giving her pleasure. I swarm my way over the fell side, searching for her, needing her.

Wanting to tell her how much she means to me, to my Wurm, to my pizzle, to all of me, every single scale, every flutter of my wing, every point on my tail. I might not be able to break the curse, but I belong to her until I am no more, and I need her to know this.

Rain pounds as I dive into the gulley. A shriek which is suddenly cut off makes my scales stand on end.

“Alice!” I growl her name through a magical fog which seeks to dull my senses.

“She is mine now,” Mab echoes back to me, maybe in my head, maybe in the air.  
“And you are mine too, Wurm.”

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“Never,” I growl, thrashing at the chink of chains which seek to bind. “I belong to no one, not even you, Mab. It’s the reason you could not make me fight on in the Night Lands, the reason you want to take the one thing I own from me.”

“You will be mine, Lambton Wyrn, if you want her to survive the birthing of your young.”

I can’t see straight anymore.

“If you hurt her, Mab, I will come for you, and you will not escape my wrath, Faerie queen or no,” I snarl as my head hits the caged spell she has placed over me. Every inch of my being strains at it.

I cannot get through, I cannot get to her, I cannot rip her to shreds.

“I won’t give you anything, Fenrother, not until I have your troth. Your loyalty to me. Provide it and she lives...refuse me and she dies.”

I shove my nose hard into the spell and it sizzles on my skin.

“Follow me, and I will kill her without a single regret, Wyrn. You have three days to decide her fate, and yours.” The queen’s voice flows back at me and as sudden as the cage appeared, it has gone, and I am left snarling at the sky.

Every part of my Wyrn wants to go after her. Every single inch screams at me not to let Alice go.

But she cannot die either. I have to have her close to me at least until the curse finally takes hold.

That is, if she is prepared to look in my direction ever again.

I should have told her about the curse. But my regrets are too late.

I may have lost my mate in more ways than one.

ALICE

I feel sick. I'm not entirely sure if it's from the interesting method of travel the Faerie used or in fact something to do with the alleged fact I'm pregnant. Either way, I think I might lose my breakfast as I stare at the small room, sumptuously furnished with a hell of a lot of gold furniture.

It's as if the queen wanted to make sure I knew my place, with the size, and yet couldn't quite help herself with the furnishings, wanting to show off her power and wealth.

A long chain runs from my wrist to a metal ring next to the bed. I've already tried to pull and twist it free, but it isn't budging.

I've also tried both doors, one leading to a rudimentary toilet, but no bath, and one is locked, presumably the exit. There's one small shuttered window, and I can't get it to open either.

It's possible the nausea is from my efforts and the way I feel completely useless against the magic the Faerie possesses. Being with Fenrother has not been a real introduction to the Yeavinger. His lack of magic and the limited ways the Duegar used it mean I haven't even really thought about it much.

But I'm getting the hang of it here. I'm also slowly understanding why the rest of the world beyond the veil accepted the Faeries' help when we needed it and did nothing further to challenge them after.

How do you fight magic when you have none?

Hopelessness steals through my heart, gripping it like barbed wire. If I'm to believe Fenrother and the queen, not only am I pregnant, but I'm stuck here until I give birth and afterwards...

Fenrother dies.

And he knew this. And he continued on his path to destruction anyway, without even thinking how it would affect me...how it would affect any child I might have.

There was a curse, and he left me with no choice at all.

I slam my fist against the ornate carved gold headboard. It hurts, but not as much as my heart aches at his betrayal. And his loss.

The door swings open, and a large Faerie male, dressed in the uniform of the queen, all tight black leather and straps, sneers at me.

She obviously has a preference for the pretty, big muscular males too. This one has an air of a model around him, with his blond hair and bright azure eyes along with chiseled cheekbones and a sculpted jaw.

Of course, given their magic, the Faerie can probably be whatever they want to be, so I can't trust the evidence of my own eyes.

"You are required for an audience with Queen Mab," he says.



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“I’ve had one, thanks.” I turn my head away from him. “I’m good.”

He yanks my chain from the ring as easily as plucking fruit from a tree, hauling me upright.

“It isn’t your choice, human,” he snarls, turning his back and stomping through the door, dragging me with him.

Clearly this sort of work is beneath him as I’m pulled roughly down a stone passage of glittering dark granite, lit by flickering Faerie light. I manage to match his pace enough so the chain around my wrist isn’t slicing into my flesh.

The passage turns into a set of stairs winding down in a tight spiral. I make sure I keep close behind the Faerie as he descends, grumbling about humans being pathetic, because the last thing I want is to fall.

The stairs open out into a larger room, still granite. This one has a scent of many bodies and is some sort of guard room, with a number of other ridiculously good looking, leather clad Faerie males lounging around.

“See you got human duty, Yarain.” One of them laughs.

“Fuck you,” my guard grumbles.

“If you’re lucky, you might get to fuck her, although she doesn’t look worth a fuck,” another sneers.

“This one is already with child. She’s been fucking with the Wurm.” Yrain pulls on my chain until my body slams into his. “She’s tainted goods.” His handsome face twists into something resembling a demon, like the queen did before him.

The Faerie are not pleasant creatures, and it makes me wonder exactly what Fenrother was battling in the Night Lands.

He shoves me back from him, and I stumble, causing the others to snort with laughter.

“Still good for a fuck though,” one of them says. “Which is all humans are good for.”

To my surprise, Yrain slams his body into the speaker who tumbles to the floor before scrambling back to his feet.

“She’s under the protection of the queen and not to be touched,” he snarls. “Not by any of you.”

“I wouldn’t touch anything which has been anywhere near that Wurm,” one of the others grumbles.

“Good.” Yrain squares his shoulders and tugs on my chain. “Don’t forget it.”

The Faerie metal catches my flesh, and I hiss in pain. If Yrain hears me, he ignores it, and I’m dragged behind him again as he exits the room out into a large courtyard.

It reminds me of Lord Guyzance’s palace, filled with plants, set out in a formal way with a haze of magic hovering over it. The scent is artificial, the glimmering butterflies unnatural.

I’m trailed through the box hedges, gravel crunching underfoot as we approach a tall

tower, the smooth darkened granite gleaming in the light. Ahead a wooden door, covered in gold, swings open, and I find myself in the queen's palace, a long gallery entrance filled with light and opulence, lined with huge columns which terminate in a vast vaulted ceiling, all designed to show her power and wealth.

Our footsteps echo as Yrain walks quickly through the gallery which terminates in a set of outlandishly lavish crystal and gold doors which have to be twenty feet tall.

Yarian halts, pulls on his uniform, and flicks back his hair. A great set of translucent wings slowly appears from his back, and he gives them an exploratory shake.

The doors open in front of us, and without a glance at me, he strides through into the Faerie queen's court.

## FENROTHER

It is as if I've been hollowed out, left a mere shell of a Wyrn. I do not matter. Only Alice matters. She was the only thing which ever mattered to me. She brought a light into my life which I hadn't seen until it was put out.

"Alice!" I roar at the ceiling of the great hall as I enter, as if it will help anything.

The name echoes, but there is no response. I change into my Wyrn form, and I rage around the hall, shredding the tapestries, snapping the furniture until there is nothing left but rags and matchsticks.

And the rage hasn't done anything at all. I'm still filled with it, with remorse, with the loss of Alice.

I curl up in the midst of the destruction, unable to close my eyes, unable to keep them open because without her, I am nothing.

Before Alice, I didn't know what I was. After her, I know exactly what I need to be, and I failed completely.

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I was supposed to protect her. Instead I offered her up to the Faerie like a sacrifice and without any thought whatsoever.

Because I never think. Wyrms don't think. We follow our destiny, our prophecy, and our curse. Not for the first time, I wonder why my parents didn't leave me anything but this dusty old castle. No warning, no texts, nothing to tell me what I needed to do to break the curse or avoid it.

Instead, they left me in the arms of the Yeavinger, and look where it's got me. A lost mate, a broken heart, and still no flames.

Flames the prophecy insisted would happen when I met my mate. Flames to protect her, to keep her, to warm her.

I have none and the prophecy is false. The only truth is the curse. The curse which the queen's mother placed on the wyrms of Lambton eons ago. The curse I didn't believe.

But I believe it now.

The curse which says only one Wurm can survive and that the birth of another means the end of the father. A curse I hoped it might be possible to break, given the current queen seemed to wish it.

Instead she says it is on Alice now, unless I give her what she wants, and if that's the case, I may as well be dead because returning to the Night Lands to fight a pointless war may as well be a death sentence. I won't see my young and it won't see me.

Instead I will be turning my little one over to the same fate I suffered.

I rise and change back from my Wyrms form, making my way through the debris to my library. More texts have revealed themselves since Alice arrived, a situation she remarked upon with wonder. These texts were not enchanted against her and she often spent time in here reading.

In fact a text balances on the edge of the shelves, her customary ripped piece of parchment sticking from it to mark her place. I snatch it up, dismissing the part of me which wants it left where it was, to respect her decision to leave it there, as if that might bring her back to me. The text represents a link to her, and I want it in my hand.

I scent it, and there is the very faint trace of her on the pages. It falls open at her place holder, and I find it's a history of the Yeavinger. The page she read is one about the Duegar and how the castle is built on their land, meaning it belongs to them as much as it belongs to generations of the Lambton Wyrms.

The place marker has writing on it, and as I look closely, I recognise my handwriting. The words are scrawled near the top.

A note I made to myself a very long time ago, to check the hermitage at the edge of my lands.

Something I never did because my Alice arrived in my life. For a while, I stare at the note and at the text. My mind is blank. All it wants is her, here, in my arms, and without Alice, it seems I cannot function.

I'm sure the note was in my pocket, but at some point, it must have fallen out, and she has kept it. It makes it hard for me to breathe somehow, the thought of her keeping my note.

Did I know my mate at all? Did I bother to know her? Was the last moon month and more wasted because I thought I didn't need to know her.

But I did. I needed to learn what made her eyes dance, her heart beat, her mouth smile. I thought I did because I was there to protect her, to feed her, to mate her, but this simple note, the creases carefully smoothed out, tells me I did not know her at all.

With a roar, I slam the text closed and stomp out of the library. The Duegar pause in their clean up of the great hall. I should apologise to them, but I'm too filled with rage at myself. Instead I sweep past the crystalline creatures without a word, out into the courtyard before swarming up the walls and taking to the sky.

I have received the message from the past, and I may as well perform my duties as the Lambton Wurm. I should track my boundaries, prepare what is needed to keep the castle in repair. All while I contemplate what, if anything, I can do to lift the curse and get my mate back.

Once I have the answer, no one, not even Queen Mab, is safe from my wrath.

ALICE

The great hall of the queen's palace is, of course, significantly larger than the one in Fenrother's castle. It is filled with glittering light, ethereal, which reflects off the thousands of mirrors, off the carved gilt surrounds, the golden furniture, everything which makes this place look like Casanova's boudoir on an industrial scale.

It is also filled with Faerie lords and ladies. Some of them scuttle to one side when they spot me behind Yarain, their pretty faces twisted with disgust.

He pulls on my bonds, causing me to stumble forwards, and there is an unpleasant titter from those closest when they see my misstep.

The queen is sat on a ridiculously ornate throne, raised above floor level to put her in a commanding position over her court. Around half a dozen Faerie are bowing and scraping to her, one holding her hand and pressing his lips to the back of it as Yarain approaches with me in tow.

She pulls her hand away, and her would be suitor or whatever he is gives me the dirtiest look I think I've ever received.

And my aunt was very good at dirty looks.

"Yarain." She nods at my guard.

"My queen." He gives her a deep bow.



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I consider making a run for it, but I'm right in the midst of more Faerie than I think any human has ever seen, who are very clearly hostile towards me.

I don't think I'd get far before I was turned into a frog.

The queen motions to him and he hands her my chain. She uses it to pull me towards her violently, causing me to fall to my knees. I cry out in pain and hate myself for it because it causes another wave of amusement among the Faerie throng.

"What we have here is the human who went with the Wyrn," the queen announces to the room.

There are audible gasps followed by disgusted muttering. I don't want to look, my face flaming, not because I'm embarrassed about Fenrother, but because I hate being on my fucking knees in front of this horrible queen.

"And she will bear the next generation," she adds.

I lift my head. "You don't know that."

"I do." She glares down at me. "I suppose you want something humanlike as a scientific test to prove what I am saying, rather than believing nature. Because science has served you humans so well." The queen sneers.

"It's served you. Science kept us alive for a long time before you had to intervene," I retort.

She laughs. It sounds like killer bells tinkling to warn of coming doom.

“The humans think we saved them,” she hisses at me. “We did not. We enslaved you instead.”

My blood halts in my veins. “You did what?”

“Faerie need humans,” she says dismissively, sitting back on her throne. “You were at risk of forgetting your place on the earth. Those we banished to the Night Lands might have disagreed, but we know what the real threat is...a wave of humans taking over.”

“The virus...it was you?” As the realisation of what I’m being told slams into me, I see red. “You killed my parents.” I rise from my knees, glaring at her, my vision narrowed down.

“I did?” She doesn’t even bother to meet my heated gaze. “Then they weren’t worth saving.”

I manage to take two steps, my hands outstretched because I want to kill her, rage boiling within me, but the chain takes on a life of its own, wrapping around me until I fall again, but this time like a felled tree, all the air expelling from me as I hit the ground.

“Now, now.” The queen stands over me. “You don’t want to damage your young, do you?”

“Fuck you.”

“An ugly mouth on an ugly creature.” The male Faerie who was slobbering over the queen’s hand earlier moves into my eye line. “Put her in the dungeons.”

The queen gives him a sharp look, and I suspect he may have spoilt his chances of whatever it was he had hoped for.

“I want the Wyrn to be mine,” she announces. “So, his mate will be extended the courtesy of good quarters and good food, provided she gestates quietly.” The queen, glares coldly down at me. “For she wants to honour the memory of the Wyrn, after all.”

“Bitch,” I hiss. “What have you done to him? What have you done to Fenrother?”

“He brought his fate on himself,” she says imperiously. “Because no one disobeys me. Not even the Lambton Wyrn. He knows what he needs to do to ensure your survival, even if it means he loses his fight.”

“You already cursed him. What more do you want?”

This time she leans in to me, her face contorting to the one I saw on the top of Fenrother’s castle that night so long ago.

“His kind brought the curse on themselves. He deserves it, and he will pay for the crimes of his ancestors.”

She pushes me with her foot, and I roll twice before landing at Yarain’s feet. He looks down at me and curls his lip in what has become a familiar sign of disgust from a Faerie.

As I blink, I’m back in the prison room at the top of the tower. Only this time the window shutters are open. The chain uncoils from me, attaching itself back to the wall before I can stop it. I run at the opening, my arm at full stretch as I reach it, the fingertips of my free hand only just reaching the sill.

Outside the sky is an unnatural blue, too bright to be real, and as I crane my neck, I see what's laid out below me, over the many undulating hills are mile after mile of low lying palaces, set around courtyards filled with magical plants, the artificial scents choking, the colours all wrong.

Without Fenrother, I am a mere human. And now I'm the Faerie queen's prisoner, condemned to the tower until I give her what she wants.

The Lambton Wyrn.

FENROTHER

The hermitage is not empty.

I growl under my breath as I approach the dwelling, carved into the sandstone cliff, its doorway a blank space but with smoke curling from the flue which perches on a small outcrop.

No one should be here without my permission, and today is not a day anyone wishes to be on my bad side. Without even thinking, I stride through the doorway and find myself instantly ten feet away on my behind, wings rowing uselessly at the lack of air.

An explosion spell, one I should have expected, only my mind is anywhere but here. I change to my Wyrn form and shove my head through the spell and into the dwelling.

“If you value your limbs, you will leave this place,” I snarl.

“Fenrother!” Meg of Maldon hurries from the rear of the hermitage with a cauldron.

“If I’d known it was you, I’d have removed the spell!”

The cauldron’s contents smell absolutely delicious. But I can’t possibly think about filling my stomach.

“Why are you here?” I ask, shifting out of my Wyrn in order to fit through the

doorway properly.

Meg ladles out a large bowl of the stew from her cauldron and shoves it into my hands with a large wooden spoon.

“Sit,” she exhorts me.

To my surprise, I sit. The stew steams, and the fire in her hearth flickers, the scent of woodsmoke mingling with that of the dish.

“Eat,” she says.

“My mate...” I take a mouthful of the stew even though I have no intention of doing so.

“You said I could stay here, a moon month ago,” Meg says, placing the cauldron on a hook to one side of the fire.

“I did not,” I growl through another spoon of the stew which is too delicious and something I am not deserving of. “I would have known if I said you could stay anywhere on my land.”

“I am where you need me,” Meg says, not looking in my direction as she turns over a pile of rags as if searching for something.

“The queen has taken my mate.”

“And you let her?”

The growl which rips from my throat can’t be thwarted by mere stew. “NO.”

Meg shakes her head, and I contemplate eating her, but I know it's not going to get me anything other than a sore stomach. So, instead I eat more stew, which remains good even with the bitter taste in my mouth.

"The queen took her back to the Faerie hills. You know I cannot go there," I mutter.

"Fenrother, when are you ever going to learn anything?" Meg sighs.

"I have learnt plenty from the text you gave me." I find myself grinning. I like thinking about mating my Alice.

"You didn't learn enough." Meg pulls out a basket filled with balls of wool and shoves her arm into it, pulling free a skein which glints in the light. "Because it doesn't appear you learnt how not to give up."

"I have not given up. The queen cannot keep me from my mate, no matter what curse I have on me, no matter what the prophecy says," I snarl. "A prophecy which is entirely wrong given I have no fire since meeting my one true mate."

"Have you ever bothered to read the prophecy properly?" Meg asks, sitting on a comfortable looking bench with her knitting, the needles clicking as the skein becomes something other than a long silver line.

"I have read the prophecy many times," I lie.

"So, you've no doubt interpreted it."

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“It needs interpreting?” My lie is undone.

The stew is good though and the hermitage is warm. There are cushions and rugs next to the stool I’m sat on, comfortable looking cushions and rugs in colourful block patterns, so unlike the item Meg is knitting.

“What does it say?” she says, her beady eyes fixed on me.

“Keep the creatures, keep the Wyrms, never let him harm, for in all his days and all his nights, he will keep her warm. Fate has come and fate has gone, and she will be the one to tame him, for when the Wyrms find his mate, fire will finally warm them,” I repeat, as if in a trance.

I have read it, but I did not think I had committed it to memory.

“I have no fire,” I say, my voice sounding quieter than I expect.

My spoon falls to the floor.

“You have plenty of fire, Wyrms,” Meg says. “You just haven’t found it yet.”

“Where?”

“The question is when, and the when is where you find your army,” she says cryptically.

“Stop speaking in riddles,” I growl.



My brain can't work out anything, not when all I want to do is sleep. But sleep is not what I should do. Sleep is for the weak.

I sleep.

FENROTHER

I open my eyes to find I am not in the hermitage anymore. The residual warmth of the fire and the food ebbs away. I do, however, have something around my neck and I pull at it. My claws catch in the loops, and I pull at it, and it slithers from my scales.

It's a scarf. One Meg was knitting earlier. I stare at it for a while. The only garment I like to carry with me are the knickers of my mate. If I had my way, I wouldn't bother with any clothing. Only the Dwegar insist.

I am out on the edge of the moors, close to the river valley, my scales glistening with dew. It's been an entire night, and my sweet mate is not in my arms.

I am not in my castle. Meg has tricked me, and I want to kill her.

"Fenrother?" I'm rolling onto my front, clutching at my head when a voice drops into my ears like a hot poker.

I sit up and see Warden as he trots slowly along an animal track which follows the contour of the fell.

"Have you been licking mushrooms again?" he asks as he gets closer.

"It was one time," I grumble. "And no, I haven't been licking mushrooms again," I mimic him. "Meg of Maldon did something to me."

“How is Meg?” Warden asks.

“She’s creating a stew which sends you to sleep before evicting you from your own hermitage,” I reply.

“Did the stew have mushrooms in it?” Warden’s back legs dance from side to side, his head inclined, and his dark eyes filled with the ferality of his kind.

I glare at him.

“What are you doing here anyway?” I say finally, after he’s folded his arms and stamped a front hoof a few times.

“I was at a loose end, and I thought, why not go bother Fenrother and get my arse bitten again.”

“I did not bite your arse.” I rub the back of my neck, knowing I was more concerned about keeping Warden away from Alice than where I put my teeth.

“Look, I got a message you wanted to see me,” Warden says with growing irritation. “An annoying raven which kept cawing in my ear.” He flaps a hand at his head, catching one of his short horns and tugging it.

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“Why would I want to see you?” I stick out my tongue, which feels like it’s been in my armpit.

I could do with a drink, so I get gingerly to my feet, and ignoring Warden, I make my way over to a small spring half hidden in the heather and surrounded by flat blue stones. It bubbles up globs of cold water which I hastily suck down.

“So, you didn’t want to speak.” Warden is standing over me.

“No,” I growl, wiping my mouth with the scarf. “I have to find my mate. That’s all that matters.”

Warden backs up a couple of paces. “What happened to Alice?” he says.

The growl I release is one which would be at home in the Night Lands. “You don’t get to say her name.”

“What happened to your mate?” Warden snarls back, planting his back hooves in a way I know from experience means he isn’t going to be moved.

“The queen took her. But I’d already...” I shake my head, wishing I hadn’t as my vision blurs. “I hadn’t told her about the curse. She was cross with me.”

“Curse?”

“Only one Wyrms can survive at any one time in the Yeaving. When my young is born, I die.” I raise my head to the sky. “But the curse isn’t what concerns me. It is

whether my sweet Alice will survive a birthing. My mother didn't. The queen says she will ensure she does if I pledge my loyalty to her."

I fist the heather next to the spring, careful not to pull it up but at the same time, clutching it hard enough my claws dig into my flesh through the twisted branches. I can't, I won't let Warden show how much this means to me. It is a weakness.

And the Lambton Wyrms is not weak.

"Then you need to get her back and force the queen to break the curse," he says, simply.

I laugh, or at least I make a noise like laughter, rasping from my throat.

"You make it sound easy. She's a Faerie queen. She's the Faerie queen. My earth magic is no match for her elementals."

"You don't need to match her magic," Warden snorts. "You need to offer her something she can't refuse."

"She has my mate. I have nothing else to give."

"Fenrother, you are the Lambton Wyrms. Queen Mab cannot have you, and she cannot control you. It's the reason she sends you, me, the Barghest, the Bluecap, and all the others to the Night Lands. She wants control. You have to show her she cannot have it at any price. Instead you need to give her your rebellion."

I wipe my bloodied hands on my trousers without a care. "Then I will go to the Faerie hills and take her back," I growl.

Warden dances from one side to another. "And how do you propose to attack and

beat all the Faerie within?" he says.

"I'll deal with that problem when I come to it. I am the Lambton Wurm." I roar at the sky. "I take back that which belongs to me."

Warden lets out a short, harsh breath. "Let me come with you. It's about time I spilt Faerie blood." His front hoof beats out a regular pattern on the ground, each hit hollow like an ancient drum. "And I know others who will join you too."

"I don't need others."

Warden stops moving, thankfully, or I might have had to do him some damage.

"You do. If you're to stand a chance of getting through the elemental defences." He's suddenly making far more sense.

"So, I take you." I give him a long stare. "And you're my distraction."

"We need others," he growls.

"We? Who is this we?" I respond, getting to my feet and making a mental note never to accept food or drink from Meg of Maldon again.

"Me." Warden looks affronted. "And the Barghest, provided we break him out of Lord Guyzance's dungeons first."

"I don't want to do that." I sniff. "Last time I released a Barghest, he bit me."

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Warden shrugs. “Get used to it. I have.” He turns and trots down the path into the river valley.

I suspect, other than the tiniest shred of dignity remaining in me, there is nothing left to lose in doing as Warden suggests. But I have everything to gain if there’s even a hint of a possibility the wild plan might help me get Alice back and lift the curse.

Getting her back in my arms is my only aim, the only mission, the only end point in all of this. The Faerie thought they could take my life. They were wrong. If they think they can take my mate, then I have to bring the battle to their door.

And it appears I need a monstrous army to do it.

ALICE

Time is like molasses here. It does what it wants. The sun rises and sets to no rhythm at all, making the view outside look like a CCTV picture, flickering with life but far removed from what living actually is.

Although I suppose the Faerie live down there somewhere. Sound doesn’t carry, and there is a vague cheesy smell which wafts in occasionally. Yes, the Faerie smell of cheese. It would be funny if I hadn’t found out they were the ones who caused the mass deaths of humans beyond the veil in order to ensure our everlasting loyalty.

As if loyalty means anything to a Faerie. From what little I’ve witnessed in the queen’s court, it’s kill or be killed.

I put my hand on my stomach. It feels more rounded than it did when I arrived. It's certainly the case I've not had a period since the first one when I arrived in the Yeavinger. Although I know stress can also stop periods too, but even if I am stressed, this seems unlikely.

There are no mirrors in my room, so it's not possible to look at myself. All I have to go on is how I feel, coupled with nausea which rolls through my stomach whenever it feels like it, there is a distinct chance both Fenrother and the queen have made the correct assumption.

I am pregnant.

I flop onto the bed. The chain which binds me allows a truncated semi-circle of movement from one side of the room to the other and stretches long enough to allow me to use the toilet.

I get to bathe once a day. A bath appears in the centre of the room filled with lukewarm water. The Faerie might smell of old gorgonzola, but it seems they don't want a stinking human in their midst.

I stare at the ceiling, one which is covered in a mural of flowers, which open and close magically depending on whether it's light or dark outside. It's simple magic, pretty, innocuous, and I can't understand why the Faerie would enchant such a small thing while systematically killing off half the population of the world beyond the veil.

"You like?" a small voice says at the end of the bed.

I raise myself up on my elbows to look at the tiny crystalline creature.

Turns out the Duegar are absolutely beautiful. Far more like a fairy, like the illustrations I've seen in books, than the Faerie themselves. The Duegar are part

translucent, or rather they look like they're made from glass, making it hard to see their features as they move around. They have small, delicate, translucent wings which emit a small chime when they flutter.

Here in the Faerie hills, they are unable to maintain their complete invisibility by order of the queen. Here they are servants, doing everything the Faerie do not want to do or create. As it turns out, the Faerie are inherently lazy. Even if they have magic, they prefer someone else to do things for them.

"The ceiling?" I point upwards. "I can't understand why the Faerie would decorate a cell."

"They did not. We did," the Duegar at the end of my bed says. "You are to birth, are you not?"

My hand goes to my abdomen once again. "From what I'm told, yes."

"We want you to be comfortable in your confinement," she says as two more translucent Duegar appear, one each carrying a platter of food.

"And well fed, apparently." I laugh. "There's no way I can eat all of that. I don't feel great."

The Duegar cocks her head on one side, then looks at one of the others. He puts his platter on the bed and sidles away.

"I am Abbe," she says. "This is Cedric." She jerks her thumb at the Duegar closest to me. "This is Heard."

Heard instantly disappears.



“Thank you for all you’ve done for me. I really appreciate it,” I say, blinking swiftly at the missing Duegar and wondering where the hell he went.

“It’s not like you have much of an option,” Cedric says, his glass-like hand running over the magical chain which links my wrist to the wall.

“True.” I shrug. “Same goes for giving birth here.”

Cedric and Abbe look at each other. “The father is the Wyrn?”

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I nod, because the instant Fenrother is mentioned, a lump forms in my throat which makes talking almost impossible. I'm still incredibly angry at him, but I also miss him with an intensity I can't get my head around.

I think Abbe smiles. "A Wyrms birth is nothing special. You will be fine."

"Fenrother said his mother died giving birth to him."

"That is what he was told," Cedric says. Abbe gives him a savage look, and he grabs the platter he has set down and pushes it up at me. "You need to eat."

There is fresh fruit, some cheese, and several large slices of bread already buttered. I am hungry, but I just don't know if I can trust my stomach.

"I know." I pull the platter closer and eye the fruit, wondering if I can manage the sweetness of a strawberry. I pick up a slice of green apple instead.

The first bite causes me to salivate in a way I know is going to mean trouble. I swallow as quickly as I can and put the remains back down with an apologetic look at Cedric.

Heard pops back into existence, holding a small pitcher and a glass.

"Drink this," Abbe says. "It will help you with your digestion."

Heard pours out a pink liquid into the glass and hands it to me.

I sniff at it. Other than a slight sweet scent, it seems like mostly water.

“I’m not going to start hallucinating or anything, am I?” I ask Heard. He smiles at me.

“He cannot respond,” Abbe says. “The queen took his speech, but the drink will do you good.”

Heard clutches the pitcher to his translucent chest and continues to smile. My stomach does a dance which I’m beginning to recognise. I take a quick sip of the liquid. It tastes like water only better, and as I take a larger mouthful, the squirming in my guts subsides.

I think I feel almost human again.

“Thank you,” I whisper, not wanting the tears which spring into my eyes unbidden.

“You need your Wyrms,” Abbe says. “We are a poor substitute.”

“It doesn’t matter.” I shake my head. “He is cursed which means I am cursed. Once I give birth, he dies. There can only be one Wyrms.”

Abbe snorts, and I’m jolted by her dismissal. “Who told you this?” she says, rolling her eyes.

“He did. It’s what he’s been told. The queen said the same.”

Cedric chuckles. Even Heard seems to be swaying with silent laughter.

“There is no such curse,” Abbe says. “We would know. The Duegar are the keepers of the curses, for all we are tasked with here in the Yeavinger. The Wyrms are an

enchanted creature, not a cursed one.”

“He won’t die?” My heart beats like it has been freed from my body. “Fenrother will live?”

The joy which flows through me is tempered by my situation.

I need to tell him. He needs to know he doesn’t have to swear fealty to the queen. My great Wyrn needs to know he is free.

FENROTHER

Moranik rises above us from the river valley below.

“Just how are you thinking of breaking the Barghest out?” I yawn, thinking about my Alice and how I could be ripping my way into the Faerie hills right now rather than messing around with Warden and a Barghest.

These particular monsters give everyone the creeps. As their presence in a village or a town usually signals death, they are mostly outcasts. Who knows why Guyzance chose to imprison one. Or this one in particular.

He presumably had his reasons.

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“I have someone on the inside,” Warden says cryptically.

“Inside what?”

“Moranik castle.” Warden glares at me. “This way. There’s a back entrance.”

I follow him around the cliff face which rises into the castle itself. I could get up there in no time, but it seems Warden has other ideas. We reach a small crack in the rock, far too small for either me or Warden. I feel my Wurm form expanding, wanting to get this part over with.

I don’t care much for Lord Guyzance, and making an enemy of him is not going to trouble me at this point.

“Wait, Fenrother!” Warden says, and he walks through the solid rock.

An enchantment of course. Something I detest. The feel of the magic on my scales makes them crawl. All of this seems awfully well planned for a creature as damaged as Warden.

But everything I do brings me closer to Alice, so I push through the veil of the enchantment and find myself in a small cave, made all the smaller by the large hairy withers of Warden.

“What now?” I huff at the scent of horse arse in the confined space.

“We wait for my contact,” Warden says.

“Is it the Bluecap lurking in the corner?” I ask. “Because if it isn’t, I’m just going to kill him.”

“I’d like to see you try, Wurm.” The Bluecap bares his sharp teeth, his large downy wings slicked to his back, his red eyes glowing with hate.

Bluecaps are feral creatures, supposed spirits of the caves and mines meaning they prefer the dark. Their natural calling means most of them are assassins, like this one. I will not turn my back on him, not now, not ever.

“Easy,” I snarl. “I’ll rip your wings off.”

Warden hangs his head and swears under his breath. “This is my contact, Fenrother. I’d appreciate it if you didn’t eat him.” He looks up at the Bluecap. “Linton, this is Fenrother, the...”

“Lambton Wurm, I know.” Linton bristles, a dagger clutched in each hand.

“I’m here to free my mate from Queen Mab. Warden says I need a Barghest to do it.” I sigh, folding my arms. “I do not need a Bluecap.” I stare over at Warden. “I don’t need any of you. I’m going to go get her myself.” I thrash my tail to get him to move out of my way.

“And risk being permanently trapped in the Night Lands?” Warden says. “Because that’s what she’ll do to any of us who threaten her authority, let alone what she might do to your mate.”

Next to him, the assassin shakes his wings, teeth bared and red eyes wild. “I’m with the Wurm,” he says, voice half strangled with violence which is barely repressed. “Let’s kill the queen.”

Warden stamps his foot, sparks flying up as he does. “As much as I’d like to join you bunch of idiots in your suicidal mission, I’d rather get one over the queen and stay alive.”

Linton growls. I join him.

“Or you can both die. I don’t care.” Warden glares at us both.

“I want my mate. I don’t want to go to the Night Lands,” I concede. “But I do want to kill and eat anyone who gets in my way.”

“You’re not going to get an argument from me on that score,” Warden says. “Killing is the only thing which keeps me sane.”

Linton shrugs. “I kill for gold, and I kill for fun,” he says, somewhat unnecessarily.

I still don’t think I need these monsters, but on balance, I’d probably rather have them on my side against the Faerie than roaming the Yeavinging and causing havoc.

Or I could use them as a distraction while I get my mate and take her far from the Faerie hills. The curse, I can deal with later, once I have my Alice in my arms, where she belongs.

“Let’s go get the Barghest,” I grumble.

Linton fades back into the cave, and Warden trots after him. I partially change to my Wyrms form because it makes me feel better, and we wind our way up a number of rough-hewn passages inside the cliff which smell of decay until Linton comes to a halt. There is an iron gate.

“Iron? In a Faerie stronghold?” I query.

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Linton shrugs, pulling at it until it finally bursts open. “Not all in the Yeavinger always belonged to the Faerie,” he says.

As we turn the next corner, the smell hits almost physically.

“What is Guyzance keeping down here?” Warden exclaims, his hooves dancing over the stone flags.

“Death,” a voice growls from the darkness ahead.

“Is that you, Barghest?” Warden asks.

“Like there would be anything else in the dark talking about death,” I grumble, flicking a torch on the wall alight with a flame from my tongue.

The light flickers around the large dungeon with multiple cells. If there are things in them, they’ll stay quiet if they know what’s good for them. Stood next to the bars in the cell nearest to us is a hulking shape with glowing blue eyes.

“You brought a Wyrms and a Bluecap?” it says.

“Reavely, may I present Fenrother and Linton,” Warden replies.

“You know this Barghest?” Linton asks.

“We fought together in the Night Lands.”



“I saved his skin more than once,” the dark shape says. “He owes me.”

“I probably do,” Warden admits. “And did you just produce fire, Fenrother?”

“The Wyrms flames,” Linton says, his eyes huge.

“I do not have fire,” I say, staring at the lit torch.

“I don’t give a shit about the Wyrms. Get me out of here, Warden,” Reavely snarls.

The centaur rears and slams one of his hooves against the lock. The door swings open, and the Barghest swaggers out, his shaggy fur encrusted with dirt.

It would appear the smell is him.

This is it. A feral assassin, a brooding centaur, and a stinking black dog are the monstrous army to take on the Faerie and free my mate.

I think I stood more of a chance alone.

ALICE

Yarain holds out his hand from the doorway, and the chain unclips from the wall, floating into his grip like an obedient dog.

“The queen wishes to see you.”

I don’t reply, instead standing and holding the other end of the chain in my hand to save my wrist. The queen could just raise a finger and have me appear in front of her, but it seems she prefers to have me dragged around in chains.

I'm not going to give her the satisfaction of thinking it bothers me.

Yarain takes a different route from last time, as we don't pass through the guardroom again. Instead we enter a long passage which, after what seems like forever and I'm wishing I'd had a chance to have a wee before we left, a door pops us out into a formal garden.

The sun beats down on the box hedges so beloved of the Faerie. All too bright flowers exude their artificial scent, and re-animated insects flutter brokenly around them.

Ahead of us is a circular fountain, set in the centre of a low maze. The queen, along with a number of other Faerie, male and female, are gathered. They are fawning over her, and she looks bored.

"Ah, the entertainment," she says as Yarain brings me up to them.

I yawn. She needs me. I don't have to play along. Pretty sure she'll get bored really quickly.

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Yarain hands her my chain with a low bow. With a strength her delicate form doesn't appear to have, she jerks it until I stumble forward and land on my knees in front of her.

"Open wide," she says, picking up a blue coloured ball of something from a beautifully laid out platter.

"I already ate," I respond.

"This is not a request," the queen says, her eyes hard. "Eat."

She pushes the coloured ball at my lips, and given what she can do to pull me to my knees, I decide I'd prefer to keep my two front teeth, and I let her put the food in my mouth.

It doesn't taste of much, perhaps a hint of processed strawberry.

"As you can see, the human appreciates nothing about the Yeavinging," Queen Mab says imperiously to her surrounding courtiers.

They titter and clap as if she's performed some impressive act.

"I don't appreciate being kept prisoner either," I say.

Her eyes darken. "Please, help yourselves." She gestures to the platter as she gets to her feet. "I need to deal with my pet."

The Faerie fall on the strange coloured balls like they're some sort of treat as the queen pulls me to one side.

"You'll have no doubt noticed your mate is not coming for you," she says with the nastiest of smiles.

"Who says I want him to come? Not if you're going to enslave him or whatever it is you want to do," I respond.

It doesn't stop my heart squeezing in my chest at the mention of Fenrother. I'd do anything to see him again.

Except he lied to me. He drew me in with his innocence and lack of guile and then, just at the point I fell for him, he pulled everything out from under me.

Everything I thought was the truth. Now I'm living my truth with a queen who will kill me if the whim takes her, and I have nothing to fight back with.

A mere, un-magical, human.

"You"—she swallows, her eyes popping—"mated with him." Her mouth turns down at the corners in disgust. "You let him...touch you. Doesn't that mean something to humans?"

"To humans, yes. To a Wurm, what do you think it means? He acted on instinct. You threatened me. There was nothing more."

I know this is not true, but I still want to protect Fenrother, if I can, even if he didn't tell me the truth. There's no reason everyone should suffer at the hands of the queen.

"He will want you back. His kind cannot stop themselves."

“His kind?”

“Monsters of the Yeavinger,” the queen spits. “Foul creatures we have to share our lands with. Uncontrollable.” Her head swings back to me. “But there is one way of getting what I want. You are to call the Wyrms to me.”

“Call Fenrother? How?” I have the mental image of him in his Wyrms form attempting to text with his huge claws.

The queen sinks viciously clawed fingers into my arm, the sharp points slicing deep into my flesh. Unable to help myself and despite gritting my teeth as she hits bone, there’s nothing I can do to stop the scream which she rips from me.

The noise appears like a cloud. With her free hand, she directs it into a bottle where my scream hovers behind green glass.

“Your call to your mate.” The queen pulls her claws free, and my arm runs with blood. “One he will be unable to resist.”

The bottle disappears with a resounding pop.

“Whatever you think, Fenrother isn’t stupid. He won’t fall for one of your tricks,” I say hoarsely as Queen Mab washes her fingers in a golden bowl which has appeared by her side.

“On the contrary. I don’t intend tricking him. He will be unable to stop himself once his instinct kicks in. Then I will have you, him, and the Wyrms which grow within you. I will have control and I will have order,” she snarls.

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“I doubt it. When he comes, Fenrother will rain down violence like you have never seen.”

Because it occurs to me, the tapestry in the great hall of Fenrother’s castle, the one I thought showed Wyrms killing and eating humans...all of the figures within it had rather long, pointed ears...

### FENROTHER

The Faerie hills rise up ahead of us. I’d still rather be on my own, but I know I cannot get through the enchantments which surround this foul place.

I’ve never wanted to before, but the queen has my Alice, and getting to her consumes me. I don’t care about the others, but I must have my mate.

“Fuck the Faerie,” Reavely growls as we pass the last marker on the road warning us where we are entering. He scratches his hairy stomach.

“No thanks,” Warden says. “I’d rather mate with a rock.”

“I still can’t believe the Wurm is mated.” Reavely eyes me. “He’s a Wurm. All he knows about is fighting and eating.”

The three of them start an argument about why they are here and what they are doing helping me.

I ignore them, instead concentrating my attention on the demarcation line between the

Yeavinger and the hills. The scorched earth stretches for around six feet wide into the Faerie lands, and this is the place where you die, or at the very least, turn into a creature which will then be enslaved to the Faerie.

I don't want to think about the Night Lands. All my attention is on my mate. She is in the hills. I can feel it in my bones.

I can scent her on the air. I can scent...blood...I can hear...a scream...

"We have to go," I growl. "Whatever it is we're supposed to do to get through the enchantments, we need to do it, now. My mate is in trouble."

Warden looks at the other two. Reavely shakes his shaggy fur insolently. "So?" he demands.

"We have to go together. The enchantments cannot withstand all our earth forms at a single point." Warden sighs.

"How do you know this? I don't want to end up as charcoal," Reavely snarls.

"Meg told me."

"It seems Meg likes to meddle almost as much as she prefers not to participate," Linton grumbles.

"And involve us all in the Wurm's business," Reavely adds. "What is in it for me?"

"Death or glory." Warden glares at him. "The usual."

"I did enough of that for the Faerie," he growls. "Why would I do it for the Wurm?"

“Because if we don’t do it for each other, then we are as the Faerie,” I respond, not taking my eyes from the far point beyond the enchantment. “And we are not like them. We are better.”

I hear Linton and Reavely grumble something.

“And because the Faerie have done us all a disservice at one time, and this is your chance to even the score,” I add.

“I can get behind that,” Reavely rasps after a short pause. “Anything to spill Faerie guts.”

“Death is my business as much as it is his,” Linton says, jerking his thumb at the black dog of death. “I put flames out, so don’t forget it, Wyrn.”

“The Faerie left me to rot in the Night Lands. I want my revenge.” Warden shrugs.

I take a step forward, and beside me, the centaur, the Bluecap, and the Barghest line up. The next step we take is as one. Magic sizzles the air, raising my scales and raking over my wings. The next step increases the temperature to the point of pain.

Linton and Reavely grunt as we push forward, their faces set into grim lines as we push on. The demarcation line on the other side doesn’t seem to be getting any closer, but the pain and the heat are increasing.

I’m beginning to think Meg was wrong. Warden and I have our heads bowed, and Linton and Reavely are mere streaks of darkness. I take the next step and the next, the need to find Alice driving me, the scent of her blood mingling with my own as the edge of the enchantment seems further away than ever.



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I will not be kept from her. Curse or not, Alice is mine. I swore to protect her, and I will. She carries my young, and we will raise the Wyrmling together. Curses can be broken, and I won't stop until I find someone in the Yeavinger who can assist us.

With a roar, I push forward, and as if it were never there, the enchantment breaks. We topple out onto the grass, breathing ragged and with the scent of singed dog hair all around us.

"I am not doing that again, for you or for anyone," Reavely snarls.

"I think you smell better because of it." Warden pushes back up onto his hooves.

"Fuck you." Reavely rolls onto his back and stares up at the sky.

"We can't hang around." Linton scans the horizon. "They will know we are here."

Out of all of us, he seems the least affected by the enchantment. I dealt little with the Bluecaps when I was in the Night Lands, but there was an understanding they were almost as indestructible as me.

"Good," I respond. "Let them come for me. I'm in the mood to destroy Faerie."

I stride out ahead, my Wurm form overtaking me. Here in the hills with the scent of my mate's blood filling my senses, I am a mere vessel.

A streak of violence for her alone. No one hurts my mate. No one touches her but me.

Over our heads, a scream rings out, hollow and filled with pain. I charge ahead until something grabs hold of my tail.

“Fenrother, wait!”

“There is no wait,” I snarl, pulling myself free. “I have Faerie to kill for touching my mate.”

“It’s a trap!” Linton calls out.

“No,” I respond. “It is not. It is a killing ground. And I’m doing the killing.”

ALICE

The queen leaves me tied up in the garden, sweeping away with her courtiers without a backward glance. There’s no sign of Yarain, so it looks like I’m here for the foreseeable future.

I find my chain reaches far enough I can get to the fountain, and I’m able to wash my arm clean. Dark shapes dart out from the fountain to where my blood leaks into the water, making my shudder and withdraw my arm.

Faerie hills want to look benign, pretty even, but under the surface, there is an undercurrent of evil. Unlike the wild moors around Fenrother’s castle, I know there is nothing here I can trust.

I slide off the side of the fountain and onto the ground. My arm is still running with blood, and it drips onto the gravel and hisses.

My bloodhisses? I look closer, unable to work out what is happening.

“You are human,” a voice whispers. I look up to see Abbe peeking around from the other side of the fountain. “Your blood contains iron, something they cannot stand.”

“I thought the Faerie mated with humans?” I lean back against the cold granite of the fountain, suddenly more tired than I’ve been in my entire life.

“When the urge takes them. They might want to think they are better than all other creatures, but they have their base desires like any living thing,” Abbe says. “Their sophistication comes at a cost. Their glamour is exactly that, a shield hiding their true nature. Mating with a human causes them to lose some of their power, which is why their halflings, the witches and warlocks, have theirs.”

“So, mating with humans weakens them?” My mind is whirling with this new information.

“But creating a new life strengthens them.” Abbe sighs. “It is the way the world and the Yeavinger turn.”

“I get that.” I close my eyes briefly, opening them to stare at an increasingly stormy sky. “I just wish humans had understood it too, before letting the Faerie into our world without question.”

“Survival is the driver for all life. Do not blame your fellow humans for wanting to live,” Abbe says as several large raindrops hit my dress and arms. “I have to go.”

“Wait...release me, please? It’s starting to rain.”

“I cannot.” She looks upwards. “The magic is too strong for me alone, and besides, your Wyrn is coming.”

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“Fenrother is coming?” I ask, my voice cracking.

But Abbe has gone. I am, apparently, alone once again in the rapidly darkening garden. The flowers look like the colour is slowly being drained from them, turning them to black ash. I get to my feet, gripping the side of the fountain for assistance. The water within has completely disappeared, leaving only a layer of dark green slime. I back away from it, knowing there were things there earlier which I don't want to discover more about.

The chain tinkles merrily on the gravel, as if the damn thing is sentient and enjoying its work. I go to where it is buried in the ground and heave on it. There's no real surprise when it doesn't budge.

“Trying to escape?” Yrain towers over me.

“Trying to get out of the rain.” I glare at him, my hair now plastered to my head and my clothes sopping wet.

He goes to grab me but takes hold of my injured arm. I hiss in pain, and he cries out, stumbling back, staring at his hand. It steams in the rain, as if burnt.

Drops of fresh blood drop onto the chain. It too steams.

Of course, it is enchanted with Faerie magic. I seize my advantage, swiping my hand down my arm and covering it with the red stuff, I curl my fingers around the chain and pull again.

This time it gives, snapping at the point I touch it, setting me free.

I wipe at my arm again, covering both hands with blood and holding them up to Yarain, before wiping one hand down my face and the other down my uninjured arm.

He stumbles back, fear in his eyes.

“Now I’m escaping,” I say before taking off at a run out of the formal garden, through the now monochrome archway, and out into a grey field beyond.

If Yarain is following, I don’t look back. Instead, I hitch up the dress and skirts as best as I can and run as if Fenrother is chasing me.

At any time, I expect to be jerked to a halt or have some sort of spell put on me which means I am unable to move, but it doesn’t happen. Instead, as I cross the field heading towards a collection of Faerie dwellings, I hear behind me what can only be described as a series of explosions.

Are explosions even a thing in the Yeavinging?

My breath ragged, I turn to look, knowing it could mean I give away any advantage I might have. The sight which greets me is absolutely not what I was expecting at all.

It looks like hell has come to the Faerie hills.

The queen’s castle burns with a purple and blue flame. Here and there, reds and yellows flicker but it’s nothing compared to the main event. How is this even possible? A castle made of magic shouldn’t be able to burn at all.

Unless there is other magic at work.

Pain grips my left side, robbing what remains of my breath from my body and causing me to drop to my knees. I clutch at my injured arm, but the crushing pain in my chest isn't related to my injured arm. It has to be something else, most likely related to the Faerie and their attempts to break me.

I'm not going to give them the satisfaction. I force myself to my feet and stumble towards the dwellings. They should contain Duegar and if I have any luck left at all, they will hopefully be sympathetic towards me like Abbe and the ones who inhabited the palace.

I really, really hope they got out before it set on fire.

My chest cramps, my entire body feeling like it's folding in on itself as an incredible pain sears through me. Whatever Mab did, I think I'm done for.

As my vision dims, I think I see a shadow in the sky, silhouetted against the flames.

Could it be...

"Fenrother?" I can only whisper his name as the darkness claims me.

FENROTHER

Flames burst from my lungs like they should have always been part of me. The magical fire spreads perfectly over the queen's palace. It catches easily, flames purple, blue, and green, almost as if they've been waiting for me all this time.

I left Warden and the others at the gate, dealing with the Redcaps, the bloodthirsty creatures welcoming the fight, although how the Redcaps felt about it is anyone's guess. All three, the Brag, the Bluecap and the Barghest, are battle hardened in the pits of the Night Lands.

No sensible soldier would want to go up against them.

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I hear a dull roar somewhere behind me and guess the Barghest has taken the advantage. He will kill without compunction, like I once did, until the killing got old.

And I needed solitude.

Mab will never understand why, only that I disobeyed her. My punishment, now so obvious as to be glaring, was to give me something I needed with all my heart and soul.

Then take her away. Take my life away from me. Take everything.

The Faerie have no mercy. I knew this, but I didn't challenge it.

I should have.

I make a third pass over the palace, desperate for any sign of my mate. Her scream still rings in my ears. Faerie attempt to fling their spells up at me, but my hide is thick enough to deflect most of them and my eyes attuned enough to avoid the rest.

"Give me my mate!" I snarl down at those fleeing the burning palace. "Mab! Come out and face me!"

I can scent my mate, but she isn't in the flames. However, the burning makes it difficult to determine where she might be.

I send another searing bolt down into the main hall and revel in watching how it disintegrates.



Mab thought she could control me.

She was wrong. I am nothing without my mate. I am everything with her, and I will stop at nothing to find her.

The prophecy has finally come to fruition. Alice has ensured I am the Wyrms I should be and not the creature who couldn't face what he really was.

I am going to be the best mate Alice could wish for. I am going to make sure our young is comfortable and cared for, curse or no. I will be there for her, even if it turns out to be true, and I will never, ever stop searching for a way to break it.

Although, it is Mab who has the power, and she is the one I need.

I'm sure I hear a voice carried on the wind as the flames crackle beneath me. I turn, lifting up over the burning building as the fire creeps over the formal gardens, turning them to ash.

In the air, above an empty space beyond, I see Mab.

Below her, I see a figure I will always, always recognise.

My sweet mate. My Alice. My heart.

She glares into the sky. I'm not sure if she sees Mab, given the amount of smoke, but there is so much defiance in her little body.

I know she is mine.

I am the luckiest Wyrms alive.

Mab turns slowly in the air, her garments flowing unnaturally within her magic sphere. Her eyes are white with rage.

“Wyrn.” The word reverberates around my head, as if she’s inside me. “You will give yourself to me, or your mate dies.”

“You cannot kill her.” I push the thoughts back as hard as I can. “Not while I have breath left to burn.”

The laughter is the worst. Mab tilts, looking down at Alice, and a spike of energy hits my beautiful mate.

It fountains from her, the scent of her blood filling my senses.

Alice crumples to the ground.

There’s a roar which seemingly shakes the entire Faerie hills as I descend, a roar it takes me a while to determine is coming from me. I flame at Mab, not caring whether I hit her or not because I have to get to Alice.

She cannot die. I won’t let her. Fate can’t let her.

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Unless this is what fate is.

I reach her lifeless body after what seems like forever. Her skin has a blue tinge to it, and the blood which covers her arm has a scent I want to recoil from.

“Alice?”

She doesn't respond to me.

All this time away from her and all I wanted was my mate back in my arms. It was what my body was telling me. It was what my flame was made for.

And I was too late.

I gather her against me, trying to get my warmth into her body.

“Alice, my mate.” I push my face into her hair, desperate to have her stir, to say something, anything, even if it's to tell me to leave and never return.

I need her alive. My soul can rest as long as she walks the Yeavinging or beyond the veil.

Without her life, mine may as well be over.

Rain tumbles from the sky, wetting the skin on my face, only it's not rain.

It is tears.

ALICE

Something drags me back from the brink, pain every step of the way, other than the soft, wet warmth which soothes it all away.

A warmth which is familiar, a scent which is one my heart has missed terribly.

A body I have to come back to. With all the effort I can muster, I fill my lungs and open my eyes.

Fenrother holds me in his arms, his eyes, those incredible eyes studying every aspect of my face.

“Alice.” His voice is anguish personified. “You are...here.”

And I realise what he thought he had found.

He thought I was dead.

My emotions churn, heating me from within. He came for me. He came for me, and he thought the queen killed me. The water is not rain but from him.

From my big bad monster.

“You should have told me about the curse,” I force out.

Fenrother blinks. He dips his head, wings shivering and tail lashing.

“I should have.” He glares at my midriff as if it’s done him a wrong. “I should have told you everything the moment I knew you were my mate, but I didn’t know how.” He lifts his head, and I’m lost in his handsome face. “It’s not an excuse. You

deserved better, given how you ended up in the Yeavinger, and I should have been a better Wyrn for you.”

“Fenrother.” I want to reach for his face, to touch him, to connect with him, my heart aching because it’s filled with conflict “I understand you didn’t know what to say, but I would never want to do anything which would end up hurting anyone, especially you.”

The pain which floored me, the pain which speared through my being, making me lose consciousness, making me fall to the ground—the pain is gone.

Fenrother is all there is.

“It’s not you didn’t tell me about the curse, but that it would mean I’d lose you, and I don’t want to lose you. That’s what hurt me the most.”

I cradle my damaged arm. Fenrother dips his head again and laps over my wounds with his forked tongue.

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“I never meant to hurt you, my Alice. My dying is nothing compared to my living without you.”

“Then we’re going to have to stop all the dying, Fenrother.” I gaze at his strong jaw, the muscle ticking there as he attempts to contain himself. “We’re going to have to live.”

“I can’t be without you, Alice. You are the scales, the wings, the sky, and the heather. You are the soft breeze which blows across the moors, the hunt, the sleep, the filled belly. You make my world whole and my heart light.” His lips graze mine. “I love you, my little mate. I will love you to the end of time and beyond.” He nuzzles into my hair. “I will always love you.”

“Wyrml!” A screech rends the air.

Fenrother takes in a long breath, his chest swelling. He lets it out slowly, as if deliberating.

“Leave this to me,” he says, releasing my body which instantly feels the loss of my big Wyrml.

His chest is streaked with my blood as he changes to his Wyrml form. I peek between his legs to see the queen hovering in the air a short distance away.

“What do you want?” Fenrother asks, his voice devilishly low.

“How dare you come to my palace and use your flame. Where did you even get it

anyway? I control flame in the Yeavinging.”

“Not anymore,” Fenrother replies. “The prophecy of the Lambton Wurm has been fulfilled. It started the moment you gave me my mate.”

Queen Mab screams. I clamp my hands over my ears at the demonic shriek.

“There is no prophecy, stupid Wurm,” she snarls. “There is no curse.”

“No curse?” Fenrother says evenly.

“I removed it many years ago. My mother was a banshee who should have never had magic. You don’t curse a monster like you. You control it. And I want to control everything in the Yeavinging,” she snarls.

Fenrother beats down with his great wings and lifts off the ground, matching her height. Fear grips at my lungs, my heart jumping into my mouth. He may have burnt the palace, but taking on Mab is another matter entirely.

“You cannot control me,” he growls, and it reverberates through the air. “My mate, my young, and I belong to no one but the Yeavinging, and you are not the Yeavinging.”

Lightning spikes all around us, slamming into the ground and making me leap away. The ionised air crackles, but Fenrother seems uninterested.

His eyes are fixed on Mab.

She throws back her head and laughs, a horrible cackle which sears through my brain. Lightning dances in the sky before it slams into her, her body shaking as it flows through, blackening her white dress. Just when I think it might have killed her, or at least slowed her down, her eyes open, blank white orbs which glow, and she directs

the energy directly at Fenrother.

He moves easily to avoid it, but one spike hits him in the chest. I run forward, but to my amazement, it bounces right back at Mab, striking her and sending her off balance, spiralling to the ground.

“Wyrml!” Her voice is high-pitched, piercing, but the strength has gone. “What have you done?”

“I am not to be controlled by you, Mab,” Fenrother growls. “Nor is my mate. You will leave us be, now and for eternity.”

His huge head pushes down over her body, the vast jaws pressing against her, before he snorts, sending her hair flying backwards.

“You would kill me, Wyrml?” she says, all the confidence gone from her body and voice. “You would eat me?”

“I would not. It serves no purpose, and I wish you to remain as a warning to any others who believe they can bend me to their will. I belong to my mate. She alone controls the Lambton Wyrml. She alone will stop anyone who attempts to take me.”

He rears up, displaying the patch of my blood on his chest. Mab gasps, looking down at herself, a red stain on her clothing which fizzes and smokes.

With a hollow scream, she pops out of existence.

In an instant, he has resumed his other form. Fenrother turns on his heel and walks back to me, his hands around my upper arms as he gazes into my eyes.

“I would move the Yeavinger for you, little mate. Down fells, stop streams, prevent



the heather from blooming, but while there is breath in my body, I will protect you and our young.”

He plucks at a silver piece of fabric protruding from his pocket, and it unravels into a scarf. Gently taking my arm, he winds it around the wounds, and I feel an instant relief, as if a door somewhere has closed and the draught chilling my body has been cut off.

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“She hasn’t...she didn’t...die, did she?”

“It takes more than a Wyrn growling at her to kill Queen Mab,” Fenrother rasps. He takes my chin between finger and thumb even more gently than he bound my arm. “And it would take more power than the Yeavinger has to take you from me. You are mine, Alice, until the stars go out.”

ALICE

When Fenrother kisses me, it’s like he’s never been gone. I know I am in the one place I should be, with him, in the Yeavinger.

In his arms, with his lips, he chases away all the Faerie, all their hills and palaces, and it becomes us, only us, against the worlds.

Fenrother will keep me, he will protect me, and he will tell me the truth. My heart beats hard within my chest, a chest swollen with love for my monster, who, as it turns out, is the least monstrous thing in the Yeavinger after all.

As Fenrother releases me, there is the sound of beating hooves. I stare up at him, and he shrugs sheepishly.

“I needed some help getting into the Faerie hills,” he says.

Warden stands grim faced, arms folded, his chestnut flanks streaked with what looks like bodily fluids and his chest covered in soot.

Next to him is a towering, red-eyed creature with what looks like a long mottled cloak hanging all the way to the ground, and a glowering werewolf, all shaggy fur and terrifying jaws, dripping with blood.

“They helped you?” I say, my voice suddenly very small in the presence of all these monsters.

“Warden, you know.” Fenrother rubs the back of his neck. “The Bluecap is Linton, and the Barghest is Reavely.”

“Plenty of death here,” Reavely growls.

“Barghest?” I press myself against Fenrother. “The black dog...”

“Wherever I go, there is death, little human.” Reavely gives me a deep bow. “Here too. Many Faerie have met their end as it was their time.”

“I thought the Faerie were virtually indestructible.” I turn my gaze back to Fenrother.

“Not where a Barghest is concerned,” he says. “Which is why Lord Guyzance had him chained up.”

Reavely shrugs. “And probably will again, if I don’t make myself scarce. I’d like to say it’s been good, Fenrother, but”—he gazes at the flaming palace—“I’ve never liked fire much.”

He melts away into the shadows. And I notice Linton is gone too.

Warden gives us both a searching look. “Your mate is unharmed?” he asks.

“She will be well,” Fenrother responds. “And she is with me, so no further harm will

come to her or my young.”

“Treasure her,” Warden says. “Because mates should always be treasured.”

His head swings to one side, as if he’s heard something. But with the flames roaring, and with one ear pressed hard against Fenrother’s chest so I can hear his heart, any other noises are lost to me.

However, I do give Fenrother’s hand a squeeze.

“Thank you, Warden,” I say. “For all your help.”

Fenrother’s eyebrows knit. I squeeze a little harder. The eyebrows unknot slightly.

“Thank...you,” he says.

But Warden has already gone. I catch a flash of his hooves as he trots away.

“Time to leave,” Fenrother says, lifting me into his arms. He doesn’t bother to change his form, wings beating down easily as he rises up over the flaming buildings until we burst through the clouds into the sunshine.

It’s as if I’ve been living in darkness and Fenrother is the light. I snuggle against him and close my eyes as the warmth of both his body and the sunshine warm my bones. If I thought sleep was impossible after everything, I was wrong.

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I wake in our bed. Fenrother is sprawled on his back next to me, still clothed, and he snores quietly. I suspect he's been watching over me and will insist he's been awake all this time when he finally snorts himself into consciousness. I brush a kiss over his cheek because he is the absolute cutest when he sleeps, and one side of his mouth quirks into a soft smile.

But he doesn't wake.

I slip off the bed and remove my dress, pulling on a comfortable, warm nightgown instead and wrapping myself in a large fur. The castle's Duegar have left a pot of hot coffee and some fresh baked goods on a tray in the window.

I hadn't realised how much I'd missed this place as I sit and sip my drink. Not just Fenrother, but the castle too.

A place I can call home.

As long as it's what he wants.

My stomach rumbles and I rub at it. There is most definitely a bump, which admittedly I wasn't expecting so early, but as I got little to eat in Queen Mab's less than tender care, despite the best attentions of the Duegar, it can only be due to one thing.

I am pregnant.

I'm going to have Fenrother's child.

I'm going to have our child.

"Mate," Fenrother rumbles, sliding in to the window seat next to me, his hair mussed and eyes half lidded with sleep. "What are you doing out of bed?" His voice is like sin spread like hot butter, decadent and warm.

"Breakfast," I say, holding up the cup of coffee.

He smells amazing, like cereal and spice, whereas I have to smell like Warden's withers. He takes the cup from my hands and downs it in one.

"In my bed, under me, is the only place I expect you to be for the next one hundred years," he growls, wiping the back of his hand over his mouth as he puts the mug down.

"A hundred years?" I raise my eyebrows, struggling to contain my smile. "Why only a hundred?"

"Forever then."

"And when are we going to eat?" I tease.

"I will feed you," Fenrother growls.

"And when are we going to bathe?"

"I will bathe you." His eyes flare with all their holographic beauty. "I will fill you with my pizzle, and then I will clean you out. Thoroughly."

"Thoroughly?" I squeak, heat rushing to my core.

“Thoroughly,” Fenrother says emphatically.

With a single claw, he reaches out and slits my nightshirt from the collar to the hem.

“Hey, I liked that!” I grumble.

“The wardrobe will make you more,” he rasps. “I want to see you.”

He peels back the destroyed nightgown, and his eyes rake over my body, landing on my rounded stomach. The strangled noise he makes in the back of his throat is only made better by his cock bursting from his pants. Fenrother groans, fisting himself, eyes remaining steadfastly locked on my stomach.

“Ripe,” he forces past his fangs. “Ripe with my young.”

## FENROTHER

My senses are fit to burst with all the delights my mate has to offer. Her belly might be filled, but my instinct is to mate her and mate her often. This little mate needs constant attention, and she will get it without any question, fear, or favour.

I’m going to enjoy every single second. In fact, I might decide not to let her leave the bed at all while she grows our young. That way I get to taste her and mate her constantly.

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I probably should check she would like that first. But for now, I'm going to unwrap my parcel and deal with her as I see fit.

The remnants of her garment are quickly spirited away to the floor, and I dispose of the tray between us with a snap of my fingers.

Parting her thighs, I revel in the way her stomach hangs over her entrance just a little more. It means I can cup her with a hand as I use the other to play with her folds and delicious little nub which causes her to moan my name.

As I drop my head between her thighs, she grasps my horns. My pizzle has already freed itself from the confines of my trousers and is steadily dripping everywhere. The touch of her hands on my horns releases an impressive flood I'm quite proud of.

But I have other jobs I must attend to. Her slit has not been licked recently, and it requires my attention. I pull her hips towards me as I set to work, my tongue delving in, revelling in her new taste, the one which tells my soul she carries my child.

I could eat her forever, but the noises she makes mean I'm going to have to sheath my pizzle within her soft heat.

"Fenrother." She whispers my name, steering my head with my horns to make me lick lower.

My tail is already curled around, wanting to get involved. I let it circle through her soaking slit and then press gently at her sweet pucker. Alice gasps as it slides into her. I lap further at her delicious nub, my hand spanning her stomach and my chest



groaning with the delight of being covered in her slick.

In no time at all, her body convulses around my tail, her slit soaking me, even though I attempt to suck up as much as I can, my tongue doing its very best to capture all her essence.

She whimpers my name. Letting go of one horn, she uses the other one to pull my head up.

“Fenrother, I need you, right now,” she demands.

“You are giving me an order?” I growl.

Her colour deepens, and one hand strays to her slit, and she slides in a digit.

“If you don’t, I will.” Alice’s eyes glitter with temptation, with wanton need, and with a challenge I am not going to refuse.

A low roar escapes my throat as I pull her to her feet, spinning her to face the wall as I slide deep within her body. She takes me beautifully, a guttural groan as I press her chest to the rough stone with mine and pull her hips to me, making sure I can go into her as far as possible.

It means I can watch my pizzle as it pumps in and out of her, glistening with her moisture. I’m not sure I’ve ever seen anything so beautiful in my life, her tiny body taking my girth and making me want to explode on the spot.

For a second or two, I concentrate my attention on the iron nail sticking from the stonework, holding back as far as I can before withdrawing and driving back into my mate. She shudders beneath my touch.

“Is this how you wanted it, little mate?” I growl, and she grips at my pizzle, her back arching as I’m coated in her slick which runs from her, dropping onto the floor in thick streams.

“Yes.” Her voice is hoarse. “More,” she adds.

I don’t need to be ordered twice. As much as I hate it, I withdraw from her, scooping her up as she whines at my loss and depositing her onto the bed. My tail uncoils further as I drive back into her, now able to watch her gorgeous face as I thrust in and out of her flooded slit. Alice reaches up and cups my cheek with her hand.

“I love you, my sweet Alice,” I say as my climax rises within me. “I love you more than words, more than the sky, more than my tail.”

“I love you too, Fenrother,” she says as she pulses over me.

I cannot hold any longer. Everything is perfection as my entire body is turned inside out, emptying itself into her, giving my mate all I have and more, because I need her like I need to breathe. Her pleasure is my pleasure and her life is my life.

Alice wraps her legs around my waist and holds me close, making sure I don’t leave her body any time soon.

“I missed you,” I say when I can speak again. “I missed your hot slit and your soft body.”

Alice laughs quietly. “Did you miss anything else?”

“I missed your eyes and holding you tight. I missed being in the bath with you. I missed the way you pick up the crumbs from the table and put them in the fire,” I say.

“I missed everything. But I will never miss a single second with you ever again.”

ALICE

The great hall is well lit with a cornucopia of candles. They flicker on every windowsill, in every small alcove, on tables I don't think I've seen before, as well as in huge hanging holders suspended from the beams high above us.

I smooth the long dress over my little bump. There's no denying I'm most definitely filled with Fenrother's baby. I wasn't sure what to expect in the few weeks since he freed me from the queen, but I'm getting large quickly. This Wyrms is going to be a big fella...or girl. I have to have my hopes after all, even if Fenrother and his texts insist Wyrms can only ever be male.

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Fenrother also very much likes my baby bump. At one point in the last week I thought he might reintroduce the no clothing rule, given how often he wanted to look at me.

His almost wide-eyed innocence, the more time we spend together, is enchanting, frustrating, and cute in equal measure. What he's going to make of the way my body changes in the next nine months.

Next to a glowing fire, Fenrother has donned a pair of clean trousers, his scales sparkling from an earlier bath which he insisted I shared (I wasn't complaining). He looks absolutely magnificent stood next to his throne-chair, the one he prefers I sit in, as he stares into the fire. His tail curls around the legs of the chair, and his wings flex, something I know he does subconsciously when he's thinking.

Not always deep thoughts though. I asked him last week what he was thinking about, and apparently he was contemplating whether or not he could fit through the drainage system under the castle...in his Wyrn form.

I haven't asked since.

The Duegar rush past me, carrying multiple platters of food to the table. Abbe and her mates followed us back to the castle, much to my relief, given the inferno Fenrother left behind, and now all of the Duegar are always visible. It's nice. The castle feels less empty, even though it wasn't empty before. It's filled with life and light.

It feels like home.

He turns at the sound of the Duegar scuttling through the hall and sees me. The way his face lights up is something I'm never going to get used to. It brings tears to my hormonal eyes because it's as if he's seeing me for the first time, every time. His wonky smile, the way his posture changes, his shoulders dropping, his tail lashing, and his wings slowly flexing.

His hips swing as he walks towards me, reminding me, as if I need a reminder, of how damn sexy my great Wyrn is. Abs ripple as he gets closer, muscles in his bare arms bulging before he wraps them around me, burying his head in my hair and murmuring my name.

Being in his embrace is entirely something else. The scent of him, of fresh scales and something uniquely Fenrother which is a hint of sky and a hint of heather, I inhale, pulling him into my lungs, filling my senses with him.

Love is everything.

"The Duegar are insisting on a feast tonight," he says into my head.

"Are they celebrating?"

"No, we are."

I lean away from him so I can study his face. It's not the easiest of things to do when you are as pregnant as I am and as massive as Fenrother is.

"We are?"

"Every day is a celebration when I have you," Fenrother says with a smile. "But the Duegar say today is the day I was birthed."

“It’s your birthday?” I gasp. “Why didn’t you say anything? I should have got you a present!”

“A gift.” Fenrother furrows his brow. “Why?”

“Have you ever had a birthday?” I query. “Celebrated one, I mean?”

Fenrother shakes his head. “I had forgotten until the Duegar reminded me.”

“It’s normal, at least among humans, to give gifts to people having a birthday.” I answer his question. “So, if I’d known, I would have got you a gift.”

A smile steals over Fenrother’s face, one which is relatively new, one which only really appeared after we returned to the castle following the battle with the queen.

I lean back a bit more in order to take a good look at him.

Sure enough, there’s something sticking out of his trouser pocket. Something red and lacy. Something I recognise from yesterday.

“Are those my...?”

“Yes.”

“Did you steal...?”

“Yes.”

“Will you give them...?”

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“No.” The very, very bad smile spreads further over Fenrother’s face.

He has no intention of returning my knickers, in this case, a big lacy maternity pair the wardrobe has been producing recently. Comfortable and pretty, they’re also clearly a magnet for my Wurm. I am partially released as he fondles the fabric and his eyes go distant.

Fenrother remains my shadow in the castle unless he’s out hunting. However I know he has somewhere in our home where he keeps all my knickers, and I’ve yet to find it. Fenrother is absolutely looking forward to the day I do, even encouraging it.

But he won’t tell me where it is.

“The best gift I could have got for the day of my birth is you,” Fenrother says, placing his huge hand over my stomach.

“You’re very sweet,” I say, melting a little under his touch.

“I thought I tasted of salt.” Fenrother grins.

“If you’re going to be like this all night, I will be eating on my own,” I scold him.

It has the entirely opposite effect than I planned. I find myself lifted into the air and snuggled against his chest, despite my squeals of protest and carried to the table.

“I should mate you here and now, feast on you alone,” he growls.

“You did that last night.” I giggle. “And I don’t think the Duegar will ever recover.”

Fenrother growls/snarls/purrs into my neck. He doesn’t care in the slightest. He does what he wants.

And I am finally free.

ALICE

The moth-man, or Bluecap, Linton, lurks in the shadows of the great hall. I won’t lie—he makes me feel incredibly uncomfortable with his red eyes and velvet wings. Moving so silently he seems to be the master of the jumpscare.

As for the shaggy Barghest, he might exude a level of violence I didn’t think possible. He paces, his dark fur seemingly pulling in the light. No wonder people believe he is a harbinger of death as Fenrother has told me.

“What do you mean you haven’t seen the Brag?” Fenrother growls, putting himself between me and the other two.

“Not since the battle at Faerie hills,” Linton says, his voice dark and soft like a dagger in a velvet case. He is truly terrifying.

“I was too...busy.” The Barghest, Reavely, growls, heading towards the fire in the great hall, his claws clacking on the stone surface. “Killing Faerie,” he adds, as if that’s necessary.

Fenrother is as big as he can be without changing into his Wyrms form. I get the impression he’s grateful to these two monsters for their help, but he’d very much rather they were not in our castle.



Reavely snatches a chicken from the spit and consumes it noisily, and possibly messier than Fenrother, which I hadn't thought possible.

"The last I saw of him, he was going back into the flames," Linton says, emerging into the sunlight from the stained glass window. He blinks as if he dislikes it but then slightly opens his wings, as if warming them.

These two, along with Warden, have to be the strangest creatures I've come across yet.

"He went back into the fire?" Fenrother growls.

"He wanted his revenge on the Faerie." Reavely shrugs, wiping grease from his muzzle. "He either got it or he didn't."

Fenrother growls under his breath. For all he said he doesn't have friends, this motley collection of creatures seems to be close enough to him.

Close enough he's let them into the castle and offered them food. Something Reavely is taking full advantage of.

"What about the Shellycoat?" Linton asks.

"What Shellycoat?" Fenrother growls. "Those things are worse trouble than you lot put together. They side with the Faerie most of the time."

"That's because they get their powers from eating them," Reavely says with his mouth full. "Not that I'd trust them any more than I trust a Bluecap." He looks over at Linton. "No offence."

“Offence taken,” Linton growls, his red eyes glowing.

I’ve finally put my finger on what he reminds me of—a vampire, all red glowing eyes, long cloak, and fangs. No wonder the Bluecap scares me, and from what Fenrother has told me, I’ve every right to be scared of the brutal assassins who kill without compunction.

But despite their fearsome appearances, all three monsters are concerned about the disappearance of Warden, the big, burly centaur.

“Um...” I push through from behind Fenrother’s wings. He lets rip with an impressive snarl when Linton and Reavely look at me. “Why don’t you ask Meg? She might know something.”

“Warden can look after himself,” Reavely grumbles, clearly affronted by Fenrother’s attitude. “I’m not going to Meg for anything.”

Neither he nor Linton can take their eyes off me, and I’m beginning to wonder if any of the monsters of the Yeavinging have seen a female other than a witch or a Faerie.

“He managed all that time in the Night Lands,” Linton says. “He even escaped the clutches of the Reivers who would have taken his soul.” He shakes his head. “He was never the same after that.”

Fenrother huffs. “Warden’s burden.”

“What is that?” I ask.

“Warden was the enforcer for a Faerie lord. When he lost his mate, he asked to go to the Night Lands, hoping to die there,” Linton says. “But his curse is he cannot die, for all he wants to, and it’s turned his mind.”

Reavely laughs, a deep, dark sound I’m not sure I want to hear again. Ever.

“Thank you for your hospitality, Wyrn,” he says, stretching out his limbs, “but I have an appointment in Ashwinton to terrify some locals, and I can’t be late.”

I look around for Linton, but the assassin has already gone, or at least I hope he has.

“It’s been a blast...literally, Fenrother.” Reavely looks at his singed tail. “Don’t ask me for help again.”

“Wouldn’t even consider it.” Fenrother bares his teeth. “Keep away from my lands and my mate.”

Reavely shakes his head as he stalks past us. “Can’t believe you’re mated,” he says. “Perhaps there’s hope for us all yet.”

The great hall seems a bigger place now the monsters have vacated, and Fenrother gathers me into his arms.

“Do you think Warden is okay?” I ask him. “He did help you, after all.”

“The chances of Warden being okay are limited. He has a death wish that cannot be fulfilled,” Fenrother says with a hint of sadness in his voice. “But he will have escaped the flames, of that I have no doubt.” He shoves his face into my hair and there’s a suction as he breathes me in. “I can only hope one day, he finally feels contentment as I do. Because I have you, my Alice, and I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else.”

“Same goes for me, Fenrother.” I cuddle a little closer to my big, bad Wyrms. “You make me whole.”

## EPILOGUE

### REAVELY

Itake a piss on the wall of the Wyrms’ fortress. It’ll take him an age to find my marking and it will annoy him, which, given he hadn’t even bothered to roast an ox for our return after the battle with the Faerie for his mate, he deserves.

What a strange creature his mate was too. Fur only on her head. Fenrother wouldn’t have tolerated me looking elsewhere on her body, but I didn’t see any on her limbs or face.

I’m not sure what to make of his furless female, but then mating is the Wyrms’ choice. I don’t get a mate.

I am a Barghest, the black dog of death, the harbinger. The creature no one wants to see and will do anything to avoid.

It’s great. I get to terrify whomsoever I come into contact with, I usually get fed and no one can say anything if I piss on the wall of their castle.

Save for Fenrother, which means I probably should leave, even if I’d like to hang around to find out what he thinks of my mark.

I can imagine there will be flames.

My fur shivers over my body at the thought. I’ve seen enough battles to last a lifetime, and yet when they called, I still came. Because I love the fight.

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The first rain drop hits me directly on my nose. I growl at the sky, but it won't make any difference, so I shift to my wolf form and run between the drops.

I can outpace death after all.

In no time I am a long way from the Wyrms' lands and heading towards my own. It's been a long time since I was there, given the work I have to do, but something is drawing me back.

The Yeaving is not a safe place. Not even for a creature like me, one step ahead of the end of everything, shunned by the world.

The rain stops but I do not, racing on, following the moon, not wanting to stop, not wanting to think about anything but the ground under my paws and the air in my lungs.

The run is all I have when there is nothing left to fight. It forces out all the other thoughts, all the darkness save for what carries me along. My curse. My burden.

The reason I will always be alone.

Which is a good thing, because I never wanted company anyway. Company wants feeding, company wants to pat me. Company doesn't like its hand being bitten off.

Those times I arrive in a village, to lap at the water from the fountain at the market cross, those are the times I am hit with projectiles and sharp things. Shouts of hate ringing in my ears.

It makes no difference. The inevitable will come to visit, whether I stay or not. I hear him, bones rattling, scythe swishing, with every step.

I shake out my fur and carry on running. Running is everything. Fighting is everything. Battle is everything. A shiver of pleasure slides through me at the very thought of the battle against the Faerie.

The creatures who sent me to the Night Lands to deal with the demons. Demons who had no fear. Fear is what I feed on.

I went hungry and I went lean.

I fought until I could shred every last demon I encountered.

And then they feared me.

A shiver wracks my body. I enjoy being feared. I need some fear right now.

Ahead a small village comes into view, lights still twinkling in the windows, smoke still issuing from the chimneys despite the late hour.

The perfect hour for fear.

I snarl out as I stalk down past the first house. A face appears at the window and turns ghostly white. Curtains snap shut, as if it will somehow keep death out.

The fear hangs in the air, delicious, ripe, perfect for my consumption.

Except something is carried in on the wind. I lift my head and scent at it. It is fear, of course, but not fear.

It calls to me.

As I turn on the spot, I see the creature streaking down the hillside, a pack of Redcaps following it and from what I can see, they are nearly on top of it.

This village has had a reprieve. I have another soul I need to bring to the reaper.

“Not this time, Reavely,” something snaps at my heel and pain spikes through my leg. “Lord Guyzance wants a word.”

As I take in the trap biting into my flesh, the creature’s screams rend the air.

The Redcaps have caught it. I snarl out louder, ragging at my injured leg, desperate to get free.

To stop the noise. To stop death getting any closer. To keep this soul for myself.

It means I don’t see the club until it is too late.

And everything goes dark.