



# Act of Command (PSI-Ops/Immortal Ops #4)

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**Category:** Fantasy

**Description:** Captain Corbin Jones heads his own Paranormal Security and Intelligence Agency Special Ops team. He's used to being in command. Used to having to make the tough calls. As a lion-shifter, he's no stranger to fighting his primal instincts. He's had them well in hand for most of his immortally long life—that is, until he catches a scent that sets his body on fire.

The scent of his mate.

Mae wasn't looking for love and certainly didn't want to go on a blind date. When she's stood up and then ends up in the hands of the enemy, she's not sure who to trust. Not even when the very same man she's been fantasizing about is deposited next to her. Fate—and her own supernatural hormones—won't be denied, and she finds she can't control the desire burning through her. The only problem is, her fantasy man, the very man who came to rescue her, is now in the hands of the enemy as well.

**Total Pages (Source):** 19

## Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 2:42 pm*

Mae Bertelot glanced at her best friend Alice and then turned, facing the mirror once more. She smoothed the front of the floor-length, pale yellow dress that had been a birthday present from Alice. She'd worried it might be too much to wear on a dinner date, but Alice had promised it would be perfect. Mae had to admit she loved the dress. It made her feel like a whimsical princess.

Her friend had great taste in clothing. Mae really didn't. She liked to shop the bargain bins at thrift stores. The older and more vintage an article appeared to be, the more she wanted to wear it. She loved dresses and skirts, and her favorite article of clothing—an item Alice would never be caught dead in—was an old sweater she'd found for a few dollars at one of the thrift stores.

Everything Alice wore came with a designer label and price tag. Mae didn't even want to think on what the dress must have cost. For as much as Alice liked the finer things in life, she appreciated gifts from the heart as well. For Alice's birthday, Mae had made her a necklace, each bead hand-sculpted by Mae and painstakingly painted. Alice cherished the gift.

Like Mae, Alice preferred to live on campus. They shared a dorm that had a common living area in the center and then a separate bedroom for each of them. Though of opposite minds when it came to men and clothing, the two meshed well and were best friends, and had been ever since they met their freshman year in a required English course. Mae's love of reading was well known and Alice's hate of it was equally as famous. They'd started as study buddies and by the end of their freshman year they'd agreed to be roommates for the rest of their college life. They were both fifth-year seniors now, so the choice had been a wise one.

Sure, they had their differences, but that only made the friendship stronger. Alice was a much freer spirit when it came to sex and dating than Mae. Dating just wasn't her thing. It was certainly Alice's, as Alice often went on a new date several times a week. She'd been known to take off with a new boyfriend and spend a week skiing or on a beach without letting anyone know what she was doing. Alice's family was used to the behavior and always managed to smooth things over with the university if Alice missed too many days.

Mae's parents didn't share that outlook and would have been greatly disappointed if she pulled anything close to that. Not that she ever would. Her parents were heading out for a three-week vacation to Europe to visit with their overseas friends and spend some romantic time together. Mae knew she'd have limited access to them while they were gone because of some of the locations they'd be staying in and the time zone differences. She didn't mind. It warmed her heart knowing they were still every bit in love as when they'd met long ago. Her parents, like Alice's, were much older than they appeared. Immortal was how it had been explained to her. However, she knew they could and would eventually die. Immortal was just a nice way to say they would live much longer than a human.

Originally from Germany, her parents had fled to the United States before the Second World War and had been living there, hiding among humans ever since. While they did well for themselves, they weren't frivolous with their money, nor had they raised Mae to feel she was entitled to anything. They were sweet and loving parents, and Mae couldn't imagine taking off for a week and not telling them first. Although, she had considered vanishing for a while when her mother had called informing her that Mae would be going on a blind date with a friend of the family.

No friend she'd ever met.

Corbin Jones.

She'd never heard of him, but that didn't mean much. Ellen, her mother, kept her finger on the pulse of society and was a walking book of who's who among the elite. Mae could intermingle with them, but didn't necessarily enjoy spending large amounts of time around them. She understood she was blessed with loving parents, a happy home, and privileges that most weren't afforded, so she didn't look the gift horse in the mouth.

She volunteered monthly, helping to deliver meals to elderly who were homebound, and she took a full course load. For now, that would have to do. Alice came from money as well, and while she had no problems spending it, she and Mae had become so close over their years at university that neither wanted to separate or move off campus. More than that, the women shared something else in common—they weren't human, and both were adopted when they were infants. They had sensed the fact they were more than human within seconds of meeting one another, and from that point forward, they'd been like two peas in a pod.

"Turn around, let me see," directed Alice from her spot on her bed.

Mae still wasn't certain about Alice's choice of clothing for her blind date tonight. "Are you sure I look all right? I should go with the blue skirt and white tank top."

"You should sing to him and it won't matter if you're wearing a paper bag or your pajamas." Alice lay back on her bed and smiled wide, her long red hair falling partially over her shoulder. Tiny freckles dotted her nose and upper cheeks. Mae had always been jealous of them to some degree.

Mae laughed nervously. "I've solemnly sworn off singing."

"Girl, you understand that even when you just hum, you can bend men to your will?" asked Alice. "I want that superpower from the supernatural power lotto."

Mae cringed. Alice was being generous. Mae could hardly bend men to her will. She mostly just broke them. It wasn't a gift she relished. In fact, she hated it. She had nearly no control over it, which meant she had to always remember to avoid singing in any form or fashion. There was no telling what the results would be.

"Remember that time you were singing in the shower here and the sound carried?" asked Alice before grinning wide. "That one guy heard it and I thought he was going to sleep outside our door forever. He just hung out there, like a lost puppy or something. Pathetic."

"He stayed out there a good four days before campus police removed him," said Mae with a sigh. "I didn't mean to do that to him."

"You never do." Alice shrugged. "Sing for Corbin. He'll propose."

Mae laughed. "Or go crazy. That would be my luck, wouldn't it? Most seem to go nuts."

"Good point." Alice stretched her arms above her head. "I need to feed."

Mae glanced at her friend. Alice had a bit of succubus in her and required sexual energy every week. As far as Mae could gather, Alice didn't need actual sex, but that certainly did the trick. They'd learned that Mae's humming could sometimes calm Alice's urges. It was strange the way the supernatural world worked. Neither girl questioned it. They just went with it.

"What are your plans for the night?" Mae asked.

Alice grinned. "Heading over to that frat party. I figure there will be people all over each other. I can get drunk from the energy there. Should fill me up."

Mae surveyed herself in the mirror. “Do I look like a cake topper?”

“You look smoking hot,” said Alice, motioning with her hand for Mae to turn in a full circle. Mae did, and Alice clapped. “Stick with the yellow one. You can pull that color off. A lot of women can’t. Your date is going to love it. I hope he’s hot. Oh, and hung. You need a hot, hung guy to rock your world.”

Smoking hot wasn’t exactly Mae’s goal. Neither was hot and hung. She’d promised her mother to give this guy a chance and to take the date seriously. Her mother had given her limited details on Corbin, only saying that she could feel free to be herself around him, and there would be no need to hide who and what she was.

A supernatural.

That meant Corbin was one as well. Mae had met plenty of men in her life who were, but she’d never been on a date with one before. The idea had always turned her off, until the mention of Corbin, though she wasn’t sure why he was different. She wasn’t exactly thrilled to be forced into a date, but she was curious. A little surprised too since her parents had always been so against her dating. Mae’s ‘condition’, as they all liked to call it, left her vulnerable to problems with the opposite sex. For her mother to push for her to go on a date was a big deal. She’d make the best of it.

She’d promised her mother not to go looking like a throwback hippie, which was the style of clothing Mae preferred. Still, the long, somewhat flowing yellow number that Alice picked out, while similar to Mae’s whimsical dressing, was a touch too revealing for her. The four-inch heels were certainly not her style. Flip-flops and sandals were more to Mae’s liking. That or bare feet.

She pushed her large black-framed glasses up her nose and glanced at her friend. “I look like Belle.” The women shared a love of classic children’s movies that had not died as they got older. Belle had always been Mae’s favorite character as she too had

a love of books.

“You look sexy. Trust me. That outfit will get you laid,” said Alice with a smirk. “And didn’t Belle land a beast? Yummy.”

Mae groaned. There was no point going down the sex talk path again. “I’m perfectly fine hanging onto my virginity a bit longer. I totally respect that you embrace your sexuality and welcome new experiences. I’m just not quite there yet.”

In truth, Mae was downright prudish when it came to sex, at least next to Alice. They joked a great deal about it and even bonded closer because of it. Mae wanted to have sex. She wanted to experience everything, but she lived in fear of somehow damaging the man. In her life, she’d left a fair number of men needing either medical attention, locked away in mental institutions or in prison. Her gift got away from her that much. That and no one had realized what she was doing to men when she sang. It had never affected her adoptive father or any of his friends. No one could figure it out and she’d stopped trying. She tried to stay away from men whenever possible and she didn’t dare sing—even though she had the urge to do so daily.

It was another form of creativity for her. An outlet. A way to let her muse run free and wild. Sadly, the crazy bitch of a muse didn’t have a stopping point.

“You say that now, but wait until you experience a big dick between your legs,” offered Alice as she lay on her back, putting her hands in the air and waving them back and forth. “Hard, hot and heavy. Yum. Now I’m thinking sex is in order tonight. I’ll pick a few frat boys. They’ll do.”

“Or you could go on this date in my place. He’s never seen me. He won’t know you’re not me,” said Mae, ready to take the dress off and force Alice into it. Alice was a few inches shorter than Mae, but other than that they were close in size.

“We wouldn’t be having this debate if you were going out with the guy you’ve been making a sculpture of. That hot dude with the long hair and ripped body. He reminds me of that one guy who was on the giant ad in Times Square.”

“What ad?” asked Mae.

“The underwear one. It was a traffic stopper. Yum. Your sculpture guy could totally be up on a billboard too.”

Mae glanced at her friend. “He’s not real. I made him up. He’s my version of a Greek god.”

Alice tipped her head. “Why is he resting his head on a sleeping lion? Is that a mythology thing too?”

Shrugging, Mae continued to fidget with her dress. “I don’t know. It just felt right to sculpt.”

“Did the muse tell you to make him hung too? He’s very blessed ,” Alice said, putting a lot of emphasis on the word.

Mae had sculpted every detail on the man with painstaking precision. Exactly as her mind pictured him and that had included a rather large cock. She’d sculpted the area as if she’d ever seen a penis that size before. She hadn’t. Proportionally she’d certainly gifted the man. She may have been a virgin, but she’d seen many a man part before. Her major made sure of it. The models that came to pose nude were fit and attractive, but they were nothing more than forms to study to her. They didn’t excite her. The man she saw in her mind, the one she was sculpting for her current class project, excited her. The sculpture wasn’t life-sized as the assignment was creating a nude sculpture that could fit on a pre-sized pedestal for a showing. Mae wasn’t sure she could have handled having a life-sized version of the man. The darn thing already

turned her on enough and it would fit on an end table. More than once, Alice has suggested that when the project was done, they take turns posing next to the erotic form and post the pictures online.

“That is my final project for class. Don’t get any funny ideas. It’s all done. It just needs to be graded.”

Alice feigned indignation, touching her chest, her jaw slack. “I would never.”

Playing innocent didn’t work for Alice in the least. But it did make Mae laugh. “You would. You totally would.”

With a shrug, Alice picked at a fingernail. “You should have made the sculpture bigger. Like sex doll kind of big.”

“Dirty girl,” quipped Mae.

“Thank you.” Alice beamed. “I’m not the only woman who would want a piece of that hottie.”

Mae smiled. She had to admit, the man she’d sculpted hit all her hot buttons too. If he was real he’d be a specimen for sure.

“Wear contacts tonight,” said Alice, sitting up on the bed. She grabbed a small bottle of lotion from the side table and put a dollop in her hand.

Mae shook her head. “If a man doesn’t appreciate a woman in glasses he’s not the man for me.”

Alice rubbed the lotion over her hands and up her arms somewhat. “Mae, you’re killing me here. I’ve told you before, I’ve never met a supernatural who wears

glasses. I think you should talk with my family doctor. He only treats non-humans. Humans are so beneath him. Let him take a look at your eyes.”

With a sigh, she looked to her friend. “Not this again, please. I’ve been to tons of doctors and yes, they were for non-humans too. No one can figure out why I need glasses. I just do.”

“You’re hopeless,” said Alice, rolling onto her side. She grabbed a stick of chewing gum from the bedside table and set about unwrapping it. “Can I do your makeup?”

“I wasn’t planning to wear makeup, and are you sure you’re not ADHD?”

“I’m awesome.” She plopped the stick of gum into her mouth. “Seriously hopeless. How about some lipstick at least? You’d look hot in red. Chicks with dark hair and pale complexions always look super sexy in red. Throw me a bone here. I am the one who helped scrub the dried paint off your face.”

Mae had been caught up in her art again and had lost track of time. When Alice had shown up in the sculpting room, demanding Mae get a move on, Mae had been covered in clay and she wasn’t sure how Alice managed to get it off her. Normally, Mae walked around campus with smears of paint or clay on her at all times. That or charcoal from her drawing sticks. It was par for the course with her major in fine arts. She loved just about every medium available to her and enjoyed getting to explore each and every one.

Alice glanced at her phone, blowing a bubble in the process. She snapped it loudly. “We need to get you over to the Union. Smart having him meet you there, across campus, rather than here. If he’s a total creeper, it puts some distance from him knowing where you live.” She frowned and then a wicked smile fell over her face. “Unless you really are like Belle and you really do get a beast. Shifters and vampires can smell and track about anyone once they catch a scent. Like bloodhounds. So he’ll

be able to track you anywhere on campus, even with a misdirect. Creepy, but they're almost always smoking hot. I guess that means they're worth it. If you can tolerate all the alpha-male bullshit."

Mae paused, wondering for the first time what Corbin was. He wasn't human, or her mother wouldn't have pushed for the date. She'd always warned Mae that dating a human could be bad. Very bad. When Mae was in grade school she'd caused an entire classroom full of boys to go nutty during their Christmas pageant. She'd been singing along with all the other students and it just happened. She got lost in the fun and joy of singing and the next she knew there was an all-out brawl happening on stage. All the boys began fighting with each other, knocking children off the stage. It was horrible.

That was one of many events that had happened before they figured out the problem.

"My mom never mentioned what Corbin is. Just that he's something. I should have asked, shouldn't I?" Unease settled over her once more. "This whole thing is a stupid idea. Who lets their mother fix them up?"

"Sweet girls. Wait, I'm not sweet and I'd totally let your mother hook me up with a hot guy." Alice offered a wide smile. "It's enough you agreed to the date. We'll work out the kinks later. Don't forget your phone tonight. You're always forgetting it."

"Not always," Mae protested, knowing Alice was right. Mae did tend to forget most things—like phones and keys and time. As she said it, she realized she forgot something important. Embarrassed, she went to her top drawer and pulled out a pair of silk, white panties. She slipped them on under the dress and did her best to ignore Alice's cackling.

"You should have gone without any," quipped Alice, still laughing.

“I could never,” said Mae, shocked at the idea of walking around without panties on. “I’m normally not this forgetful. I’m stressing big time about this date.”

Alice shook her head, offering a scolding look. “Phone. Remember it. Text me if you need me. If you get a hinky vibe from him or anything, text. If you’re bored, text. If you decide to do him, take video. I so want to know and see! I’m kinky like that.”

Mae laughed. “Got it. If I do anything, text.”

“You got it, sister! Now, let’s get you over to the Union.”

Mae nodded. It was now or never. She started for the door, and Alice whistled, drawing her attention. When she turned, she found Alice holding her cell phone, smirking. “Off to a great start so far. At least you remembered panties, though I’m guessing this Corbin guy would have preferred you didn’t.”

Mae was almost out of the door when she remembered she’d not put on the lipstick Alice had suggested. “I’m coming. Right behind you!”

She hurried to the bathroom, rifled through her friend’s makeup drawer and found a lipstick she remembered getting with Alice when a popular company had done a tribute line to Marilyn Monroe. Setting her phone on the counter, Mae applied the lipstick and then dabbed most off, unsure how she felt about having something so bright and so red on her lips.

“Mae, come on!” called Alice.

She doubled-checked her hair and dress before walking as quickly as she could in heels back towards the front door. Alice was there, grinning. “See. Told ya you’d look hot in red.”

Mae blushed. “Let’s go.”

Alice held the main door open to the building and Mae exited, the cool evening air making her shiver as she did. She took a few steps and then stopped, butterflies overwhelming her stomach. This was a bad idea. She wasn’t the best in social situations, and she didn’t really know anything about Corbin other than her mother thought they’d be perfect together. Her mother had also thought it was a good idea to try to get Mae to play an organized sport when she was younger only to realize Mae seemed to have two left feet.

“Never mind,” she said, trying to make a break for it and head back into the building.

Alice blocked her path. “Sister, you’re going. If he’s not a creeper and he’s hot, you’re getting laid. The time has come.”

A giggle erupted from Mae at the sight of her friend body-blocking the door. “You’re scary when sex is involved.”

“Trust me, Mae. I have this feeling that this is going to work out for you in the end,” said Alice, stepping forward a small bit, but not enough for Mae to get past her with ease and back into the building. Alice was scrappy for sure.

“Okay, but if he’s a mouth-breather, I’m out,”

“Well, yeah! No one wants to hang on a date with a mouth-breather. Remember that one date I had. The one who couldn’t stop sniffing. I swear he was hooked on cocaine or something.” Alice took Mae’s hand in hers. “I’ll walk you to the Union.”

“You’re only offering to escort me because you know I’ll bolt and bail on tonight,” said Mae, knowing her friend well.

“Hell yeah.”

Mae was about to comment more when she turned, her attention pulled to the side of the common area. Off in the distance was a man who looked oddly out of place surrounded by the frat boys all around him—all of them wearing shorts and polo shirts.

The man walking through them was tall with a head of long blond hair that was tied back. He wasn't wearing the douchebag get up. “Who is that?”

Alice eased up alongside her. “The blond hunk?”

“Yes.”

“Tell your vagina to stand down. I think he's probably a new professor or something. Not your blind date. But if I'm wrong, you are so doing that.”

“Oh yes. For sure,” said Mae, still staring in the direction of the hot guy. He looked familiar, but she couldn't place him. “Can I just skip the date and go out with that guy instead? I bet he'd be great in bed.”

“Earth to formerly-sexually-repressed-girl,” said Alice, waving a hand in Mae's face. “Pod people took you, didn't they? Where is my virgin?”

“She's lusting after some random guy,” responded Mae before facing forward.

Alice stared harder in the direction of the man. “I can't believe I'm going to encourage your strange obsession with a sculpture, but that guy looks a lot like your Greek god statue with the lion.”

Mae gasped, realizing her friend was right. The man did look like her sculpture.

“Think he’s hung the same?” asked Alice, ruining the moment.

“Alice, really.”

“What? Legit question.”

Mae groaned. “I need to go back to the apartment. Before you think it’s to bail, I forgot deodorant and the blond is making me so hot that I noticed.”

“Totally hopeless. Let’s get your pits covered and then we need to get you to your date.”

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 2:42 pm*

Captain Corbin Jones held a bouquet of wildflowers in one hand and his phone in the other. He was behind on paperwork and trying to walk and scan read at the same time. The documents had been sitting in his inbox for nearly a week as it was. He didn't have time to go on a blind date, and he certainly had no inclination to be on one. Blind dates were for men who couldn't get a woman. Not for him. He could land any woman he wanted. He'd been considered quite a catch throughout his lifetime and had gone through certain periods when he paid more attention to his sex life—the last big burst being in the 1920s. He was still fond of jazz and gin. A perfect pairing. Sure, his pick-up lines needed work as they were somewhat antiquated, but he could blend when need be and he got by. The roaring twenties weren't that long ago, were they?

He nearly tripped as he thought about how long ago his last dating high period was. He blinked. "Your last rush coincided with the advent of sliced bread."

He cringed, hoping his teammates didn't figure that tidbit out. They'd never let him hear the end of it. It wouldn't matter that he'd not had the time to date. He'd told his mother as much. That was of no importance to her, who, even at his age, still managed to scare him. She may be in London, thousands of miles away from him, but that was no matter—the woman could still make him listen as if he were but a boy, rather than the leader of his own special operatives team and hundreds of years old. She had that effect on a lot of men, so he didn't take it to heart. His father was a proud lion-shifter and alpha in his own right, but next to his mother, his father was merely a cuddly teddy bear. She came from a long line of lion shifters herself, but lacked the ability to shift forms, as was often the case with female shifters. That didn't stop her from putting the fear of the gods into those around her.

There was simply no way out of the blind date. At least, not unless a crisis at work came about. It seemed wrong to hope for one, but secretly he did. So far, it was just a mass of paperwork that he was behind on. Nothing pressing enough to convince his mother he didn't need to be fixed up—again. Not one of her past attempts had stuck. He'd only fucked a couple of them. His mother's taste in women she thought would work for him was that poor, to say the very least.

He sighed, his thumb scrolling down the document on his phone display. It was a briefing of another Paranormal Security and Intelligence (PSI) mission. It was not one his team had been on, but rather one with intel in connection to a group of very bad men Corbin's team had recently begun tracking. Lately it seemed everything tied back to the Corporation.

He really and truly was starting to hate them.

He glanced up to be sure he wasn't about to walk into anything and then continued reading. He felt out of place on the university grounds. He was far too old to be there, but then again, he was far too old for most everything—including his date. Looking at him, none would guess he was more than thirty at most. A perk of being immortal. As a lion-shifter he had heightened senses and drew upon them as he walked while reading, using them to smell and listen for anything that may be in his path.

All he could smell was the group of young men gathered off to one side of the common area, tossing around a football. He snorted in derision, failing to see what the American version had to do with feet, apart from a designated kicker coming out at what seemed random to him. His preference was definitely for European football—at least it required the actual use of one's feet coming into contact with the ball.

Most called him British as he was born and bred in England, but the truth was, he was English. He had neither the time nor inclination to explain the difference to his

American friends. And he was pretty sure that, outside of England, the rest of the United Kingdom spent far too much time with their sheep.

Corbin paused in reading the report and opened the screen holding a map of the campus. He glanced up, long enough to see he was indeed headed in the right direction, and then stopped as a scent caught his attention. Honey, cinnamon and vanilla filled his head, making his cat shove upwards, towards the surface. He had to take a deep breath and focus to keep from doing something incredibly foolish, like partially shifting forms in public where anyone could see him. Clutching the flowers tighter, he felt some of the stems give under the pressure of his hand. He turned, trying to find the source of the smell. He knew without a shadow of a doubt that the owner was female. There were so many women walking on the campus that he couldn't zero in on the owner of the scent. He just knew that it was from the other direction—not the way he was headed.

Not his date for the evening.

Mae Bertelot, the daughter of one of his mother's friends, was his dinner date. When his mother had pushed for him to agree to the date, he'd tried to point out the extreme age difference between himself and the young woman. She was, from his mother's accounts, a fifth-year senior, studying fine arts. By his guesstimate that put her around the age of twenty-two, maybe twenty-three. He hoped. Anything younger and he'd spend the evening feeling like the sleazebag he was shaping up to be. Those men who trolled bars looking to pick up younger women always set his teeth on edge. His mother was doing her best to lump him in the mix.

He sighed.

Colette Corbin meant well. She always did.

Hence, him walking on a campus, with flowers, dressed for an evening out, while he

really just wanted to be catching up on paperwork. He wasn't a monk. Far from it. He liked sex. What red-blooded male didn't? He was just too busy to bother with all the things associated with it—the wining, the dining, the romance aspect. And he wasn't much into women who charged, who didn't require those necessities.

He caught sight of another group of young men, this one gathered near a bench, talking and carrying on, seeming to have fun. They were all dressed in snug-fitting polo shirts with baggy shorts and leather slip-on shoes. Corbin paused and glanced down at himself. Was he dressed wrong to go on a date with a woman who was still at university? His fellow teammates liked to joke that Corbin reminded them of an underwear model. Frankly, he didn't see it.

Did women prefer men who looked like that? If so, he was certainly out of his element. The designer button-down, long-sleeved shirt he wore had trimmed cuffs that, when rolled, showed a checked pattern, setting off the blue of the shirt. He'd paired it with charcoal-gray chinos. The black loafers he wore retailed for around five hundred dollars per foot and didn't look anything like what the young men on campus were wearing.

Corbin's long blond hair was fastened at the nape of his neck with a leather band, and while he was normally clean-shaven, he'd taken to wearing a close-cut beard. It was several shades darker than his hair.

He looked nothing like the men here.

Because they are boys , he thought, calming somewhat. You're a man.

As a group of women approached, he chanced a glance at them, noting they were dressed as casually, if not more so, than the boys. He sighed. Yes, he was certainly a man who did not belong there. How his mother could even begin to think he would have anything in common with a woman so young was beyond him.

The smell that had caught his attention before hit him again, this time stronger. There was no way he could ignore it. He looked in the direction it was coming from and froze. The single most beautiful creature he'd ever laid eyes upon was there, off in the distance, but not too far that his preternatural eyes could not pick up on every detail of her. Her sable-colored hair was piled high upon her head and fell loosely in long, semi-waves down her back. Eyes so dark a brown they reminded him of fine chocolates, hid partially behind black-framed glasses. Never before had he thought he had a thing for a woman in glasses, but seeing her fast changed his mind.

She wasn't dressed as the others around her. She wore a long, light yellow, flowing dress that somehow managed to hug every curve she had. And did she ever have curves! They were glorious. His cock responded at once, hardening as his cat made an attempt to surface. He couldn't move. Couldn't draw in air. Couldn't do anything beyond stare as the goddess made her way in his direction. The dress had a slit in the side, gifting him a view of her long, creamy, pale legs. As she neared, his gaze drew up her slowly, memorizing her shape, the soft, sultry sway of her hips and her breasts. Her full lips had red lipstick on them, and while he wasn't usually a fan of lipstick, he had to admit the color was stunning on her.

There was an elegance about the tall beauty that set her apart from the woman near her, though the other woman wasn't anything a man would call unattractive. Quite the opposite. With her red hair, pale skin and bright blue eyes, she was very attractive, but the brunette was stunning. Possibly the most attractive woman he'd ever seen in all his years.

He wanted to stop heading in the direction where he'd been told to meet Mae and go to the brunette instead. As wrong as it sounded, his cock didn't care. It wanted the woman in the yellow dress. Wanted to know what it felt like to sink into her, and he wanted to know what those bespectacled eyes would look like as she reached culmination.

He nearly did the unthinkable. He almost went to the woman, to hell with the blind date his mother had arranged. Had his phone not begun to buzz at that moment, indicating a call was coming in, he might very well have abandoned his date for the evening.

A total tosser move.

It went against everything he stood for. Yet the compulsion to go to the woman, to meet her and to know her in a carnal way, nearly did him in. He lifted his phone, seeing Striker's number there, thankful for the distraction. "Yes?"

Striker (Dougal to his mother only) McCracken spoke, "You dinnae get to yer date's place yet, did you? Please tell me I'm nae interruptin' hot monkey sex. If I am, why the hell did you answer yer phone? When I'm havin' sex, aside from a selfie, I do nae have my phone near me."

Striker was addicted to social media. It had become a serious problem. Supernaturals had to avoid picture trails whenever possible. It wasn't easy to explain away their lack of aging, and with the advancements in technology it was getting harder and harder. All had hoped he'd learned his lesson when he'd nearly ended up the star of a furry fetish fantasy, but the stubborn Scotsman hadn't learned anything from the experience.

As not only a member of Corbin's PSI-Op team, but as a close friend, Striker knew of Corbin's date. He didn't know the date came by way of Corbin's mother though. Corbin cleared his throat, willing his hard-on for the woman in yellow down. "No. Not yet, why?"

"General Newman is here in the office," said Striker, his Scottish accent as thick as it ever was. "He wants the team in now. Says it cannae wait. I did explain you were about to get laid, but he dinnae seem to much care. Sorry. Yer dick will have to wait

for another day to get some release. Unless yer up for wanking, then that is on you.”

“Asshole,” snapped Corbin.

“Aye, I’ve one. So do you. What of it?”

With a groan, Corbin pivoted, turning back in the direction he’d only just come from. If General Jack C. Newman was in the office, it was serious. The matter couldn’t wait. A tiny pang of guilt hit Corbin as he walked, remembering how he’d been secretly hoping for a work crisis.

Be careful what you wish for.

“I’m just under two hours away,” he offered, accelerating his pace.

“Long way to drive for a piece of arse,” returned Striker with a snort. “There is great pussy to be had around here. I told you I’d take you out for a night on the town. We could throw back some beers, pick up women and see to our needs. We’re single. Us non-mated ones need to stick together. We’ll be outnumbered soon if another of us falls. Do me a favor and do nae go findin’ yer mate or anythin’.”

For supernaturals, a mate was more even than just a spouse. They were the one person who would complete a supernatural, make them feel whole, and someone they could reproduce with. Supernaturals mated for life.

Corbin had no interest in such distractions. He had a job to do. Bad guys needed to be handled, and he enjoyed stopping them. He didn’t have the time or inclination to mate.

Though, at the mention of mate, he found himself glancing in the direction the woman in the yellow dress had been. She wasn’t there anymore. “I’ll need to phone

my date for the evening to inform her I won't be able to keep our scheduled plans. I'll be in shortly."

"Might nae want to refer to yer date as a scheduled anythin'," said Striker. "Make her think yer broken up about missin' out. Women like to feel wanted and needed. They're faster into the sack that way. And remember, the more they believe you want 'em, the quicker they are to offer anal sex. Best kind of sex."

Rolling his eyes, Corbin hung up on his friend and searched his recent calls for the number his mother had given him. He thought of calling Mae, but so far their back and forth had all been done via text message. He wasn't sure why younger people preferred it. Going against what they'd established so far, he called her, forgoing messaging. Her phone went to an automated voice mail answering service. He left a short but informative message alerting her that their date would need to be rescheduled and that a matter at work couldn't wait.

He considered seeking her out to give her the flowers and explain in person, but since he didn't want to go on the damn date to start with, he kept walking in the direction of the lot where he'd parked his vehicle. With each step he took, his mind was drawn back to the woman in the yellow dress. He had to force one foot in front of the other to get himself to the parking lot once more—the need to seek out the mysterious woman was that great.

Corbin made it to his vehicle and glanced around, noting he was alone in the parking lot except for some men near a large black van at the opposite end. He paid them little mind as he reached down to adjust his cock. It was hard from seeing the woman in the yellow dress and didn't seem to want to go down anytime soon. He had a decent drive ahead of him and he wasn't about to attempt it sporting a twenty-five centimeter hard on.

Groaning, he lowered his head, trying his best to get his dick to obey. It wasn't

having any part of listening to him. He chanced another look around, making sure he was indeed alone before he did something he couldn't believe he was about to do.

He unzipped his pants and pulled his cock out. He'd officially become one of those sick fucks who masturbated in public. He wasn't sure how he'd fallen so far in an evening, but he'd ditched his date, wanted to bed a woman in a yellow dress and was now stroking his prick in a parking lot.

Oh, how the mighty have fallen.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 2:42 pm*

Paranormal Security and Intelligence Division B Headquarters , classified location

Two weeks later

Corbin turned, placing his body in the ready position again as he prepared to run through the Wankan kata once more. It wasn't a widely practiced form of the kata, but he liked it all the same. His mind was clear, focused, and his body took each step, each motion as if an opponent was truly there in the martial arts training room with him. He wore only a pair of loose-fitting workout pants, nothing else. His bare feet swept over the foam-tiled floor mats of the dojo. The pattern upon them was wood grain, giving the feeling of a wood floor, but the padding was required to train properly. The other portion of the oversized training room had actual wood scraped floors, providing options for the men who used the room.

This time of night, there weren't many left at headquarters. Most were either at home or deployed on missions, as was the standard. Corbin preferred to use the martial arts room when it was nearly empty, and it wasn't as if he had anyone waiting on him at home, so he was free to spend his time as he wished. He enjoyed the tranquility of the room—one of the elements it had been designed with in mind. He welcomed the time to reflect.

To focus.

To be alone.

While able to function easily in social situations, he wasn't one who normally sought them out. Too long ago he'd been forced into them—forced to wine and dine

aristocrats, every word spoken holding double meaning and everyone out for themselves. He didn't miss the vapid women with their arrogant men. Even worse were the women who had been angling to ensnare a wealthy man to wed them.

He shuddered, thinking back on the women of old. Some tried just about anything to land a husband, even stooping so low as to try to put the man in a situation that made it seem as if he'd compromised their virtue. Corbin had seen it all. He'd been in their sights more than once and had taken off to fight for his country—something his mother still wasn't keen on, though she'd had centuries to get used to the idea. What he had hated most at the height of his forced socializing was the outfits. The bloody footwear. Squared toes, heels, even for men. He didn't miss the breeches or justacorps either.

And he didn't miss the wigs.

The horrid wigs.

He fucking hated wigs.

That fashion couldn't have died quickly enough for his liking.

He hated it nearly as much as he'd disliked the bellbottom craze that seemed to have happened only yesterday, but upon closer reflection was decades ago. Time tended to get away from immortals. All he knew was every fifteen to twenty years he had to reinvent himself in the eyes of the human world and vanish on paper for a while before reemerging under an assumed name—to the humans.

To the supernatural community he was Corbin Jones. That did not change, no matter the fad or craze. And Corbin was not much of a trend chaser. No. He liked his hair to be long, despite modern standards and what was considered normal for nowadays. His long, blond hair was pulled up in what he'd heard someone term a man-bun,

though it was a style he'd worn long before the name had been applied to it. A style many men he knew in the paranormal community wore, before hipsters decided to covet it.

It kept it out of his face as he trained. That was all that mattered. He'd surprised himself lately by not shaving. He did keep his facial hair trimmed and maintained—he was a fan of looking orderly. His newfound rugged look probably had something to do with his mother's revived kick of trying to find his mate. Without realizing, he had staged his own version of a protest. He'd stopped shaving his face clean. His beard was not as long as Striker's. The damn Scot had given up shaving, and at the rate the man was going, he'd be nothing but a giant head of red hair. Evidently, the online forums Striker was so fond of were composed of women who thought beards were sexy—therefore, the man refused to get rid of his. Looking that unkempt wasn't something Corbin could willingly do.

His mother, notwithstanding all her bluster, was a hopeless romantic at heart. In her mind, she'd be the one to seek out that one perfect person created just for him and bring them together to live happily ever after. His father no longer attempted to intervene on Corbin's behalf. He simply allowed his mother to do as she pleased whenever she got in the mood to see her son with a woman—which seemed to be every ten or so years. And she was in the height of one of her moods now—spurred onward by his canceling of the date she'd set up for him.

He repeated each step of the kata and was midway through his fourth time when his concentration began to waver, his latest mission vexing him. He generally prided himself on his ability to compartmentalize, to push down and store for another day anything that wasn't relevant to the task at hand, but the mission had gotten to him. It had gotten to all his men. Nearly as much as when they'd helped to shut down breeding centers for what the government had now termed the Asia Project. That had been just over twenty years ago.

It wasn't until Corbin had run through the kata twice more that he realized he was no longer alone in the training room. Dr. James Hagen, a fellow operative and a member of Corbin's team, stood near the entrance, silent, waiting to speak with Corbin. James was reserved, and Corbin liked that about the man. They had that much in common. Corbin continued with his training, and it wasn't long before James had kicked off his boots and was joining in, following step by step in the kata.

From the haunted expression that passed between the men, Corbin knew James's thoughts were where Corbin's had been—on their latest mission. Paranormal Security and Intelligence Ops Team Five, headed by Corbin, had just returned from the Middle East where they'd taken down a sex trafficking ring. One of so very many that existed. This one dealt primarily with supernaturals, though a few humans had been victims as well. Humans were food for some types of supernaturals. There to be sold, sexually assaulted, and then killed for the food they provided. Some were to be sex slaves and blood banks for certain supernatural elements.

The supernatural victims had numbered high. Some had been thoroughly abused already by the time the Ops got to the facility, and others had been traumatized, but not sexually assaulted. Corbin now knew more about human trafficking than he'd ever wanted to, and it was keeping him up at night. He'd been somewhat familiar with it prior to the mission, but not to this extent. He'd had a brief encounter with traffickers just over twenty years ago. The memory of how horribly the ordeal had ended still haunted him to this very day.

Corbin's stomach twisted at the thought of what they'd uncovered on their newest mission and just how deep it all ran. He and his men had barely spoken on the plane ride home, their normal banter gone, each soaking in the reality of what they'd just broken up. The looks on the faces of the victims, mostly women, but some men, had nearly broken his spirit. Even Striker, the team's smartass, had refrained from making lewd remarks or jokes. He had torn apart three of the men who had been bidding on a young woman. Striker had then taken off his gear, removed his shirt and put it over

the girl, shielding her body from the view of others, taking her directly to the female PSI-Agents who were on site, ready to render assistance.

The world was full of sick bastards.

Thankfully, nearly seventy of them were detained and no longer a threat, and almost twenty more were too dead to be an issue again. Those who were detained were being pumped for information in hopes of breaking up more trafficking rings.

One more thing PSI had on its plate. The list was never-ending.

The bust had taken down of a large number of bad men, but that didn't minimize the damage the bad guys had done. The lives they'd already ruined. And it would never make things right for the victims. That was something he'd witnessed twenty years back. That trafficking ring had been one that focused on supernaturals as well—all women though. All seriously mistreated and most, by the time Corbin had gotten there, were in various stages of pregnancy that none had been willing participants in.

The memories of it all washed over him. One of the women who had been held captive and offered up for sale had been heavily pregnant. Corbin had burst into the small holding room she'd been in all those years ago and had nearly vomited at the state he'd found the young woman in. It had been uncovered later that she'd been first held in a breeding facility that he later found out had ties to the Asia Project, but at the time he'd been unaware of such overlap. The woman, who he took to calling Jane because her identity was never figured out, had been force bred and then sold on the black market to traders. Jane and her unborn child had been up for grabs. Available to whoever had the deepest pockets—no questions asked on what use the buyer had for them. Nothing.

By the time Corbin and his team had happened upon her and the others being held, the woman's mind and spirit were long broken. He'd sat by Jane's side while she lay

in the infirmary under the watchful eyes of PSI doctors, a shell of herself. Corbin had even found himself holding the woman's hand, though she didn't acknowledge his existence. He hadn't been able to walk away from her. A strange, almost feral need to oversee her condition had been all consuming. He'd been so obsessed with her child that someone had even asked if the child might have been his in some way. It wasn't. He just had to see to the child's safety. He couldn't have explained it if he tried, so he'd not bothered trying. He'd not wanted to leave the pregnant woman's side, but duty had called and he'd had no choice.

Upon his return he'd learned Jane had died during childbirth and that the baby girl she'd been carrying had been placed in a good home, with loving parents. He'd had to fight the need to demand the location, knowing it was for the best. He trusted that the man who had placed her—General Jack C. Newman, Director of PSI—wouldn't have put the baby with someone he didn't trust fully. Another mission had come up and it had been a welcome one. It had taken his need for answers from him.

That had been just over twenty years ago.

Yet the newest mission had brought it all to the surface again as if it were yesterday. His worry for the child that had been born long ago had hit him hard once more. He couldn't shake the feeling from his head that he should be searching for her. That was absurd. She wasn't a brand new baby in need of protection anymore. By his calculations she'd be nearly twenty-three years old by this point. And Jack would have told him if something bad had happened. If the closed adoption hadn't worked out.

Jack had said nothing when he'd ordered Corbin and his men to head to the Middle East for the newest mission. Perhaps the similarities of the situation fell short on Jack. Corbin had been surprised when his team, in particular, had been deployed on the mission. They'd been handling hunting down bad guys affiliated with the Corporation, an evil catchall conglomerate that was like a hydra. They'd cut off one

head, and two more would pop up. When the orders came for wheels up and to head to the Middle East, Corbin wasn't sure what to make of it all. It hadn't taken him and his men long to track and break up the ring. It wasn't until they were on the flight home that the hows and the whys became apparent.

The newest ring had ties to the Corporation.

Corbin and James drew to the end of their kata and faced one another, the air to the room thickening with the pending conversation's tone, though no words had been spoken. Laney, James's mate and a gifted computer hacker, had been working on encrypted data the team had retrieved while in the Middle East. They'd been back nearly three days and she'd spent the first day giving James one hell of a welcome-home present and the next two assisting PSI's analysts with cracking the encryption and decoding files. Nothing they had managed to decipher to date was good.

He waited for more bad news as he bent, grabbing his workout towel from his gym bag before putting it behind his neck. He held it with both hands as he faced his longtime friend. He wiped the sweat from his brow. "It's late for you to still be here. Let me guess, Laney is lost in a sea of data mining again."

James inclined his head. "She and Mercy are looking over some information on the Corporation that came through about an hour ago."

Corbin hadn't realized Duke Marlow's wife had come in as well. It was apparently all hands on deck. "How was Duke with her being here?"

Duke was also a member of Corbin's team. And the man tended to hate nearly everything. Everything but his mate Mercy.

"Not pleased, but when is he ever," answered James with a shrug.

“Do I want to know what they’ve found?” Corbin asked, his British accent lighter than it had been when he’d first moved to the United States, but still very noticeable to others, or so he’d been told.

“No,” answered James softly, his brown hair longer than normal. His mate was helping James come out of his buttoned-up, prim and proper shell. Hopefully, James didn’t take it to Laney’s extreme. She was a Goth punk girl. Boomer was already Goth enough for the team. They didn’t need James going that way as well.

“How bad is it this time?”

James exhaled slowly, his large shoulders slumping. “We’ve found another ring, linked to the one we just busted. The girls found the tie by following some accounts the Corporation has set up. This ring is run stateside and it’s big. Really big. A small faction of it is local and they’ve already grabbed new merchandise.”

By merchandise Corbin knew James was referring to supernaturals for sale. It turned his gut. Criminals never ceased to surprise him with their cruelty. He’d been alive a long time and he’d never known a world without mad men, a world without violence, and he probably never would. Peace was something on greeting cards, not something that seemed obtainable. Not when there were sick people in the world who would do anything for a profit.

James continued, “The Corporation has been placing bids of some of the merchandise—turns out, it’s not them holding these people, but they want them. They want them bad. There are several that are up for auction right now that are hot commodities. Looks like the Corporation has some competition for them. I had the girls set up a dummy account with offshore funding in an attempt to outbid these assholes, but, boss, there is no way the girls are going to win. The backers for these guys are big. Really big and really motivated. I think we’re going to have to extract the women ourselves.”

Corbin's body tensed. He wasn't sure he wanted to hear more, but knew he had to.

James rubbed the bridge of his nose. "From what Laney was able to find, the Corporation and the other big bidders want these women for breeding, and they're hunting for male candidates to use in hybrid testing."

"Bloody hell," he said in a hushed whisper. His disdain of the Corporation grew daily. Did their horrors never end? They had been a thorn in his side for months now, and he was frustrated with PSI's inability to get ahead of them. The Corporation's reach was far and wide, and they were so much bigger than Corbin or the others could have predicted or imagined. It didn't help that rogues had been uncovered, working within PSI, feeding the Corporation and their allies information. "Tell me we have some leads on the whereabouts of those being held."

"The girls are trying," replied James, reaching out and touching Corbin's shoulder lightly. "I wanted them to go home and rest, but they're refusing. They've been at this all day and night now. I don't want them stressed. It's not good for their pregnancies."

Corbin didn't want Laney or Mercy taxing themselves or putting their health at risk. The information was important, but so were Laney and Mercy. "I'll order them to go home."

With a snort, James backed away. "Let me know how that works out for you. Duke has been trying, and even with all his bluster, they're ignoring him. Last check, they had him grabbing printouts for them and some ice cream. He's been reduced to a glorified errand boy. He's bitching the entire time, but he's doing it."

It was amusing to see his friend now that he was mated. James had always been known as the one who came off as easygoing but had a wicked temper. Since mating to Laney, the alpha male seemed to only fear her wrath.

No other.

The same went for Duke and Mercy.

“We need to get you mated off,” said James sternly. “It’s about time you had a woman and some kids. You know matings tend to happen in clusters. Look at the I-Ops.”

Corbin was far too British to want to discuss his feelings. He wiped his face once more with the towel as the entrance to the training room darkened.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 2:42 pm*

Mae tried again to pry open the door between her and freedom. It was no use. She couldn't budge the old, rusty, metal door. Each time it closed she winced, hearing the thud echo around the room, knowing the door was too thick to get through. And she'd heard the noise more times than she could count.

Turning, she surveyed what had become her reality—though just how many days, she wasn't sure. It wasn't very big. There were no windows to help mark the passage of time or to help her figure out where, exactly, she was being held. Screaming for help had done her no good. No one had answered. It had only left her voice hoarse with no fresh water to quench her thirst or ease the burn.

She pushed her glasses up more, thankful to have them again. They'd appeared next to the small bed in the cell when she'd woken earlier. Before that, she'd spent all her time trying to focus on who and what was happening. At least with the glasses she could see. Not that there was anything hopeful to look at.

With a groan of frustration, she sank to the floor, its texture rough and unforgiving, her back against the metal wall, her gaze locked on the door. The only contact she'd had with anyone lately had been by way of the small opening in the door through which someone had pushed something that was to pass as food and drink. She thumped her head against the wall and was surprised when a follow-up thump came from the other side of the wall. She twisted and tapped the wall again, crawling towards the small return air vent near the bottom of the wall. "Hello?"

A deep, low growl was the only response she got. It sounded as if someone had a caged tiger in the room next to her. She froze, fearful whatever it was would somehow magikally appear in with her. Stranger things had happened in her life.

There was a scuffle and then the sounds of a commotion coming from the other side of the wall. Shouts followed as well as threats to tranquilize the occupant should he not pull himself together. Mae swallowed hard. She'd been shot up with something that made her sleep for long periods more than once since her arrival. She didn't wish that upon anyone.

The urge to sing nearly did her in. She knew better than to dare and she'd been sure to avoid speaking when the guards were around as often nerves left her talking in more of a song anyways. She didn't want crazy and out of control on top of scary. Yet, she couldn't seem to stop herself as she pressed her hand to the return air vent. She began to hum softly, hoping to help calm the person in the cell next to her. If it backfired, they'd be even more agitated. The only saving grace was that they weren't in the same cell. A few minutes had passed before a large, male hand appeared against the other side of the vent, startling her. She stopped humming and jerked in place.

"No," said a deep voice. "Don't stop. It helps."

She kept going for a while more, sensing him calming. When she drew to a stop, she leaned against the wall. "Are you okay?" she asked softly, keeping her hand in place.

"Better now," he replied, his hand still there. "What did you do?"

A shaky laugh escaped her. "I'd tell you, but you wouldn't believe me."

"Oh, you'd be shocked at what I'm willing to believe."

The walls of the cells were thick and the vent was small. She couldn't have fit through it if she wanted, not that she wanted to, considering how scary the man had sounded only moments before.

“Got a name?” he asked, the hard edge leaving his voice.

“Mae. And you?”

“Brad.”

They didn’t talk for a spell, but both left their hands against the vents. After a while there was a loud noise, and she eased to her feet. The metal in the wall between her holding room and Brad’s drew back in the center, revealing a large, glass window. She found a man standing there in a thin pair of what looked to be hospital-issue bottoms, the kind a doctor or nurse would wear. His dark hair was just past his shoulders and looked unkempt. He had a face full of hair and looked like a wild man. He was big, yet it was clear to see he was malnourished.

His dark gaze locked on her and he glanced around the room wildly. “What is it this time? I’m not going to hurt her. You can’t make me.”

Mae squeaked as she realized he must be Brad. She got the sense he wasn’t speaking to her.

There was a clicking noise and then a voice came from above, leaving Mae turning in a circle trying to figure out where the intercom system was. “We thought you might like a look at your new breeding partner.”

Mae cupped her mouth. His new what?

Brad growled, and she watched as his dark eyes went from nearly black to ice blue. “No. I haven’t bred any of the women you’ve put me in with before. I won’t with this one either.”

“You will,” said the voice from above, sending chills down Mae’s spine. “Soon

neither of you will be able to resist the drugs we've been administering to you both."

Brad snarled. "I've resisted them just fine all this time, dickwad. I'm not hurting the girl. Period."

"You'll fuck her, or you'll eat her," said the man over the sound system. "Either will amuse me. Agree or I'll hold your food and force a change. Will your shifter side be so willing to forego fresh meat?"

Brad's gaze whipped to her, and he took a step back from the window.

Shifter?

She didn't want to guess what kind. Unless he shifted into a hamster, she knew it wouldn't end in her favor. Tears she'd done her best to hold back burst free from her. Brad moved to the window, placing his hand upon it. Mae went to the glass and put her palm to it, feeling a strange bond to him, though she couldn't figure out why. Maybe it was because he was the first person other than guards she'd seen since being grabbed. Whatever the reason, she felt a connection to him.

"I won't hurt you," he said loud enough for her to hear through the shared vent between their rooms.

The slot on the cell door opened and a tray of food appeared through it as had been the case multiple times before. She was hungry and thirsty, but each time she ate and drank anything given to her, she felt ill and tired. She saw through the thick glass that a tray appeared in Brad's cell as well.

He glanced at it and then shook his head, his gaze landing on her. Was he trying to tell her not to eat from it?

A lone tear trickled down her cheek, and Brad offered a sympathetic look. There was the slightest of clicking from above, and then Brad spoke once more, “The food is laced with drugs that keep us somewhat sedated and sometimes with things that make us want to have sex. I’m guessing something to help make sure you end up with child too.”

“What?” she gasped. “Why? Where are we? Who is holding us? What do they want?”

He exhaled, looking tired. The dark circles under his eyes said he didn’t sleep much. She wondered if she had matching ones. “I don’t really know who has us. I get moved around a lot. One of the places I was at got raided. I thought, at first, it was the good guys coming to save the day. It wasn’t. I’ve been with this group now for a few weeks. I don’t know for certain, but I may have been with the others for months—possibly a year now. I honestly couldn’t tell you. I’ve sort of lost track of time.”

She shook her head. He’d been held for months?

“They got me on a trip to South America. You?” he asked.

“Leaving the Student Union on my campus,” she confessed. Mae had been at the Union waiting for Corbin, who never showed. After giving him an hour, she’d prepared to call Alice when she realized she’d done as Alice had feared, she’d left her cell phone back in the dorm room. Mae had set it down with the intent to apply the lipstick Alice insisted on. She’d remembered the lipstick but not the phone.

Mae forgot a lot of things. Her adoptive father said she lived her life with her head in the clouds, and he thought that was wonderful, always encouraging her to continue to see beauty in all things. And she did—at least until she’d been grabbed leaving the Union.

Had her blind date not stood her up, she would have been out with him and not even near the Union. Nowhere near the creeps who had snatched her shortly after leaving the building. Their grip had been unlike anything she'd experienced before.

She rubbed her upper arms, staying close to the window and Brad. The bruises from her abductors' fingertips were still visible, even in the poor lighting of the cell. The cold of the floor seeped through her feet. She'd lost her shoes in the struggle with her abductors, and the dress she'd been so worried about wearing had been ripped during it all as well. Plus, it wasn't made for warmth, and with as long as she'd been in it, it wasn't faring well.

Cold, hungry, battered and bruised, she wanted to curl up into a ball and let the tears flow freely. Her mother and father wouldn't realize she was missing until they were back from their extended trip. Her only hope was Alice. Alice would send out the troops. She'd make sure someone was looking for Mae.

"Help will come," she said, more for her own well-being than anything else.

Brad didn't comment, but from his expression, he didn't think so. Believing no one would arrive to end this wasn't an option.

"What do they want with us?" she asked, unsure she wanted to hear the answer. The not knowing scared her more than anything.

Brad glanced downwards. "When they first took me, they had me strapped down and hooked up to all kinds of machines and medical stuff. They took every sample you can think of and more. From what I could overhear, they were doing something to me, manipulating my genetic makeup."

"That's not possible, is it?"

He looked up. "Anything is possible with these people."

"So you didn't start out as a shifter?" she questioned, easing forward. "You were human, and they made you one? Like from a bite?"

She'd heard of some people living through a vicious attack and being weres. She didn't know anyone personally who had. The shifters she knew were natural born.

"I was born with the ability to shift into a wolf," he said, narrowing his gaze on her. "But I don't trust my wolf anymore. Something is wrong with it. You?"

"I can't do anything special," she confessed.

"Funny, talking to you...hearing your voice and you humming calmed me right away. I think that is pretty special."

"Don't get too excited. Normally, when I dare to hum or sing men go batshit crazy. You're one of the first it soothed." She sniffled, holding back more tears. "They mentioned breeding."

Brad glanced away and nodded. "At some point, they'll dope one or both of us with this stuff they use. It makes you feel like you'll burn alive if you don't find sexual release." The way he spoke said he had firsthand experience with it and that it wasn't pleasant. "You think you're strong enough to resist it, but it's impossible."

"You said you resisted," she offered, looking for hope.

When he looked back at her, his expression was haunted. "I only managed to resist because the women they'd paired me with died during it all. They'd given them so much of the drugs that their systems' overloaded. Two died in my arms. And, Mae, you need to know that during that drugged up state, I still nearly fucked them."

She felt sick. She bent over, putting her hands on her knees and took several long breaths. This couldn't be happening. Things like this weren't real. Evil like this didn't exist. Did it?

"Something tells me you won't die from the drugs," said Brad, drawing her attention back to him. "Mae, I don't want to hurt you. And I really do not want to touch you like that. I can't explain it, but it seems really fucking wrong. Like more than it should."

She stood tall, pushing her glasses up the end of her nose. "I know."

The sound of footfalls just outside the door reached her, and she stiffened, backing away from the window. She took a few steps back as the door to the room opened. An exceptionally pale man was there, long black hair hanging to his waist. The first thing she noticed was his fingernails. They were long, filed to points and painted black. The next thing she observed was the copious amounts of eyeliner lining his eyes. His entire get-up was very Bram-fabulous. He glanced at the window and grinned.

"Getting to know one another?" he asked, and she realized he was the voice from the intercom system.

"Fuck you," said Brad, growling again.

"Down, doggie," said the man.

As she took a deep breath, she caught the scent of something different about him. Something off. Two more men entered, each one armed to the teeth. The long-haired man eyed her. "Tell me why the buyers are willing to pay so much for you."

She just stood there, unable to answer because she didn't know what he was talking

about. He snorted.

The man to his right, who had a buzz cut and was wearing a muscle shirt, offered a warm look from behind the other man's back. "The collector who brought her in said a bounty had gone out on her head, but he figured he'd get more for her if he brought her to auction. His finder's fee is steep, but from the look of the bids coming in online, she's worth it."

"What is she?" asked the one with long hair who was clearly in charge.

The man with a buzz cut shrugged. "Not totally sure. The lab results came in and they're inconclusive. Looks like she has Fae in her and a hell of a lot of different strands of shifter. Small amounts of vampire too. There are notes here about only letting the mated males near her when guarding. Don't know what that is about but I've been sure to only let guys who are mated near her so far. More information just arrived on her. Seems one of our buyers actually supplied it, for a fee, of course."

"How can she have so many strands of supernatural in her?" asked the man in charge, his gaze moving over her. "The hybrid tests haven't yielded anything as beautiful as her. Well, and Brad. Brad is breathtaking is he not?"

Brad growled again.

"The collector said she wasn't part of any hybrid testing. Said she was from some other tests—ones done on babies still in their mothers. We've another female at our other location that is a big mix up of DNA as well. From the same testing we think. Guess the babies from those tests have been tracked down, or are being tracked down as we speak. And from what we're getting feedback-wise, the biggest bidders want her and the other for breeding. That's why we got the big upfront bonus. If we can get either with child, we'll get even more money."

“Excellent.” The man with the eyeliner took a step towards her, and when he smiled she caught sight of fangs. The smell of him hit her hard, and she backed against the wall, unsure what it was at first before realizing he smelled of death. Of rotting decay.

She wanted to scream at him to get away from her, but she was afraid to speak. Afraid her nerves would leave her singing or humming and the already terrifying man before her would be even more so.

“You look like a scared little animal in a trap,” he said, black filling his brown eyes. Mae wasn’t new to the supernatural community, so she didn’t scream, although she wanted to. It wasn’t as if she was totally versed in the world either. She knew enough to know scary things were real, and she knew she’d only just scratched the surface.

“Get away from her!” shouted Brad, only making the guy in charge laugh in response.

“He wishes to protect you,” said the man. “Alpha males are always so easy to manipulate. Threaten a woman and they fold. It really is their greatest weakness. History is full of incidents of great men bending and giving up all for a woman. Pathetic. Beat him until he shuts up.”

“No!” she said quickly. “Don’t hurt him. Please.”

“It speaks,” the man said, a sinister smile tugging at his lips. “If it were up to me a fuck and a suck would be perfect.” He neared her more. He was close enough to touch her if he wanted to. She didn’t want to. Everything about his presence set her on edge.

Brad went nuts in his room, slamming against the glass. He snarled and then began to growl, his expression murderous.

The man before her licked his fangs. “Tell me, woman, have you known the pleasure of a bite before?”

“Get the fuck away from her!” shouted Brad.

Mae pressed her palms to the wall behind her, wanting to push herself through it and disappear. She was the animal in the trap, as he’d so aptly put it.

Reaching out, he nearly touched her, but drew his hand back, his gaze narrowing. “If I mark your skin with a bite, I might get less, and it really is all about the money. And you will fetch a great price. Caesar,” he said, snapping his fingers at the man with the buzz cut. “See to it she’s cleaned and find her a white gown. Something sheer. Get new photographs of her up on the web. We want the buyers to get a good view of what they’ll be getting. We’ll proceed with the breeding tomorrow. Top dollar is our goal.”

The head man and one other turned and left, taking with them the smell of rotting flesh. Caesar remained, his gaze softening somewhat. He put his weapon in his waistband and lifted his hands, looking first to Brad. “Calm down. I won’t hurt her.”

Brad stopped hitting the glass, his nostrils flaring. Skepticism filled his expression.

Caesar focused on Mae. “Listen, I’m not going to hurt you. You seem like a nice girl and I’m sorry it has to be this way. I promise it’s just for a bit longer. Okay?”

She said nothing. What was there to say? The guy was part of what was going on. Therefore, he was part of the problem.

He eyed her tray of food. “Eat. You’ve barely touched the food you’ve been given since you got here two weeks ago.”

She'd been there two weeks? The reality that help wasn't coming hit her hard. How could Alice not know she was missing?

"There is something in the food," she found herself blurting to him, tears threatening to fall. Hopelessness settled over her, and she nearly gave up.

He paused a moment and then bent near the tray. He lifted it and sniffed it. When his chocolate gaze flickered to amber she understood what he was—a shifter. He snarled, the sound low and deep. "Drugs they use to increase fertility and a sedative. They won't hurt you. I promise. If I bring you something, will you eat? I know you have no reason to trust me, but I won't drug you."

Her gut said to believe him so she nodded. "I'm thirsty, and Brad needs to be fed. Look at him. He's wasting away to nothing."

"I'll bring you water and then help you get cleaned up. I'll make sure no one bothers you when you shower. And I'll bring Brad food and water that isn't drugged. Okay?"

She eyed him, suspect of his assistance. "Why are you being so nice to me?"

He glanced at the floor. "I see you found your glasses I left for you. I came across them in one of the labs with some items that came in with the newest finds. Took me a bit to realize they belonged to you. They had another woman's scent on them too. It confused me at first and then I read the files. Makes more sense now."

She swallowed hard, her throat still burning. She wasn't sure how her glasses could have smelled like anyone other than her, but she was happy to have them so she wasn't about to question it. "Thank you."

"Got a name, kid?" he asked, taking the tray and standing with it.

At twenty-two, soon to be twenty-three, she wouldn't have called herself a kid, but she didn't correct him. "Mae."

He nodded. "I'm Caesar. The guy who was just in here is Felix. Keep quiet around him, okay? He's not...stable."

She didn't need to be told as much. She'd already guessed. "What is he? He's not a shifter like you. He smells like death. You smell like a forest."

Caesar squared his shoulders. "I wondered if you knew about supernaturals. Not all the people they bring through here do."

She didn't reply.

Caesar took a step towards the door and then stopped, reflecting for a moment. "What you smell on him is vampire."

She stiffened. "I've met a vampire before. He didn't stink of death."

With a half-laugh, Caesar glanced over his shoulder at her. "Then the one you met wasn't evil. There are a lot of them out there. There is no black and white with them normally. Felix is one that there is no question about. He's evil. No wiggle room there."

Closing her eyes, her fight with her tears ended, and she lost it. They streamed down her face. In an instant, Caesar was before her, the giant hulk of a man touching her cheek and then patting her shoulder.

"There, there," he said, and the absurdity of it all nearly made her laugh. "Felix won't return tonight. A new find just came in who is all emo and a boy. He prefers men to women. And he loves the dark and tortured types."

She touched his hand. "Thank you. I don't suppose you'd be willing to let me go."

"I wish that I could, Mae," he said, sorrow in his voice as we spoke.

She averted her gaze. "I just want to go home."

"I know." He left her alone with Brad standing close to the window.

"Evil vampires," she said softly and then snorted. "Of course, why not, right?"

Brad's lips twitched and then he smiled. He was handsome under all the hair. "I call this an average Friday night anymore."

"With how long you've been held, I believe it," she returned, grinning as well.

He put his hand to the window once more. "We'll get through this, Mae."

She wasn't so sure he was right. Before long Caesar was back, bringing with him a sandwich and a large glass of water for her and then the same for Brad. She was too thirsty to resist the lure of fresh water. Waiting until Caesar left the room, she watched Brad as he lifted his food and sniffed it. He came to the window and tapped, pointing to her food and water.

"Bring it closer to the vent," he said. "I need to smell it."

She did as instructed.

"You can eat it," he said, and then stood.

Mae did the same and eagerly gulped the water, her hand shaking the entire time. Brad drank his as well, his eyes closing as he savored it. They ate their sandwiches,

both standing near the window, though neither could reach the other.

When they'd finished, Brad nodded to her. "Tell me more about you, Mae."

She found herself telling him how she was an art major, all about her roommate Alice, and then about how she'd been stood up on the night she'd been taken.

Brad's dark brows met. "A guy stood you up?"

"Yep. And then I was abducted by crazy people who have a psycho vampire leading their cause." As she said it, Mae began to wonder if maybe Corbin had set her up. Had he been behind her capture? Had her mother's instincts been that far off?

Brad grinned. "I've had worse dates."

She laughed. "Do tell."

"Once had a woman think it was a good idea to visit a petting zoo with me during a full moon."

Mae lifted a brow. "End as bad as I think it did?"

"Oh yeah. What do you say we get through this and then I can hunt down the dick that stood you up and break his face?" he asked.

"Sounds like a plan. I'm not one who is normally for violence, but I might break the guy's face on my own," she managed, leaning against the window.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 2:42 pm*

“We have got to start monitoring Striker’s food intake!” said Malik Nasser, or Tut, as the rest of the team often called the Ancient Egyptian. He entered the training room, his eyes wide as he waved his hand in the air. Everything about Malik was suave and smooth. He had a look about him that one could not easily place, giving him an air of mystery with the ladies. He was the type of man who could charm the pants off any woman, and she never felt used when he was done with her.

And he was always done with them.

He wasn’t mated and seemed to have no designs on settling down. Corbin envied the ease with which Malik moved from woman to woman. Corbin had sex when his lion side demanded he sate the need, but no more. He disliked going through the motions of romancing a woman long enough to bed her and wasn’t comfortable with the idea of picking up a woman he didn’t know at a bar, taking her home and fucking her. He preferred the pretense of a relationship at the very least. Yet he had no desire for anything long term. No real burning desire for commitment.

Malik shook his head. “Seriously, the man is lethal.”

Corbin eyed James, who in turn shrugged. Neither knew what Malik was going on about.

“Och, I’m nae lethal,” said the Scotsman as he entered behind Malik, moving a newspaper in the air in a fanning motion. “Though, I do nae think any of you want to be visitin’ that restroom anytime soon. Might want to give it a wee bit to air out. Had beans for dinner and they were guid. Verra guid.”

James coughed to hide a laugh and Corbin groaned. Striker often reminded him of an overgrown child. The man was a competent warrior and soldier, even though he often seemed anything but. His partner in crime, Boomer, staggered in shortly after him, coughing and pounding on his chest.

“What the hell did you eat? Roadkill?” demanded Boomer, his long, blue-black hair down. The man was dressed head to toe in black. His go-to color. He was the only member of Corbin’s team who was also covered in piercings. At first glance, one would think Boomer was a Goth who took a wrong turn and landed in PSI headquarters. Miles Walsh was a skilled operative with a penchant for blowing things up, hence the nickname. His mate, Haven, was beautiful and normal. So very normal compared to Boomer’s oddities.

“I know, right?” asked Malik, giving Striker a side-eyed stare. “You should see a health care professional. That isn’t normal.”

With a smug grin of satisfaction, Striker held out his hand. “Pull my finger.”

Huffing, Malik walked towards Corbin. “Do something with him.”

“Would that I could,” answered Corbin. “Why are you all here? It’s late.”

The men glanced at one another and then back at him. “Duke called us. Told us the girls had made some headway with the information we brought back from the Middle East. And he mentioned a supernatural trafficking ring that was tied to the last one,” said Boomer, clearing his throat. “We were hoping there was enough there that we could maybe help some more people. Get some more of those perverted fucks off the street. We need to do something. We’re tired of feeling like we’re losing this battle.”

At the mention of Duke Marlow, the man appeared in the doorway, his dark brown hair looking as if he hadn’t bothered to run a brush through it. Knowing Duke, he

hadn't. He nodded to Corbin. "The girls helped the analysts. They've got some more information on some of the women currently being held for auction. I put a call in to Casey, he and Weston are going to go check out one close to them, and I phoned the Immortal Ops. Another is closer to them than us. I hope you don't mind. Eadan and Wilson said they'd go have a looksee."

Corbin nodded. All of the I-Ops were either expecting babies very soon or had just had them. As much as Corbin wanted to allow the men family time, this was a matter that required all hands on deck—especially since they were operating on limited manpower as they'd not been able to successfully weed out the traitors in the PSI. He had a hunch not one man would turn down the task when they realized what was at stake. Women were to be protected and cherished. Not sold to the highest bidder.

"Thank you," said Corbin. "I'd rather not waste time with normal protocol, and besides, we need to keep this as close to the vest as possible with what has been going on around here lately. Our circle of trust is limited."

"Agree," replied Duke. "Listen, one woman is supposedly not being held too far from here, but her location is a little bit of a mystery. The techs are coming back with six possible spots she might be right now. The information doesn't make a ton of sense. We could all split up and do some recon. Call in the others if our location is it. I think we should head out tonight. After what we saw over there, I don't even want to think of another woman spending any extra time at the hands of these sick fucks."

Corbin grabbed his workout bag. "Splitting up works. We need to avoid wasting any time. We'll stay in constant contact." He was about to say more when he heard the distinct sound of his cell phone buzzing in his gym bag. He knew everyone else in the room heard it as well with as sensitive as their hearing was. Keeping things private in a room full of shifters was difficult if not impossible.

Duke grunted. "Going to run off and take the call in private again? You've been

doing that a lot lately.”

Giving in, Corbin decided to take his lumps from his teammates like a man. He already knew who was calling him this time of night—his mother. The woman was centuries old and had never once troubled herself with learning the time zone differences between London and Corbin. With a deliberate slowness, he retrieved the phone, hoping his mother would give up before he answered. She didn’t. Not that he really thought she would. She was on a mission.

“Mother,” he said, giving all his teammates a hard look. His private calls as of late had hardly been nefarious, though with the increase in rogues in their rankings, the men were smart to question anything out of the ordinary.

Their eyes widened. They’d all met his mother and had a healthy understanding of why he would avoid the woman’s calls. She was scary when she wanted to be.

“Corbin, darling,” she said, her words drawn out. “Nice of you to answer. I was beginning to think America was without cell service. They are so backwards. It’s a wonder they have anything at all.”

She’d never been fond of his decision to move to America and she’d not been shy on saying as much. To his mother, America was home to the rebel rousers. Everyone was armed and everyone ate at least ten pounds of bacon daily. She’d never even once set foot upon its soil, but her preconceived notions had carried her this far. She’d not change her mind on the country anytime soon.

Corbin rubbed between his eyes, already tired of the conversation that had yet to start. They’d been having much the same one for weeks now. “Mother, it’s late here. I’m in bed.”

“Liar,” whispered Striker, sounding much like he was seven verses centuries old.

Boomer cast him a wide-eyed look. “If Colette hears you...”

Malik grimaced. “The skies may open and swallow us whole.”

“She’s stern, but sexy,” said Striker, this time considerably above a whisper. “I’d do her. You know, if she was nae already mated and all.”

“Dude, that’s his mother you’re talking about,” said Boomer, disgust in his voice.

“Aye, a MILF. That’s what she is, you know? Hot mom,” replied Striker.

Corbin shot him a hard look as his mother spoke, “Tell Dougal I think he’s passable for a Scot. And I see you are not in bed unless you have started bedding down with the likes of Dougal. Have you, darling? Is that why you are refusing to go on a dinner date with my friend’s daughter? You can tell me. I just need to know. Your father and I want to see you mated before we’re too old to know you’ve found happiness. And with the way you work nonstop, you will never find your mate. You need our help. Come home. I’m sure a beautiful woman is here just waiting for you to cross paths with her. Or man, if you prefer. Do you?”

Malik did his best to hide his laughter, obviously hearing everything Corbin’s mother had said. Striker didn’t bother. He bent, laughing hard and loud. “Och, prefer men. Dyin’ here. Wait, I’m nae yer boyfriend, Brit. Tell her as much. Yer nae my type. I like redheads and tits. I love tits.”

Boomer cast Corbin a sympathetic look. He’d spent nearly a year living with Corbin’s parents in the past and knew just how pushy Colette could be when she set her mind to something.

“Mother, I explained something came up with work. I had to leave the country. I didn’t get a choice. I left her a message telling her as much and I left you a message

too. I only just got back stateside the other day and I haven't had a chance to call and set up anything more."

"Darling, you tend to lie to me to avoid dealing with me. How am I to know when you are and are not really able to make a date? Ellen is traveling. Last I heard she and her husband are in some chalet on a mountainside in France. They don't have to worry about their daughter like I do my son. You are hopeless. You really should have spoken to her in person, Corbin. Communication in this day and age is so impersonal. It is amazing that women today allow men anywhere near them. They should demand more. Don't you think?" she asked, her tone accusatory. "And really, Corbin, the lengths I go to in order to help you find your mate. One would think a son would be more appreciative of his mother."

"Thank you for thinking of me," he choked out. "The team is getting ready to head out right now on a mission. I'll ring you when we're done. We can find a time that is agreeable to both the young lady and myself."

"Do you mean it?" she asked, her tone brighter.

"Yes, Mother. I mean it."

"Oh, brilliant. You'll adore her daughter, Corbin. I just know it. Do you still have her contact information?"

"Yes." He wasn't sure he still had it, but he wanted off the phone. Besides, he'd been unable to get the woman in the yellow dress out of his head. For two weeks she'd haunted his sleep—what little he'd managed to get. He had no interest in Ellen's daughter Mae. He wanted the other woman.

"Corbin Amias Herman Jones, do not lie to me. A mother knows when her son is lying to her," she said succinctly. He'd had enemy combatants shout, scream, threaten

every degree of pain and suffering this side of death, yet none struck fear and dread in him like his mother when her voice simply raised one octave.

“Please give me her information again, Mother.” The zen feeling of the training room did nothing to calm his nerves. Not when his mother was involved.

“Mae Bertelot. As I told you before, she is smart. Bit younger than I’d have liked, but talented so I’ll overlook it. She’s studying art. She painted me the most beautiful picture. It’s in the billiard room. You would know if you ever came home to visit. You’ll like her.” She rattled off a contact number and even a home address for the woman. “Leaving her a message? Honestly, Corbin, you were raised better.”

“Yes, Mother,” he said.

“Repeat her contact information back to me so I know you have it.”

With a sigh, Corbin repeated the information. “I’ll ring her the second we’re back from our mission. I’ll make the date up to her. You’ve my word, Mother.” He hung up and glanced around the room. “She is on another of her matchmaking kicks. Be warned, she knows which of you are still single. Don’t think for a moment you’re safe from her help.”

“Does yer mother have any hot single friends?” asked Striker, licking his lower lip. “Make sure they’re her age too. Women her age know how to please a man.”

“I would really like to kill him,” breathed Corbin, his patience with the man wearing thin.

Malik offered a sympathetic look. “Sorry that she’s on another kick again. Remember the woman who was allergic to cats and spent the date sneezing because you’re a cat shifter?”

“Sadly, that was one of the better fix ups,” offered Corbin. Every so many decades his mother tried, rather unsuccessfully, to help him cross paths with his true mate. Mostly, he ended up taking women, he had no interest in and nothing in common with, out for a fancy dinner and then he took them home, never to speak to them again. He’d get through his newest fix-up and then his mother would give him a decade or so before she pushed hard again.

Duke stepped into the training room more. “What did you just say?”

“She’s on a matchmaking kick... again .”

He shook his head. “No, the girl’s name. The one she’s fixing you up with. What name did you say her name was?”

“Mae Bertelot.” Corbin eyed his longtime friend, and when he saw Duke’s expression fall, a sinking feeling started in the pit of his stomach. A strange knowing settled over him and fear ebbed through him. “She’s on the list, isn’t she? She’s one of the women being held for auction.”

Duke nodded. “And if what the girls cracked is right, the Corporation is in a bidding war over her. The girls have pictures of Mae in there, being held, and it’s not pretty. She’s the one close to us—at least we think. Techs are giving us six possible holding places.”

“We grabbed that intel over three days ago,” Corbin said, the panic continuing to hold him in its ironclad grasp. The same fear he’d felt just over twenty years ago. “She’s been with them for three days?”

“Longer,” said Duke, his expression hard. “From what Laney and Mercy uncovered, they grabbed Mae two weeks back. They’re taking bids on her from all over the world. Her final sale date is nearly here. And, Corbin, in the write-up online for her,

for those bidding, it boasts that she was the product of a supernatural breeding facility.”

Corbin’s blood went cold. Thoughts of Jane and her unborn child hit him hard, and he swayed. For a split second he feared he’d go down. Somehow, he stayed upright. The woman in the yellow dress flashed in his mind, and try as he might to get her out of his head, he couldn’t. Images of her and then Jane continued to assail him.

Striker grabbed Corbin’s bag from him, shaking him from his state of alarm. “Go and change. We’ll ready the SUVs. We’ll get the girl you stood up back. Then she can slap you across the face for standin’ her up to start with and then hug you for savin’ her.”

When Striker was panicked, the shit was bad. Corbin thought harder on the dates Duke had mentioned and then paled. “She was taken around the time I was supposed to be on a date with her. I could have stopped it. I could have protected her. I could have been there to prevent anything from happening to her.”

Duke held the folder out to Corbin and with a heavy heart, Corbin opened it. He froze, his entire body tensing, breath no longer coming as he stared down at photos of a woman he’d seen before. It was the woman in the yellow dress. In the picture she was still in it, though it was ripped, tattered and torn, her brown eyes wide with fright, a handprint bruise covering her right cheek and her lip swollen and bloody. There were no glasses on her now. She only wore fear.

“It’s her,” he managed, his finger running over the edge of a photo.

“Yes, Mae,” said Duke.

Mae was the woman in the yellow dress? The one whose very scent had called his lion forth? The one his dick had been hard over for weeks? The one he’d jerked off to

thoughts of in a fucking parking lot and then again nightly since seeing her? The one he'd stood up?

The one you left to be taken by mad men , he reminded himself.

He shut off, the fierce need to get to her and protect her was all consuming. His lion side pushed through, the beast wanting to seek out those who had Mae and destroy them. Vaguely, he heard shouting and felt heavier—as if his feet were weighted as he made his way in the direction of the exit. He had to get to her. She needed him.

“Bring it down a notch, asshole!” shouted Duke, his voice piercing the confusion filling Corbin.

It took Corbin a minute to realize he was being held back by several of his men. As he lifted his arms, he saw that they were partially shifted, tan fur coating them. Claws had emerged from his fingertips and he realized then that his mouth was misshaped—as was the case when he did a partial shift. Disoriented, he shook his head, gaining something close to control once more. His arms and body returned to normal. “What happened?”

“You lost your shit,” said Boomer in a deadpan voice. “Seriously, lost your shit, dude. Not like you at all, boss.”

Malik released him and nodded. “You looked at the file on the young woman and then you started to shift as you went for the door. For a moment we all feared we'd have to hunt a lion through the city. What set you off?”

Corbin glanced down at the floor and saw the file was there, its contents scattered about. His gaze locked on the pictures of Mae, her bruises, her fear, the blood, and a sinking feeling settled over him. He thought about his reaction to her scent on the campus and how he'd been unable to stop thinking about her. About how he'd

wanted to go to her, sink deep in her and lose himself.

He'd never reacted like that to anyone before.

The reality of it all hung in the air. Desperate for answers, he looked to James, knowing the good doctor would be the voice of reason. James's face fell. He looked to the pictures and back to Corbin.

"Captain, is she your mate?" asked James, drawing a round of gasps from the men.

"She can't be," whispered Corbin, though he wasn't so sure. He couldn't look away from the pictures of her, captive, horrified. His lion beat at him, wanting out, wanting to go to her. It could help track her. It had her scent. He had to take another large breath to keep hold of it. "Can she?"

Duke grunted. "Let's get her back, Captain. Just focus on that for now. We'll ready the SUVs and call in some favors. Get yourself ready to go. Tut, can you assist him?"

"Of course," said Malik.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 2:42 pm*

Striker waited until Malik had led Corbin from the training room before bending to retrieve the files on the floor. Duke did so as well, and Striker glanced over the information there. The sight of the woman and the condition she was in twisted his stomach. He eyed Duke. “If this ends poorly and she’s his mate...”

Duke sighed. “I know. I should have guessed something was going on. He’s been acting weird for a couple of weeks now.”

Striker nodded. Corbin had been off his game on the last mission and that wasn’t like the man. Corbin was always in control. Always ready to lead and he never struggled with his shifter side—unlike most of the men. Corbin rarely needed to join the men when they shifted forms and hunted on headquarter grounds. The woods outside of the facility were stocked with game for the men to hunt whenever their beasts needed to run free and be wild as intended by nature. If they didn’t hunt on a fairly regular basis they ran the risk of shifting and eating people.

It had happened before.

All the men on Striker’s team were natural born shifters, not bitten or genetically altered, as was the case with some PSI operatives. Natural borns had their own set of issues, like needing to shift and hunt animals every so often in order to stay in control of their beasts. Corbin’s willpower had always amazed Striker. They’d been through some hairy situations in the past, but Corbin had always kept his beast in line. But not now. Not with this woman. There was little doubt in Striker’s mind as to what that meant.

The woman was Corbin’s mate and it would end very badly if anything happened to

her.

“He willnae ever be the same,” said Striker, having known Corbin a long time. The man was honorable and always did the right thing. If his mate died at the hands of the enemy, he’d blame himself, and he’d never let it go. He’d forever think that by standing her up on a date, he was the reason she fell into enemy hands. Maybe he was.

“Yeah, I know,” said Duke, lifting a sheet of paper. “If it were Mercy, I’d lose control too. And there is no way I’d forgive myself.”

“We know. We’ve seen it happen. If you’ll recall, we had to chain yer sorry ass because you would nae listen to us.”

“I recall,” snapped Duke.

“You were bein’ a dick. Do nae give me that tone. What else were we to do? Kill you?”

Duke grunted in frustration. “No.”

“We chained you to protect you and others.”

“I know.”

“If this lass is hurt or dead, Corbin willnae bounce back.”

Duke’s entire body stiffened as he leafed through the papers. “We should send him to this spot. It’s the smallest of the possible locations and probably isn’t the one they’re holding such a hot commodity at. They won’t be able to secure the facility like they could with these others. We’ll all split up and take one of the bigger ones. We’ll

switch to channel five to communicate, but don't tell the captain. We can keep in contact with him via Laney here at headquarters."

Striker took a deep breath. He didn't have a mate that he was aware of, and he didn't understand the pull to any one woman. He liked all women equally. Hell, he loved women. The idea of commitment set his teeth on edge, but he did know enough about shifter males to know that if they did happen across their mates, not even the fires of hell would stop them from getting to them. "He'll never forgive us if somethin' happens to her on our watch."

Duke touched his shoulder. "Striker, you saw him lose his shit just seeing the pictures of her. Do you think his head is in the game? We'll get him back in a body bag if we let him go off half-cocked like this. No. We'll send him to the location least likely to hold her. It will keep him safe while we find the girl. We'll get her back here and then they can figure out what, if anything, they are to each other."

Striker didn't like the plan one bit, but Duke was right. Corbin's state of mind said he'd rush in and get himself killed. Striker had seen Duke, James and even Boomer behave in much the same fashion when they'd found their mates. Reluctantly, he nodded. "Aye, yer right. I do nae like it, but yer right."

"Right about what?" asked Malik appearing in the doorway minus Corbin.

"Where is the captain?" Duke glanced past Malik.

"I tossed him into the shower. Told him he smelled and needed to cool off and clear his head or he'd be of no help to the girl," answered Malik.

Striker eyed Duke. "He thinks we should mislead the captain and send him to the location least likely to be holdin' the lass."

Malik was quiet a few moments before nodded. “I think that would be best. We let him go in as he is now and it will end poorly.”

“Yeah,” said Duke. “I fucking hate the Corporation.”

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 2:42 pm*

Corbin floored the SUV. The roads were empty this time of night. He was a skilled driver, and with his heightened senses, he took maneuverability to entirely new levels. He didn't need the headlights to help him see, but he used them all the same. Driving without them tended to scare other drivers.

The coordinates Duke had given him were loaded into the SUV's navigation system. Corbin had verified them on an actual map prior to leaving headquarters, as he'd found the nav systems in the vehicles to be less than reliable in the past. He wouldn't chance being routed in the wrong direction when Mae needed him.

She needed you two weeks ago , he thought, his emotions running wild. He hated himself for walking away from that campus. For bailing on her. As he thought back to the night of their blind date, he remembered heading back to his vehicle and taking the chickenshit approach to dealing with standing her up. He'd left her a message.

Another thought occurred to him. In the parking lot he'd seen a black van and men who looking back now, seemed out of place. He gasped. They'd taken Mae. He knew it. Knew they were the ones responsible and knew that he'd ignored them, ignored his inner alarm system because he'd been too busy jacking off to relieve the pain in his cock.

He'd seen her abductors and he'd done nothing to stop them from taking her.

“Fuck!”

His beast was there, on edge, waiting for any opening it could seize to take control. It didn't understand that Corbin was trying to get to Mae. It wasn't putting paws to

pavement, the wind in its hair as he ran wild and free towards her, therefore, in its mind no progress was being made.

His cell rang and he grabbed it without looking at who was calling. The moment he heard his mother's voice, he cringed.

"Corbin, did you happen to reach Mae?" she asked, worry in her voice. "I managed to get in touch with Ellen and they said they've been trying to connect with Mae for days, but that she's not responding to their messages."

He lived the type of life that required him to keep a great number of secrets. This was one. He knew the information would be termed classified, but he didn't care. "Mother, I need you to keep her parents calm. Can you do that?"

He didn't want to be calm. He wanted to rip people's throats out, but he didn't need frantic parents getting involved. Not yet.

His mother gasped. "Something has happened to her, hasn't it?"

"Yes."

"And you are unable to give me details," she pointed out, already knowing how his job worked.

He tensed as emotions slammed into him. For a brief second he felt like the child his mother often treated him as. "Mother, she's in danger. It's very bad. I'm going to find her and I'm going to rip apart every motherfucking piece of shit who dared to touch her."

He sighed, waiting for his mother to comment on his language. She liked to blame his time in America for his mouth. His mother made a choked sound and he realized she

was crying. “I was right, wasn’t I?”

He didn’t respond because he didn’t understand the question.

“She sent me a picture of her newest sculpture, Corbin,” she said, growing quiet for a long moment. “When I saw it, I just knew. It’s you, darling. All of you. It’s why I pushed for a blind date. Deep down I knew she’s yours, son. Isn’t she?”

His gut churned. He wanted to say no and deny everything. After all, denial was what alpha males did best when presented with the reality of mates. “I think so. Yes. She is.”

His mother gasped and he knew for sure she was crying. “I’ll do what I can to keep Ellen and her husband off this for now. You make this right, Corbin.”

“I will.”

“Son?”

He swallowed hard. “Yes?”

“Be safe. And if she is yours, don’t let anything stop you from being with her. You rip every one of those bastards apart. Got it?”

“Yes, Mother.” He hung up, unable to talk more. His emotions were all over the place and he didn’t trust himself. Not after what had happened back at headquarters. When he’d finished gearing up with the men for the mission, he’d feared they’d do something stupid and lock him in a room to keep him from endangering anyone while they went off to try to help Mae. He’d been relieved when they’d all taken a location and handed him one as well.

Tipping his head, he thought harder on how easily they'd accepted his loss of control and how quickly they'd handed him a location. He was already over an hour from headquarters with only around twenty minutes left to his destination according to the navigational system. His men were a mix of mated and unmated, meaning they were more than familiar with the control issues often suffered by alpha males when their mates were in danger. And they'd always done their best isolate and minimize each other when one of their beasts got out of hand.

A mix of panic and fury assailed him as the realization of what they'd done washed over him. They'd guided him in the wrong direction on purpose.

"Bloody fools!" Corbin slammed on the brakes and steered off to the side of the road. No cars were in sight as far as the eye could see in any direction. His headlights were the only light that pierced the darkness as he threw his door open and rushed out, his adrenaline on overdrive. "They sent me off to get me out of the way."

He would have done the same thing if roles were reversed. That didn't mean he liked it one bit. Dragging his hands over his face, Corbin tried to keep his lion caged. His gums burned as his teeth began to change, morphing into the beast. He put his palms on the side of the SUV and shook his head, willing his beast to understand that if he didn't stay in control, they might never locate Mae.

"No," he pushed out from misshapen teeth, making it hard for him to speak.

His lion reared back and began its version of pacing deep within him. It wanted him to know it was there, at the ready, and if he didn't handle the matter, the beast would. His teeth returned to normal and he bent his head, closing his eyes, catching his breath and gathering his thoughts.

His mind went instantly to Mae. On her dark gaze meeting his from across the campus even for the briefest of seconds. He'd felt the connection then, but he hadn't

understood what it was. Who she was.

He closed his eyes tighter, his chest compressing, worry for her holding him in its firm grip. He shook and kept his head bent, knowing he needed to regain full control before he dare try to find her.

“Take a deep breath and then go to the location given to you,” he said to himself. “You might get lucky. She may be there.”

As the words left his mouth the strangest of sensations started deep in his gut. The urge to pull out the map he’d brought hit him hard. He obeyed it, going to the passenger side and opening the door, finding the map on the seat. He unfolded it and found his location with ease.

Help me.

Corbin tensed and turned in a partial circle, sure his mind had finally broken with the sound of the feminine voice in his head. He narrowed his gaze on his surroundings but saw no signs of life anywhere. He couldn’t smell anything out of the ordinary.

He traced his finger over the route on the map to the location given to him. If intel was correct, she might be there. As his finger settled on the spot, his gut churned more.

No. You’re going the wrong way.

This time, he was sure he’d heard a woman’s voice in his head. He did his best to follow the mental path, but came up empty his first few tries. Panic nearly won out, but hundreds of years of preparation and of being in control helped him to focus. He tried again, retracing the mental trail, following it, reaching out mystically with his mind. At first, he assumed he’d failed again. Then he smelled it.

Her scent.

It washed over him, letting him know it was Mae's voice he'd heard. She'd managed to connect to him mentally. As a mate should be able to.

Where are you? he returned down the same path, but she didn't respond.

His connection to her felt weak and he wondered if she was injured, drugged or both. His lion drew back more, as if sensing Corbin needed to concentrate fully without any interruptions.

Help me, she repeated, the fear in her voice nearly breaking him then and there.

Love, where are you? What do you see around you? What do you hear? Any detail you remember can help me find you.

He'd all but given up hope she'd reply when he felt her connection once more.

Ships. The horns they blow. I heard them when they first brought me in, but the walls here are thick. I don't hear it now that I'm inside , she returned softly, her words slightly slurred, and he felt it then on her—she was drugged.

He wanted to rip apart all who had dared to harm her. First he needed to find her. The coordinates he'd been given weren't near the water. They were in the opposite direction. She was right. He was going the wrong way. None of the locations his men were headed to were near the water.

I'm scared , she whispered down the path to him.

His heart broke. I know, love. I'm coming. Stay strong for me.

Is it morning yet? she asked, panic in her voice.

No , he returned. In a few hours.

She was quiet and he sensed her fear. Come morning they're going to try to breed me. They're going to use Brad. He doesn't want to hurt me. He's trapped here too. He won't be able to stop himself and he knows it. Hurry. Please.

Corbin's hands ached and he held them out as his shifter side showed itself, claws breaking free from his fingertips. I will kill anyone who touches you!

Hurry. Please.

I'm coming. Stay connected to me as long as you can.

She didn't reply. He hurried to the driver's side and had to struggle to get his hands to return to human form so he could drive. Mae!

She didn't respond.

Mae, love!

Nothing.

Corbin put the SUV in gear and hit the accelerator, going in the direction he felt she was in, not the one lined out for him in the navigation system. It began to try to correct his route by recalculating the destination. He struck out hard and fast, putting his hand through the dash, shutting it up as he kept going. Kept driving in the direction he now knew Mae to be.

His lion beat at him, making his head thick, which in turn slowed how fast he could

drive. Touching his chest, he did his best to stay the course. She needed him. She didn't need alpha male bullshit mucking it all up. Corbin hit the comm unit he and all his men wore.

"She's not where we thought," he said, touching it again. "Target is not at coordinates provided. I have a lead on her."

There was no response. His beast was riding his body high enough that he ripped his comm from his ear and threw it across the SUV. He'd find her himself. He'd save her. No one would touch her. White-knuckling the wheel, he drove, following the pull deep in his gut, trusting his instincts to lead him to her. He didn't give up on trying to reach out to her mentally again. She didn't respond, but that didn't mean he'd stop making the effort.

He remembered what Duke had been like when the bloodlust had taken hold of him, leaving him stuck in shifted form as he tried to kill anything that neared him. There had been a moment when Duke had thought Mercy was dead. It had sent him into that crazed state and the only one who had been able to bring him back was Mercy. The stunt, while earning Duke the Asshole of the Week Award that the men playfully gave one another, had scared the team. They'd worried they'd be left no choice but to cage Duke in his wolf form for eternity or to put him down, as he wasn't safe to others.

Fear crawled into the back of Corbin's mind. Would he lose control and need to be caged or killed? Would he go too far? Already he was struggling to stay in command of his own body. He could see himself getting lost to the lion's emotions, to the lion itself. He knew it then—he'd easily fall over the edge and into the abyss of bloodlust if Mae was harmed.

The self-revelation wasn't exactly causing the warm and fuzzies to spread through him. Rather, a newfound sense of panic took hold of him, doing nothing to help his

control issues.

“Get it together, Jones,” he said, glancing in the rearview mirror, instantly noting his eyes were that of his lion’s. “Or this is going to end poorly.”

Soon, he was able to smell the scents of the ocean, and the pull deep within intensified tenfold. He did a hard right and followed the pull, thrusting the accelerator to the floor as he did. When the feeling within him reached critical mass, Corbin whipped the SUV off the road and into an abandoned lot. Overpasses were close, the street lamps there providing only a small amount of illumination. He could hear the sounds of water and knew he was close to it. He also heard something else, the muffled sounds of men talking. He caught their scent and recognized it. They’d been at the university in the parking lot, near the black van.

“Can’t believe Caesar sent us out here to do a sweep of the area. I think he’s fucking cracking under Felix’s pressure,” said one man.

“I think he has the hots for that new number we brought in a couple of weeks back,” replied another man, setting Corbin’s teeth on edge. He held no doubt the man was referencing Mae. Every instinct in him said as much. The smart move would have been to slink away into the darkened area, locate the source of the voices, survey them and then find the best way to Mae.

Unfortunately, Corbin’s shifter side didn’t give a fuck about doing the smart thing. Lifting his hands, he glanced down as fur coated them once more. His upper arms thickened to the point his shirt tore and split, the sound was one of the last things he made full sense of.

He charged at the men, and when he came upon them the smell of their fear filled his nostrils, driving him onward. Each was a supernatural in their own right, yet they knew who the alpha was. Nature made sure they caught on to the fact right away.

Corbin roared, at one with his beast. He seized hold of one of the men's throats and lifted him high off the ground. Through partially shifted teeth and mouth, he spoke. "Where is she?"

The man beat at Corbin's forearm, fighting for air Corbin would not give him. The other man leapt on Corbin's back as if that would do anything to stop him. All it did was piss him off more. With a quick twist, Corbin flung the man free from his back and tossed the one he'd had by the throat as if he were nothing more than a ragdoll. He turned, focusing on the man nearest him now. This one had flaming red hair, cut close to his head, his beady green gaze narrowed on Corbin. A challenge flickered in the man's eyes.

If it was a fight the man was after, it was a fight he'd get. Corbin stalked towards him, closing the gap between them, knowing he looked like a monster. It took an enormous amount of control to cling to a form that was between man and fully shifted lion. For the moment, it felt as if he could hold the in-between form forever and a day.

"Where is Mae?" demanded Corbin once more, snapping his jaws at the man.

The redhead shook his head, holding up his hands before glancing to the side, a calculated smile curving his lips. Pain lanced Corbin's torso as the man he'd tossed moments before rammed a hunting knife into his side and tore downwards, ripping Corbin open. The wound was deep, but Corbin's burning desire to find his woman ran deeper.

Through eyes of the lion, he looked down at the knife sticking out from his side. Reason told him to leave it to avoid blood loss, but reason was no longer guiding his actions. Pure rage was. He plucked the knife free from his body without so much as flinching and stared at the man who had stabbed him. "Bad form. Was that supposed to stop me?"

The man wet himself.

They were all cowards.

Corbin threw the knife at him, hitting him between the eyes. He went down quickly, and Corbin knew he wouldn't be getting up again. He turned, only to find the redhead had run off.

Catching the coward's scent, he gave chase, following the man, the thrill of the hunt exciting his lion more and more. He sprang up and over a dump truck, vaulting it as if it wasn't even there. As he landed, he caught the redhead's scent again, this time stronger. Corbin pursued the man. The moment he came around the corner of another truck, he found additional men descending upon him. He made short work of several, but more kept coming.

They shot him full of darts, and while he knew what that meant—he was on borrowed time before he'd succumb to sleep—his lion didn't care. It had one focus—get to Mae. It pushed him onward. He fought with the men, slowing little by little as they shot him with more and more darts. Everything around him began to spin as he fell to one knee, still partially shifted.

“What the fuck does this guy eat for breakfast?” one shouted.

“I didn't think he was ever going down.”

“Load him in the truck. We'll take him to Felix.”

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 2:42 pm*

Mae came awake with a start and clutched her chest, her heart racing. There was a thumping from the other side of the room and it took her a moment to realize the noise was Brad at the window, hitting it. She fumbled for her glasses and put them on, bringing Brad into focus.

“Mae?” he asked, worry in his voice. “Are you okay?”

Confused, she glanced around and then took a calming breath when she realized she’d had a nightmare. “I had a bad dream. Woke up and turns out, I’m actually living a nightmare.”

Brad offered a warm look. “I understand. Want to talk about it?”

She put her feet on the cold floor, but stayed seated on the bed. Her heart was still going a mile a minute and she didn’t trust that she wouldn’t pass out if she stood too quickly. “There was a man in it.” She thought harder on her dream. It had been the blond man from campus. “Oddly enough, I dreamt of a guy I only saw briefly and from afar the night I was taken.”

Brad simply watched her from the window.

She continued, “He was searching for me. He knew I was being held against my will. But he was going the wrong way.”

Brad’s gaze narrowed. “What do you mean?”

“I don’t know. Just that I knew deep down he was trying to find me. That he was

really upset that I'd gone missing and that he blamed himself for some reason. And then it just felt like he was headed in the wrong direction. I called to him and in my dream, he answered in my head. He said I needed to stay strong for him, that he was coming. He also said he'd kill anyone who touched me. But I think something happened to him."

Brad exhaled slowly. "Have you had dreams in the past? Anything like this?"

"No."

"Tell me more of the man."

She stood and walked slowly towards the window. "I don't know him. I only saw him for a few minutes from afar. He just, well, I can't explain it. He sort of called to me from across campus. Weird, huh?"

Brad put his palm to the window once more. "Not weird in the least, Mae."

"Why would I dream of him searching for me? When I saw him he was dressed like a rich professor, but in my dream, he had on Special Forces gear." She tipped her head, thinking more on her bizarre dream.

Brad kept his hand pressed to the window. "I've been worried about you. I told you not to drink the water they brought after the guards changed shifts. It was laced with sedatives and other shit."

Mae had been so thirsty that she'd given in and drank it. She rubbed her throat. "I don't know why I'm so thirsty here."

"The drugs cause it," he said. "You get used to it."

Her heart ached for him, knowing he'd spent so much time as the captive of maniacs. "How are you sane? I wouldn't be in your shoes."

He met her gaze. "I was in grad school when I was taken. Before that, I was a frogman."

"Frogman?" she asked.

"Navy SEAL," he offered, a quirky grin spreading over his face. "When Vic and I decided to continue our education, we thought we'd put the most dangerous part of our lives behind us. We were wrong."

"Vic?" she questioned, wondering who the other man was.

"Fellow frogman, best buddy from childhood and guy who was snatched with me. There was a woman too at the time. Kimberly." He closed his eyes a moment. "I could hear her when we were first taken. I remember the guards then talking about taking Vic to try to breed her. That was the last I saw of either Vic or Kimberly. And that was months ago."

Her stomach clenched. "They're probably safe, right?"

He sighed. "I'd like to believe so, but history has shown me that the women held like this don't fare well." He closed his mouth and glanced away. "Some they manage to get knocked up. A few of those I've seen go to term and they die during delivery. Others die during the pregnancy. I haven't seen one woman they've bred make it past any of that. I'm sorry, Mae."

Mae stiffened, realizing he'd stopped talking because he'd confessed women like her died in this environment. He didn't want to scare her. Too late, she was already terrified. The longer she remained in the place, the more she began to realize how

warm her body was starting to feel. She also felt as if she may be sick at any moment. Bringing a hand to her forehead, she swiped, coming away with sweat.

Brad watched the act, his eyes widening. “Shit.”

“Brad?”

He sniffed the air and took a step back from the window. “They laced your food with fertility drugs, and if I’m right, aphrodisiacs. Way more than I’ve ever smelled them give another before.”

Mae swayed, her stomach cramping as she did. She leaned against the window. “I hurt.”

Brad eased closer to the window, looking hesitant, as if he feared he might actually be able to break through the thick glass between them and harm her. Maybe he could. She didn’t know. She wiped sweat from her neck and he watched the act as if it were soft-core porn.

“I shouldn’t have drank the water,” she said, cramping more.

“Look at me,” he said.

She did.

“Focus on me and just breathe.” He touched the glass. “Relax.”

She was burning up from the inside out and he wanted her to relax? Was he insane? All she wanted to do was crawl on the floor and submit to anyone at the moment who was willing to take her. The thought scared her. She sank to the floor, no longer able to see Brad through the window. She drew her legs up, her knees going to her chest

as she began to shake uncontrollably. It took her a moment to realize Brad was humming near the vent, much like she'd done when he'd been on the verge of losing control.

Oddly, it helped.

Closing her eyes, she thought first of her sculpture and then of the man with the long blond hair. The more she concentrated on him, his face, every detail she could recall, the more her body heated as if it wanted him to be who fulfilled its need, not some random person.

Crying out, she thrashed.

Brad hit the window. "Mae, look at me. Please. If you keep yelling they'll come in and they'll know this is the best moment to try to breed you."

She managed to look at him through the pain. She just wanted to wake up back in her dorm room, laughing with Alice about how blessed her sculpture was. This was all a horrible nightmare that she couldn't seem to wake from.

The door to her cell opened and she glanced up, hoping Caesar was there to help her. It wasn't him. It was one of the other men. Brad slammed against the window, yelling and carrying on to no avail as the man came straight for Mae.

He laughed as he bent, raking his gaze over her. "A bitch in heat."

She glared at him and shook more, the pain unbearable.

He touched her leg, running his hand up it, and the pain intensified. Screaming, she kicked out at him, trying to get his hands off her. He caught hold of her ankle and then leaned in and slapped her face, knocking her glasses from her. They scattered to

the floor.

“Leave her the fuck alone!” shouted Brad. “You piece of shit!”

The man with Mae sneered and touched his belt loop. “They want you bred, bitch. I got a dick. Seems to me, you need what I got.”

Something built deep in her and the pain increased tenfold. The urge to lay her hands on the man was so strong she couldn’t have ignored it if she tried. She did and at the same moment she began to sing, her focus on the man. She could almost feel herself directing the sound at him and no one else. The minute the words left her mouth he jerked. Snatching out, she caught his upper arm, and the moment her palm met his skin he shrieked, ripping his arm back. The smell of sizzling flesh filled the room, making her nauseous.

“You burned me, bitch!” he yelled, standing and then drawing back a foot, kicking her in the midriff so hard that she lifted off the floor. The air left her lungs with a swoosh, pain holding her so tight she couldn’t manage a scream and she certainly couldn’t sing—not that it would do much good with as little control as she had over it.

“Denis, what the hell are you doing in here?” a man asked. She didn’t recognize his voice. “Her chart clearly states no unmated males are to be in this wing. Why is she on the floor like that? What is that smell? Smells like someone held a barbecue in here.”

“Fucking cunt is in heat,” snapped Denis, kicking her again. “And she burned me!”

“Whoa, dial it down,” said the other, dragging Denis back. A handsome man bent, his green gaze finding her. He reached out to touch her cheek and then stopped as she whimpered more. “Shit. She’s having an allergic reaction to something given to her.

Get one of the doctors!”

“That bitch burned me!” yelled Denis. “I’m going to cut her up and teach her how to behave for a man.”

“Go!”

“Fuck you, Ezra,” Denis ranted. “You aren’t my boss. You aren’t mated. Neither is Caesar, so how come the two of you can be by her? Huh? Keeping her all for yourselves?”

Ezra stayed near Mae, avoiding making contact with her but she got the sense he was keeping his rather large frame between her and Denis. “Denis, you’re a simple man. That much I get, so ask yourself—would Felix want your lowbred spunk in her? She’s a big money item. Think of what he’ll do when he learns what you were going to do.”

Denis stopped ranting and lowered his voice, “I wasn’t going to touch her.”

“Bullshit!” yelled Brad, pacing the other cell, looking crazed. “He was going to force himself on her.”

Denis snarled. “I’ll deal with you later, asshole.”

“Yeah, I’d like to see you fucking try,” snapped Brad. “I’m not a defenseless young woman. I’ll hand you your ass.”

“Enough,” countered Ezra. He brought a hand near Mae’s forehead. “Can I touch you?”

“I hurt,” she managed.

He sighed. "I know. Your skin is pale. Too pale. Sweat is dripping off you and I smell something is wrong. I think your body is rejecting what the doctors are administering to you."

"The bitch burned me," said Denis. "No one told me she had the power to burn."

She didn't have the power to burn. Did she? What had they done to her?

She locked gazes with Ezra. "Please make the pain stop."

A radio crackled and Denis turned, speaking on a handheld to someone. "Shit. We have a problem. Some shifter guy breeched the perimeter. They managed to sedate him but he's a badass. They need more hands to help."

"Go," said Ezra. "I'll handle her."

Denis approached and grinned. "Gonna fuck her yourself?"

Ezra was quiet a moment before smiling. "Yes. That is my plan. Go help the others and give me privacy."

Brad hit the window more. His shouts and rants combined into inaudible noises and growls.

Denis left and Mae cried, the pain still great, her fear even greater. Ezra bent and put his hands up. "Shh, no, I said what I did to get him to go. I'm not with them, hon."

"You look pretty fucking with them to me," said Brad harshly, seeming to pull himself together at least briefly.

Ezra glanced over his shoulder. "There are bigger things at work here. I won't hurt

her. Caesar called me in when he was pulled away on another matter. He didn't want Mae unprotected here."

Brad calmed somewhat.

Mae touched Ezra lightly. "Hot. I'm so hot and thirsty."

"I know. You need medical treatment. You, wolf," he said to Brad. "Calm yourself and allow me to see to it that Mae is cared for."

"Hurt her and I will find a way free of this room," warned Brad.

Bending, Ezra scooped her up in his arms and walked her out of the cell, down several halls and into a large room with medical equipment and cells with clear walls. Ezra set her on a bed that wasn't in a cell and touched her forehead. He stepped away and when he returned he had a bag of something in one hand. Mae didn't fight him as he stuck a needle in her arm and hooked her to the bag of fluid, hanging it on a hook at the top of the bed.

He vanished for a moment more and then returned, taking her vitals. She blinked through the haze around her, her head heavy, her body hot, and her vision blurry as her glasses were back in her cell.

He smiled softly and winked. "I sent Denis to find a doctor, knowing they're all off site right now."

She glanced at the IV drip and back at him, wondering how he'd managed that with ease.

He grinned again. "I've been through medical school more times than I can remember. And beyond that, I've had field medic training. Even without medical

school I could have handled an IV. I'm going to give you something to help you sleep and I'll be here to monitor you. Caesar is working with our contacts outside of here. We're trying to get you all released."

She touched his hand, closing her eyes. As she drifted off, she could have sworn she heard Alice's voice. It was faraway and pissed. That couldn't be. Alice was at school, probably worried about her. She wasn't in this hellhole.

*Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 2:42 pm*

Striker entered headquarters and placed his hand on the scanner just inside the entrance. A second set of doors opened as his biometrics were read. He'd never understood all the new technologies. Just when he thought he had a handle on them, they up and changed. Sadly, he was quicker to embrace technology than most of the men he knew. Duke still hadn't welcomed the advent of the cell phone and computers. Striker welcomed them both. They helped to alleviate some of the loneliness that came from living so long. He'd seen nations rise and fall. He'd fought in more wars than he could count and he'd lost too many people to even begin to hazard a guess at the overall count. To the others he might appear to joke and laugh, but inside all of it took its toll on him and his soul. There were days he had to reach for anything good he could to simply roll out of bed.

His teammates were his something good. His something to look forward to. Recently, three of them had found mates. And the odds were in Corbin's favor that he'd found his now too. Striker didn't dare to hope he had a mate out there. He wouldn't be able to take the blow when it didn't happen. For now, it was better he simply continue on his path, find laughter in all he could and when he was able, drink his worries away in several pints of ale and a few bottles of whiskey.

It was the Highlander way of it for him.

The doors to headquarters slid shut behind him and he took a long breath, worry over Corbin still gripping him. He'd been out of contact far too long for Striker's liking. It wasn't like Corbin. By now he'd have figured out they sent him on a wild goose chase. And he'd be pissed enough to let them all know. He wouldn't fall out of contact.

Their search of the possible locations of the women being held for auction had yielded nothing. When the team had met at the predestinated rendezvous point, Corbin had been a no show.

They'd tried the channel they'd told him they'd operate on, but had gotten no response. Laney had been attempting to reach James the entire mission to alert him that she and Mercy had heard Corbin put out a call on his frequency, letting them know the locations were bogus, but there had been an issue with their communication gear. None could be reached.

Fucking traitors. Someone had tampered with their equipment.

PSI had rogues in its midst, and if they didn't weed out the no good sons-of-bitches, and soon, more people would die. He'd have to bury more of his brothers-in-arms. They were as close to him as his family back home. Though, most of his friends at PSI were not nearly as rowdy as the McCracken clan. To his blood family, Striker was one of the more reserved males.

He nearly laughed at that.

He'd barely taken four steps when the elevators across the lobby opened. He set his tactical bag on the floor as Duke and Malik stepped out of the elevator, each looking more worried than the other. It was Duke who spoke first, "No signs of Corbin on campus?"

"No," said Striker. He'd gone over the campus, trying to catch Corbin's scent. He'd even asked students about his captain, flashing a picture he'd taken of Corbin on his phone after an explosion in the lab at headquarters had left Corbin's hair tinted pink. No one had seen him in the last day. It wasn't as if the pink hair would keep them from knowing it was him. After all, Striker had asked females. He didn't know one female who didn't think Corbin resembled a male underwear model. They'd have

remembered him if he was around.

Malik rubbed the back of his head. "This isn't good."

"No. It's not any fucking good," confirmed Duke with his normal finesse.

"I thought he'd return here," said Malik. He'd known Corbin the longest. He and Brit had a strange friendship that the other men didn't question.

Striker nodded. "Aye, I assumed as much too. No one on that campus has seen him tonight. Several women said they saw him there two weeks back. And I couldnae find any scent of him there recently, so I believe them. Interestin' thing though, I did find out that both Mae and her roommate went missing the same night. The people I spoke to all thought the two took off on a mini-vacation. They said it's common for the roommate, Alice something or other, to do so."

Malik narrowed his gaze. "Either the roommate had something to do with Mae's abduction or she was killed when Mae was taken. You know how those assholes like to cover their tracks. We found how many dead bodies associated with the last ring we broke up? They eliminate anyone and anything that stands between them and money."

"I was in their dorm. There are pictures of them all over. I brought some with me." He pulled one from his tactical bag and handed it to Malik. The picture had two very beautiful women, arm in arm, each holding mustaches on a stick out in the air, smiling wide. "My gut tells me the redhead dinnae betray the other. I think they're both supernaturals, at least from what I could smell. And from what the women who lived next to them said, they were like sisters. Thick as thieves type."

Malik stared at the picture and said nothing.

“She’s probably dead,” said Duke, ever the ray of sunshine.

“Or she was taken too.”

Duke grimaced. “Did you find anything else?”

Striker bent and pulled out a statue. He handed it to Duke.

Duke’s brows shot up at the sight of it. “Why the fuck do you have a naked statue of Corbin?”

That caught Malik’s attention. He took the statue from Duke, his head tipping to one side as he surveyed it. “Amazing how accurate it is.”

Striker blinked. “I do nae look at his junk long enough to memorize it when we’re shiftin’ or in the shower room. It’s disturbin’ to think you do. You look at mine that much? Yer a fine-lookin’ male, but I do nae swing that way.”

Malik grunted. “I meant the rest of him and his lion. Look at how detailed it all is. Remarkable. Whoever did this is very talented and has a keen eye. Was this in the girls’ dorm as well?”

“No,” said Striker, taking it from Malik. “The neighbors told me Mae is an art major. They said she spends most of her time sculptin’. I found that buildin’ and broke in to have a look around. I dinnae know if maybe Corbin caught her scent near there or nae. I found this, but no trace of the Brit.”

Duke took a deep breath. “James called in. No sign of Corbin at his home either. Not that any of us really thought he’d go there, but we had to rule it out.”

“He’s been out of touch too long,” said Malik, voicing Striker’s very same concern.

“Not like him at all.”

No. It wasn't. Striker merely stared at his teammates. He didn't want to voice his biggest fear—that he might have lost another friend, another man he considered a brother. For several tense moments, no one said anything, each fearing the same thing.

Malik eyed Striker. “You feeling all right? You've had no witty remarks about hot college girls. You just spent hours on a campus full of co-eds. This is not like you. Are you dying?”

“Och, I'm nae dying.” Striker handed the statue to Duke, who took it reluctantly before Striker reached into his shirt pocket and withdrew a handful of scrap papers. Each had a number scrawled on it. As Malik grabbed one and unfolded it, a number appeared. There were phone numbers on all the papers. Striker lifted his shirtsleeves, showing numbers written all over his arms in pen, some permanent. Some had explicit promises on what the women would do when he phoned. He had to admit, some of the young women were quite imaginative. Had his concern not been with Corbin, he might have taken them up on the offers. He was in need of a good fuck, but that would have to wait.

With a grin he lifted his shirt, removing it from the front of his pants, showing off even more numbers all over his torso. “They've signed other places too, but I do nae think you want to see those spots.”

Malik shook his head. “Sadly, this is more what I was expecting from you.”

“I got numbers for you too,” said Striker, wagging his brows. “But nae Duke since he's mated. Ball and chains probably do nae like that.”

Duke groaned.

He held an arm towards Malik. "Take yer pick. They're eager for an alpha male to rock their worlds. I do nae think they'll mind if yer nae Scottish." He frowned, thinking upon his time on the campus. "Three of them thought I was French. Do they nae teach young people anythin' anymore? French? I do nae sound French."

Growling, Duke mumbled something about the French. Striker didn't ask for details. He knew Duke's thoughts on the country. He wasn't a fan.

Malik hid a laugh behind a cough. "Striker, you should take to the internet about that later. Point out the difference and all. The failing of an entire generation educationally."

"Guid idea," said Striker, puffing his chest. "My advice column is a big hit."

"You're a fucking dumbass," snapped Duke. No surprise there. Duke was always in a foul mood. That was part of what Striker liked about the man. And no matter what mood Duke was in, he was loyal. All the men on the team were.

"Thanks."

Malik grinned and then glanced at the elevator as it opened and Boomer appeared, worry on the man's face. "What?"

"Laney got a hit on Corbin's SUV location. The readings are all over the place, but she's managed to narrow the area somewhat for us. Either Corbin is driving around like a crazy maniac, going in circles and everything else, or someone is trying to throw us off his actual location." Boomer held out a small sticky note. "It's nowhere near where we sent him."

Striker handed the statue to Duke and took the note and whistled low, through his teeth. Boomer was correct. The location was a good three hours from where they'd

sent Corbin. It was a lead all the same. That meant something. “I love lowjackin’. We’ve got him.”

“Assuming Corbin is with the SUV,” said Malik, glancing at the note. “Captain wouldn’t waste time driving in circles. He’s far too organized for that.”

Boomer did a double take at the statue in Duke’s hand. “Something I should know? I’ve always suspected you had a thing for Corbin, but to go so far as to get a naked likeness of him, well, Duke, that is a bit much. Does Mercy know about this fetish of yours?”

“Fuck you,” snapped Duke.

Boomer ran a hand through his long hair. Striker couldn’t be sure, but Boomer may have taken a few of his earrings out. Haven, his mate, was certainly calming the man down. “The question begs, if Corbin isn’t with the SUV, where is he and what happened to him?”

Duke glanced at Striker. “Bring extra weapons and load up on tranqs just in case we find him and he’s suffering the same fate you and I did.”

“You mean the ‘curse of the mated male’ fate? Already done,” said Striker. “I get to shoot him with them, right? Payback for his people and my country and all.”

Malik touched Striker’s shoulder. “You really need to let that go.”

“They may take our land,” started Striker, drawing a round of groans from his teammates. He grinned. “Do nae take that tone about the great William Wallace. There is nae a lycan from the motherland that does nae view him as a hero.”

“Your obsession with the man is troublesome,” added Malik. “Are you going to get a

statue of him made?”

The idea had merit. He'd have to look into it. He'd want a life-sized one to honor the man.

Boomer motioned to Striker's pants. They were part of his tactical gear. “At least he's not in a kilt today. Big step for him. We should take our wins where we can.”

Duke reached out and tapped the strip of plaid that Striker had tied around his upper arm. Wearing his clan's colors made him feel whole. “But he brought a piece of his dress with him.”

“Och, 'tis nae a dress, dickhead.”

Duke smirked, his expression saying he more than understood that a kilt was not a dress. “Too easy.”

“Word,” added Boomer, taking the note back from Striker. “How are we playing this? Do we all go?”

Duke shook his head. “No. I'm not leaving the women here unattended. Not with the tampered equipment we found tonight. James is headed back here. I'll have him pick up Haven and bring her here with us. He can help me keep an eye on the women. You, Malik and Striker can check out this location. There are comm units in the back of my SUV that aren't PSI issue. Take them and stay in contact.”

Boomer tipped his head. “Might want to let James know that Scar is roaming the sanctuary freely. He's a great guard kitty.”

Malik's eyes widened. “You let that panther loose? Around your woman?”

Boomer owned and operated a huge animal rescue, and it specialized in exotic animals. Scar was a panther who had only recently come to reside there. Scar wasn't a shifter but was severely abused by humans, leaving him scared and angry. He'd been seriously injured not long back and Striker had been there when Boomer had offered his own blood to speed the animal's recovery.

Duke grunted. "What about Li'l Duke?"

Striker hid his smile as he heard his friend ask about the well-being of a chimpanzee that had been a lab animal that now resided at the sanctuary. The chimp was into cross-dressing, and because of his foul mood when they'd first met him, he'd been given the name Li'l Duke. His namesake tried to pretend he couldn't stand the little guy but all knew better.

"Li'l Duke is fine. He and Scar get along great." Boomer grinned. "That cat loves Haven. He'd eat anyone who got near her. Sometimes I swear he looks at me like I'm lunch. Whenever Haven is cross with me, Scar licks his lips like this is his moment—this is when I become a giant cat chew toy."

"Fucking cats," said Duke. "Malik, alert James about Scar. Boomer, call Haven and have her ready for James."

Striker eyed his longtime friend. "Yer sexy when yer barkin' orders."

Duke growled.

Boomer shook his head. "If Striker tries to kiss you, I'm not saving him from your wrath. Just don't go making statues of him."

Malik smiled. "Gentlemen, focus. We're not getting to this location before first light and I don't even want to think upon what we might find when we do get there."

“Aye, possibly a lion runnin’ through the city streets makin’ snacks of the mornin’ commuters.” Striker was only partially joking.

Malik tipped his head to the side. “Or he’s fallen into the enemy’s hands.”

No one wanted to think hard on that. It wouldn’t be Corbin’s first time being held captive. All the men had suffered a similar fate in their lives. Some more than once.

## Page 10

*Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 2:42 pm*

The sound of Ezra's voice pulled Mae from her sleep. She opened her eyes, but without her glasses it was hard for her to make out much. Her body wasn't wracked with pain, so whatever he'd given her was helping. The thirst was better. Not gone but better.

"Bring him in here!" shouted Ezra.

She vaguely made out Ezra's shape and that of several other men. Squinting, she realized one of the men had another person over his shoulder as if the person was a sack of potatoes. It took Mae a moment to realize the person was a man because of all the long blond hair. Hair she'd seen before.

No. It couldn't be the man from campus.

Could it?

She blinked again, trying hard to focus with no luck.

The hair obscured the man's face. His wrists were bound with thick silver chains as were his ankles. He was shirtless but had on military-style pants and boots. The man holding him glanced over the top of the blond's head as he heaved him onto the floor rather unceremoniously. The blond didn't move, making Mae wonder if he was still alive. His mass of hair continued to cover his face. It took all of her to remain in place and not go to the man.

Ezra bent, checking the blond's vitals. His gaze went to the guard. "How much did you shoot him up with?"

The other man shrugged. “I don’t know. A lot. He killed a couple of us. Took another eight of us to subdue him and he was only partially shifted. We had to wait until his body reformed fully to chain him. I’ve never seen anything like it. Kept going on about wanting to know where some woman was. I forget the chick’s name—it was a month or something—whatever it was, he was pissed and driven.”

Ezra motioned to the men. “Go. I’ve got it from here.”

“Denis says there are no doctors on duty tonight. Something about them being offsite. Might as well throw this one in a cell. When he comes to, he’s going to be pissed.”

“I’ll put him in a holding cell in here and then check him over to be sure he’s in prime condition for sale,” said Ezra. “After all, Felix loves to sell male shifters, doesn’t he?”

“Yeah, but I don’t think the infirmary holding rooms can handle this one,” said the other man. “He’s a piece of work, and if he breaks free, he’ll rip that female to shreds or fuck her to death. The only shit we had on hand were the tranqs with the sex meds in them. He’ll wake up horny and pissed.”

“I’ll see to it he’s no threat,” said Ezra. “I’ll alert Caesar that we have another item to sell. He’ll see to it the website is updated.”

“I don’t know. Maybe we should call Felix in about this one.”

“By all means, notify him,” said Ezra. “By my calculations, he is at home because daylight is almost on us, probably with several women and men draped over him as he fucks and sucks them. But yes, call and interrupt his feeding to let him know we have another shifter to auction off.”

The other cleared his throat, sounding nervous. “No. I’m good. You keep the asshole

in here. I have to check on the redhead. She bit another guy and kicked him so hard in the balls he may never have use of his dick again.”

“Put her in Mae’s cell,” said Ezra, bending over the blond on the floor again.

“You want to move her?” asked the other. “She scares me.”

Ezra laughed. “Tell her I said to go without fighting. She’ll listen.”

“If you say so, man. Bitch is crazy.” He left, and Ezra picked up the blond man with so much ease that Mae gasped. He carried him to the bed next to Mae. Much to her shock, Ezra undid the man’s shackles, freeing him and casting the chains aside.

Mae wasn’t so sure she wanted someone who scared the bad guys next to her. What if he woke up and did as the other predicted? What if he tore her to bits, or worse yet, forced himself on her?

Ezra turned to Mae. “Shh, I can sense your worry. This man is no threat to you. I know him well. That being said, when he wakes, be still until he realizes where he is, okay?”

She nodded and whimpered as her stomach cramped.

Ezra grabbed a cool compress and put it to her forehead. “I know it hurts. Your body is cycling through the toxins. These fools were giving you way too much and didn’t even seem to notice the signs that you were having a reaction to it.”

She caught his hand. “Thank you.”

“Mae, you should know that Caesar is working to coordinate an extraction. There is another facility run by Felix. Just like this one and not too far from here. Caesar and I

have to make sure the strike happens at the same time, or the other facility will issue a terminate protocol. That means everyone being held there and here will be killed if there isn't time to get them all out. We were planning to launch this in several days, but it's become clear it has to happen now."

She gasped. "I understand."

"You're safe in here, with him," said Ezra. "My guess is, anyone who tries to harm you while he's around won't have enough left of them to identify later."

"I don't know him," she said, squinting. "I mean, I don't think I've seen him before. He kind of looks like a man I saw once, but I don't know. I need my glasses."

"I'll grab them for you. I have to reach out to Caesar and check on a few things here. I'll be back within an hour. I'm going to override the door locks, which means no one should be able to get in, but also, no one is getting out." With that, he left the room, leaving her with the blond.

Mae stared hard at the man in the bed next to her. He was out cold on his stomach. His body, while not moving, still screamed powerful. There wasn't a spot on him that wasn't honed muscle. And there was a certain air of danger there—like he could and would still be a threat to all around him, it didn't matter if he was awake or not. He was also spectacular. She couldn't tear her gaze from him, a warmth spreading through her midsection, confusing her at first until she realized she was turned on by him.

Not the time. Not the place.

She gulped as the heat returned.

It took her a minute to be able to sit up. When she did, the room spun. She didn't dare

move until it stopped. When it did, she grabbed the pole with the bag of fluid hanging on it, and used it to help steady herself as she stood. The bottoms of her feet hurt as they made contact with the floor.

She whimpered, and the blond man stirred.

There was a long gash on his left torso that looked to be healing over and there were a multitude of bruises on his body. He had to be very tall judging by how he almost overflowed the bed. The urge to touch him was great. She let her hand hover just above his skin, fearful the drugs she'd been given were causing her strange pull to the man. She'd not wanted to jump Brad's bones. But the blond guy she wanted to leap upon and have her way with him.

She couldn't tear her gaze from his form. His upper body was stunning, and that was seeing it through a haze without her glasses. She could only imagine the rest of him was too. With as many art classes as she'd taken that had an emphasis on the human form, she'd seen many people nude before, but this man was unlike any she'd ever seen. Unable to help herself, Mae skimmed her fingers over his cloth-covered thigh lightly, heat instantly searing her skin, making her jerk her hand away.

Would she burn him too like she had the guard?

The more she looked at his side and the wound there, the more her chest ached for him. She glanced around, knowing there had to be something in the giant room that could aid him, but she wasn't much assistance beyond rinsing out a paper cut.

Her breath caught as the man stirred again, rising somewhat on his forearms, his long hair still covering his face. He groaned and then his upper body stiffened, his groan turning into a deep growl. Mae eased back from him rapidly, heeding Ezra's warning.

He roared loudly, coming up and off the bed as if attached to strings. He went down

hard on the other side of the bed, but didn't sound deterred. "I'll rip your bloody heads off!"

British?

She'd always been a sucker for a guy with an accent. She shook her head. Still not the time or the place for her hormones to behave poorly.

"Where is she? If you place one hand upon her, I will be your end. Mark my words."

Mae made a move to go for him, but realized she was hooked to the bag of fluid. Without thought, she pulled the IV from her arm and made her way around the other bed slowly, keeping one hand on it to support herself as she did. She found the blond on the floor, half propped up, facing the floor.

He froze and then sniffed the air loud enough for her to hear it clearly. "Mae!"

He knew her name?

She had yet to get a good view of anything more than his back and his injured side, but she didn't think she knew him. He tried to push off the floor, but fell again, his damaged side ripping open and bleeding more. Yelping at the sight of him hurting himself in an obvious attempt to locate her, she moved towards him, tripping on the long gown. She fell on him ungracefully. Heat flared through her as she did. She feared she'd hurt him.

The next she knew, he was turned under her, holding her to him in a death clasp, his face buried in the crook of her neck, her body sprawled out on his. It was hard to ignore just how hard the man was all over. For a split second they were nothing more than a mass of tangled hair and limbs.

Finally, he grasped her upper arms gently.

She lifted her head slowly, able to see him now that he was this close to her. Her mouth dropped open. It was the man from campus. The hunk she'd been attracted to.

The man you sculpted.

The man she'd dreamed was coming to help her.

Warmth rushed over her, stealing her breath, her body suddenly pliable against his. He certainly was tall and that was a bonus. At five-eight she wasn't short for a woman and this man managed to be longer than her.

Confusion coated his expression as he looked up at her. "Mae?"

"Yes." Her palms went to his steely chest. She didn't push off him. Didn't question how he knew who she was. She just touched him, the warmth continuing. "I dreamt of you."

His lips twitched and he nodded. "Love, you reached out mentally to me. You let me know I was looking in the wrong location for you."

"What?" she questioned. The feel of his chest was amazing. She couldn't seem to stop touching him. As she continued to run her fingers over it, she smiled. "It's exactly how I sculpted it."

He quirked a brow. "Come again?"

"Wow."

"Are you hurt?" he asked, his voice deep.

She just stared at him, unable to think much beyond how close he was. As her fingers eased over his injured side, her breath caught. “You’re the one who is hurt.”

He caught her hand in his and the heat intensified. She locked gazes with him, totally freaked out and excited, all at once. Her statue guy was real and he’d come for her. He was even better in the flesh. She’d not done the man justice in the sculpture. He looked her over, his gaze searing through her.

“I am slightly battered, but fine, Mae. I need to know if you are injured in any fashion.”

She shook her head. “Scared, but not hurt. I don’t feel great. They gave me something that I’m allergic to.”

His hand moved to the cheek where Denis had struck her. The man’s jaw hardened. “Who hit you?”

She dipped her head somewhat. “I’m okay. It doesn’t hurt anymore.”

He ran his thumb over her cheek and stopped at her lip which was nearly all healed over. “I’m sorry.”

She just watched him. What did he have to be sorry for?

The edges of his entirely too kissable looking lips eased upwards. “I should have gone to you the minute I smelled you.”

Had he hit his head or something? Was he crazy? “Excuse me, but what?”

“On campus,” he said.

She blushed. “You remember seeing me on campus?”

“I haven’t been able to get you out of my mind,” he returned, making no move to push her from his body. “I was drawn to you then. I shouldn’t have ignored the pull. I should have gone to you. I could have prevented this.”

She grunted. “No. The jerk who stood me up could have prevented it. Not you. Whoever you are.”

The blond cringed and cast a soft look in her direction. “Mae, it’s me, Corbin.”

Corbin?

Her mind raced and she panted. “The guy who stood me up?”

He winced. “Yes.”

Mae pushed up and off him much faster than her body, still fighting off the effects of all the drugs, could handle. She swayed and the room spun wildly. Suddenly, Corbin was standing as well, yanking her against his powerful frame, steadying her. “Easy, love.”

She felt as if she’d just gotten off a carnival ride. For a moment, she dreaded she’d be sick. The closer Corbin held her to him, the more her stomach eased. She rested her forehead against his shoulder and let him hold her. “You never showed. I waited over an hour.”

He tensed, still holding her. “I’m so unbelievably sorry, Mae.”

She felt it deep down that he meant every word he said. Another thought occurred to her. “I sculpted the same guy my mother insisted I go on a date with?”

He touched her chin, lifting her face so that their gazes met. Confusion knit his brow.

She licked her lips. “I like to sculpt things and paint. I’ve been working for weeks on a sculpture of a man I thought I made up. I didn’t think you were real.”

“I’m real,” he said, caressing her cheek lightly. “I’m sorry I didn’t stay for our date.”

“Why did you leave?” she asked, unable to tear her gaze from his face. Did the man realize how handsome he was?

He cringed. “Part of it was work-related, but another was catching your scent.”

She pursed her lips, not following his train of thought.

He sighed, still stroking her cheek. “I arrived on campus, and I was headed to where we agreed to meet. Then I caught your scent. It did something to me. I know this is no excuse, but from the minute I smelled you, I wanted only you. No other.”

“So you bailed on me?” she asked, totally lost.

“I didn’t know you were you, Mae. I assumed you were already at the Union. My mind didn’t even consider you were my date. You were simply the woman in the yellow dress whose scent drove me mad.”

Her scent did that to him?

She blinked up at him. “If you’d have bothered to show for our date, you’d have figured out I was me.” Saying it felt silly, but necessary.

He scowled. “I know. Trust me. That is all I’ve thought about since learning you and the woman in the yellow dress are one in the same and that you’d been taken. The

night of our date, I was called to work. I had to leave the country and I was gone for nearly two weeks. Mae, I need you to know, if I had it to do all over again, I'd change every action I made."

She stared at him. "I'd have refused to be fixed up by my mother."

Corbin tensed. "Mae? You don't feel a pull to me?"

"Oh, I do, but I'm pretty sure it's the drugs talking," she said, easing back from him slightly. "I'd have told my mom no when she pushed me to go out with you. Sorry, but I'm not interested in a man who skips out on dates."

Corbin winced and took her hands in his. "You said you sculpted me."

"I did."

He locked gazes with her. "Before the drugs were introduced to your system?"

Crap. She really wanted to tell herself it was just the drugs making her want to jump the man's bones. With a groan, she closed her eyes. "Great. My dream guy is a douchebag. Hot and with a great accent, but a douche all the same."

"Mae, has anyone explained mates to you?" he asked, drawing her attention back to him.

"I know about mates. Why?"

He simply watched her as if waiting for her to answer her own question. As she thought harder on it all, her eyes widened and she yanked her hands free from his. "No way! We're not. We can't be. Our mothers forced us to go on a blind date that, if you'll recall, you didn't bother following through with."

“I swear to you, I will spend eternity making up for that with you,” he said, inching closer to her. “For now, will you just let me hold you a moment? I need to know you’re okay and then I’m getting you out of here.”

“You can’t get me out. Not yet,” she said, wanting to be held, but refusing to go to him fully. She was still angry he’d bailed on her. It was childish considering the man had somehow managed to find her after she’d been taken by crazy people, but still, her pride was wounded. “People are working to get me out, but they need to coordinate it so no one else being held gets hurt or killed.”

Corbin eyed her and then tensed, touching his side lightly.

Mae’s anger with him faded quickly. “That looks bad. We should clean it or something.”

“It will heal. Whatever they gave me is slowing my natural ability to heal, and I can’t be certain, but I feel much warmer than normal.” His blue gaze zeroed in on her, raking over her slowly. “And other things.”

She felt the heat rising off him and knew what it was. Drug-induced desire. “Corbin, the one guard said they shot you full of the same stuff they’ve been using on all of us. But that they had to give you a whole lot of it. I don’t know a ton about it, but from what I do know, it makes you desire certain things.”

His nostrils flared. “I desire you.”

She yelped.

His eyelids fluttered. “Your smell, Mae, it drives me mad.”

She didn’t feel like herself either, but she wasn’t sniffing the air like a wild man. He

was. She held up her hands. “Okay, take it easy there, big guy.”

He blatantly adjusted his cock and she realized just how big a guy he really was. She also became very aware of the fact the drugs were still in her system. Her mouth watered and she found it hard to tear her gaze from his hand. As she did, she couldn’t look away from the start of sandy blond hair that poked out from the top of his waistline. The deep V-cut of his hip muscles made her feel a little weak in the knees. She touched the back of her neck, positive she’d burst into flames if she kept staring at the man.

Corbin sniffed the air louder this time. “Mae, I can smell your desire.”

“Yes.” It wasn’t the most brilliant response she’d ever had, but it was all she could manage. Didn’t anyone have a shirt they could cover the man with? Maybe a cardboard box? Something? Anything? She was going to burn up if he didn’t cover his upper body and soon. His lower body too at this rate.

He eased closer, coming into focus more for her without her glasses on. That only served to make her want him more. Heat thrummed through her, centering in her groin. She half feared her lady parts would attack the man. If they were able to separate from her, they might very well have done just that.

He put his fingers into her hair, his palms on her cheeks. His lips were so close that she wanted to sample them. His lips met hers and her mind shut off. The moment his tongue found hers, she whimpered and began to rub her body against his as they kissed. She’d been kissed before, but it hadn’t been like this.

This was amazing.

Moaning, she ran her hand down him and stopped when she touched his injured side. The idea of making out with him in a place they were being held prisoner, while he

was injured, seemed wrong. She broke the kiss and he tried to continue it.

“Corbin,” she said softly. “You’re hurt and we need to be ready to go when the extraction thing happens.”

“Extraction thing?” he questioned, his lips looking entirely too kissable for her willpower at the moment.

“Yes,” she said, staring at his mouth.

He pushed her hair behind her ears. “If you know how much I wanted to be buried deep in you right now, you’d run to the other side of the room.”

She nearly sighed at the sound of his accented voice. It only increased his hotness factor. Not that he needed any help. As she thought harder on what he’d said, she swallowed hard, pink staining her upper neck and cheeks. “Oh.”

He cupped her cheek and she closed her eyes, happy for the contact with him. She tipped her head, resting her face on his palm as she squeezed his other hand. Mae couldn’t stop herself as she started to cry, so happy to no longer be alone in the ordeal that she couldn’t contain herself.

Corbin held her against his very hard frame, his long, powerful arms wrapping around her as he held her to him, her head on his shoulder. He rocked her in place, rubbing her arms. “You’re warm. Too warm.”

“Ezra brought me in here to help stop it,” she said through her tears. “When I woke up, I felt better. But when I touch you there is heat again. I didn’t know shifters could do that.”

“We can’t,” he said. “But I’ve been told it happens between mates.”

She jerked. “I’m not Denis’s mate!”

“Denis?” he asked, his voice deepening.

“The guy I burned. I didn’t mean to burn him. I don’t even think I did it, but he said I did,” she muttered, lowering her gaze.

Corbin exhaled slowly. “Was this Denis trying to hurt you?”

She nodded.

“Then I’m glad you burned him, Mae.”

“But I didn’t. Did I?”

“My guess is you did.”

She eyed him. “Then am I making it hot between us?”

“I think it has more to do with mates than that,” he said. He’d mentioned mates before. She knew what mates were. Any self-respecting supernatural did. What she couldn’t understand was why touching Corbin would cause the heat?

As she thought harder on it, she gasped, her eyes widening. “No!”

He kept hold of her. Had he not, she might very well have leapt away from him and run. “Yes.”

“No,” she repeated.

“I’m close to taking offense,” he mocked.

“No way. No.”

“This is because I stood you up, isn’t it?” he asked, humor in his voice.

Mae stared up at him. “No way.”

He touched her lower lip. “Love, I’m going to get you out of here and then I’m going to prove to you that I’m right.”

Her mind raced with the implications and she gasped. “I sculpted you before I ever even saw you.”

“Because we’re mates,” he said softly.

“You’re saying my mother set me up on a blind date with a guy who just happened to be my mate?” she asked, lifting a brow but staying close to him. He felt too good to move away from.

Corbin groaned. “Trust me when I say, my mother will tell me she knew it all along and I’ll never hear the end of it.”

She couldn’t help but giggle. “Your mother is amazing, but I can picture her saying it.”

“That’s right, you’ve met her. I forgot she told me that,” he said. “I should apologize for her then. I’m sure she overstepped her bounds. It’s what she does.”

“She’s lovely,” said Mae. “She is always so encouraging of my art. I even sent her a piece and a picture of my current one. She’s great. But she is hoping for grandchildren.”

Corbin jerked her against him. His long, thick erection was pressed against her low stomach. “I very much want to give her them.”

Mae nearly bolted from his grasp.

He laughed. “Mae, I’m not going to tear your clothes off. I want to, but I won’t.”

She thought about him doing just that and found her body heating at the idea.

He sniffed the air. “I can smell your desire. If you want me to stay true to my word, please try to control your lust. One of us needs to, and ever since you came into my life, I’ve had no control whatsoever.”

She looked him over, her mouth watering.

He touched her chin, lifting her gaze to his handsome face. “Mae.”

“You look like a male model.”

He sighed.

She squinted and lifted his long hair. “Is it me or is there light pink on your tips?”

Groaning, he rubbed his forehead. “It’s not you.”

“My mate has pink tips?”

His gaze locked on her and she realized that she’d just acknowledged him as her mate. Gulping, she released his hair and tried to step away. He shook his head, invading her space, causing cream to flood the apex of her thighs. He yanked her to him and suddenly his mouth was on hers and she was powerless to stop him.

Not that she wanted to.

As she realized how much she was willing to hand herself over to the man with her, she found herself humming softly as their kiss continued. The more she hummed, the more intense the kiss became.

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Struggling to keep hold of his lion, Corbin broke the kiss with Mae, his entire body wanting to devour her. She bit at her lower lip, the softest of hums coming from her. She reached for him, her hum intensifying—the sound the single most beautiful thing he'd ever heard.

His lion roared deep inside him, wanting out. It wanted him to bite the woman, sink his teeth into her and forever mark her as his. Corbin wanted it too, but he wouldn't do that. He wouldn't just take her choices from her and thrust himself upon her in such a manner. He'd always been in control of every situation. Always able to hold it together no matter. This would be no different.

He'd simply stop desiring her to such a degree.

The idea was almost laughable. Simply being near her intensified his burning ache for her. Each time their skin-connected, heat raced through him, centering in his groin. She had asked if it was a shifter thing. It was not. It was a mated-pair thing.

Her deep brown eyes stared up at him and he sensed the drain the entire ordeal had taken upon her. Dark circles were under her eyes and he knew she'd not had the sleep she needed. She'd lost weight since he'd last seen her and that was simply unacceptable to him. He'd get her free from the facility and he'd see to her needs.

All of them.

Then he'd claim her.

Right now he needed to assess the situation. Get the lay of the room. Prepare his

defenses. He needed to get her out of the place and to safety.

“Mae,” he said, whatever meds were in him making him feel as if he might catch fire without her. “Please, love. I have to get you out of here.”

Her hum turned into the softest of songs. He smelled hints of Fae then and something else. Something so alluring that he nearly whipped his cock out and started to jerk off then and there. He knew then he wasn’t going to win the battle on being a gentleman.

“Corbin, please,” begged Mae, coming closer to him, the smell of Fae stronger than before. “I hurt and I know you hurt. We could make the hurt stop. Together.”

He’d been so on edge since she’d come into his life. Every second a struggle with his beast. He couldn’t hurt her. That was the one thing he would never permit to happen, and taking her in this state, with the drugs in his system, he could harm her. “Love, once we’re free, I will know every inch of you. Mark my words.”

Her bottom lip trembled and he was positive Fae magik was around them. At first he wondered if one was near, on the payroll for the enemy, and then it hit him—the magik was leaking off Mae. She seemed unaware of it. “I can feel how much you hurt. Let me help you.”

She was attuned to him, as a mate should be.

He backed away from her more as his body tensed, the urge to seize hold of her and fuck her until she understood she was his was strong. For a split second, everything around him blurred as the drugs in his system nearly claimed him. He staggered back, his fear of harming her winning out over the needs of his dick. She was precious. He would not take her like this. He would not risk her.

She swayed and touched her upper chest, her cheeks flushing. “Corbin,” she

whispered, and then began to sing softly again. It wasn't words so much as it was perfectly placed notes. Each one increased the desire in him, making him want to do the unthinkable and tear her dress from her before he thrust her against the wall and rammed himself into her. He wanted to sink his teeth into her flesh as he emptied himself in her, leaving no room for error—she was his.

The things he wanted to do to her.

His cock twitched with excitement at the idea of not only claiming her pussy but at knowing what her ass would feel like around him too. He could almost feel it, holding him there as he released and his body shook.

He growled, the sound of her song washing over him more. It clouded his ability to think of anything beyond taking her any way he could, and maybe some ways he couldn't.

Focus, Jones.

His ears rang as his cock jerked painfully. Reaching up, Corbin held his head, trying to reason out what was happening. What was sending him over the edge of reason and into the abyss of a mindless fucking machine? Whatever they'd given him was slowing his natural healing ability, but he was still healing and that meant he was also cycling through the meds. Why was the urge to fuck a hole clean through his mate growing to epic proportions when it should have been cooling to some degree? What had changed?

Mae.

She was singing.

He sniffed the air again, the smell of Fae still strong. He concentrated on the other

scent. The one he couldn't identify. His mind raced with possibilities and when he landed on siren, he froze.

It couldn't be.

Could it?

Was his mate part siren?

Lifting his hands, Corbin watched in horror as he yet again lost control and fur began to sprout on them. He shook and fell as he tried to back away from her. His body wasn't healed from his injury and was already in a weakened state. The drugs in his system and now Mae's song were too much.

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Mae blinked, her head feeling a bit foggy as she focused on the room around her as best she could without her glasses on. What had happened? She spotted Corbin's form on the floor. His blue eyes were wide and his upper body seemed even bigger than it had been.

She realized she was singing and snapped her mouth shut at once, fearful she'd done something to harm him. Had she driven him mad too? Was he now a broken man?

"Oh gods, no! Corbin." She moved to him fast against his protests.

His skin was on fire, sweat beading on it. Something was wrong with him. Very wrong.

"N-no," he managed. "Don't touch me."

"You're hurt."

"Run," he said barely above a harsh whisper. "Not safe to be around."

She touched his brow, wiping away sweat that was about to go into his eyes. "You won't hurt me, Corbin. Deep down I know that."

His teeth clenched and his body strained. The sight of him in so much pain made her tear up. What had they given him? He shook his head as she tried to touch him again. "No."

"I told you that you won't hurt me," she pressed.

He looked away for a few moments before looking at her, his gaze dead serious. “I want to fuck you until you scream my name. Until you beg me to stop. Until you carry my child.” He cursed softly and then snarled, his entire body trembling from his obvious attempts to restrain whatever was happening.

It hit her then, he was already drugged up and she’d lost control and sung to him. He wasn’t insane or broken like so many were when she did such a thing—he was horny. His pain was happening because he wanted to keep her safe from his sexual advances. She’d already had a soft spot for him; this just made it bigger. Knowing he was going through this much agony for her made her chest tingle and warmth spread through it. In addition, it made her rethink her stance on clinging to her virginity. Every instinct in her told her to hand herself over to Corbin, that he wouldn’t hurt her, that he’d make love to her, and even though they were in a horrible situation, being with him would be glorious.

“Corbin, let me help you.”

“No. Did you hear what I want to do to you?”

“I did.” She sighed. “I don’t think I’m a screamer, but who knows.” She wanted to make him smile. It didn’t work.

He convulsed and she moved closer to him, pushing on his shoulder, rolling him onto his back with ease. For a moment she felt his pain as if were her own and the tears broke free from her. She had it in her to help him. Deep down she knew it to be true. She skimmed a hand over his torso, wiping through the sheen of sweat coating his every muscle.

Corbin caught her wrist and shook his head. It took her a moment to realize his hands were misshapen. Without her glasses on she’d not seen it before, but there it was. He was starting to shift forms.

Reason said she should run.

Her heart said stay. That he needed her. She locked gazes with him and then bent over him, putting her face close to his, her lips brushing his. She was about to tell him to allow her to assist, but when his hands went into her hair and his lips crashed into hers, she knew he'd lost his ability to fight what was happening to him. She surrendered to his kiss, opening her mouth to him, his tongue finding hers. Fireworks seemed to explode behind her eyelids as she kissed him.

Her body warmed to the idea of having more from him. Before she knew it, her hands were roaming freely over his torso and inching lower as she slid up and over him, straddling him. His hot, hard erection pressed against his pants and in turn, against her mound. Mae gasped in Corbin's mouth as his kiss turned into an act of sex all on its own.

He broke the kiss, keeping his lips near hers, his hands clamping down on the sides of her head, and she knew he was straining to keep from going too far. "Mae, no."

"You don't want me?" she asked, slightly hurt.

"Bloody hell, woman, I'm fighting the urge to claim you. Do you understand what that means?"

She'd have been offended if her own traitorous body didn't crave the man under her. "You're hurting and I can help you." She blushed. "I just don't know what to do to help. I've never been with a man before."

Corbin tossed his head back and slammed his hands down on the floor. "Off. Mae, off."

"No. I can help. Tell me how to help."

He closed his eyes tight, keeping his hands off her, his body jerking under her. Her hips seemed to have a mind of their own as they began to swivel on him. His erect shaft rubbed against her mound and pleasure pulsed through her. Corbin reacted to the movement as well, so Mae continued, moving on him, drawing pleasure from the situation as well. She gave in to the need to taste his flesh by bending, kissing his neck first. The salty taste of his sweat coated her tongue, driving her onward as she licked a line over his collarbone.

Corbin gasped and went ramrod stiff beneath her. She kept going, licking her way down lower, moving her body down him as she did. Before she knew it, she was settled between his legs, her face at groin level to him. She licked the start of sandy blondish-brown hairs that started above his waistband. His cock twitched under the material of the pants and Mae decided to do something bold. She undid them and then tugged his waistband down, his long, thick cock springing out at her, bobbing there before her face.

She'd seen many a penis in her life-study classes. None had been erect. And none had been this close. They'd all been circumcised males. Corbin was not.

Fascinating.

The artistic side of her took hold and she found herself touching his cock, running her hands up and down it, feeling the velvety smoothness. Fascinated by every vein and ridge, she moved in closer, her vision better at that distance. The urge to taste him hit her hard and she gave in. The second her tongue darted over the top of his thick, long, hot, cock, he roared, and it would have scared her had she not been so captivated by the sight and taste of his dick.

She eased her mouth over the top of his erection and looked up to find him staring down at her, complete shock and awe on his handsome face. She ran one hand over his hip as she used the other to stroke the base of his cock. The total length of him

was too much to take fully into her mouth, so she worked what remained with her hand as she eased her head up and down on him. His dick was so hot she worried he'd burst.

Mae's body continued to warm as she sucked on him. Moisture pooled between her legs and she found everything on her body to be hypersensitive. Alice had spoken often of giving head and she never made it sound like something the woman gained much pleasure from. Maybe Mae was doing it wrong, because knowing she was exciting Corbin in turn excited her. She wanted to please him. Wanted to ease his pain.

She increased her pace, taking him to the back of her throat and fighting her natural gag reflex. He snarled and suddenly his hands were in her hair, drawing her off his cock. Seed erupted from the tip, splashing up and onto his torso. The sight of it turned her on more and she surprised even herself when she wiped a finger through it and brought it to her lips, tasting it. It was bitter and salty, yet she wanted to bend and lick the remainder of it from him.

Corbin jerked under her and ejaculated more. "M-Mae."

She met his gaze. "Do you hurt less?"

The way his body was still stiff and the expression on his face said he was still in a great deal of pain.

The sight broke her heart. "Did I do it wrong?"

"Love, you were brilliant."

She eyed him. "But you still hurt."

“I’ll be...fine.”

She didn’t believe him. “Corbin, tell me how to help you.”

“I won’t take your virginity here, like this. Thank you for what you did for me,” he said, trying to sit up, his body strained, semen on his torso.

Heat flared through Mae at the sight of his muscles straining and coated in his seed. She ran her gaze down him and was shocked to see his cock was still hard. Alice had told her once a man ejaculated they wouldn’t be ready to have sex again for a while. Corbin seemed very ready.

“If you could refrain from looking at my cock in such a manner,” he said, the British gentleman side of him poking through somewhat.

Mae bit her lower lip. “I can’t help it. It’s amazing. I’ve never seen one that was uncut before. And I’ve never seen one this big.”

His expression hardened. “Whose cock have you seen?”

“I didn’t catch their names,” she confessed, touching his cock once more.

He caught her wrist, his hands no longer in partial shifted form. “Their names? As in you’ve seen multiple cocks?”

She nodded, her focus on his manhood and tasting it again.

The next she knew, she was under Corbin, his long, hard body riding her, his knee pushing her legs apart. He stared down at her, looking almost animal like. “You said you’re a virgin.”

“I am,” she whispered, her hand going to his jawline. “But I study art. I have several classes that concentrate on nude forms. Men model for me all the time.”

His nostrils flared. He took hold of the top of her gown and yanked it down, exposing her breasts to him. Mae gasped as Corbin bent, his mouth moving over a nipple. He cupped her other breast, his hand covering it fully as he sucked sweetly on her. Pleasure radiated throughout her before centering in her groin. She bucked under him, wanting what he was offering and more.

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Corbin eased down her, hiking her dress more and more. The scent of her sex spurred him on. Mae opened her legs for him and he couldn't look away from her pink pussy. Her sweet scent filled his head and Corbin's eyelids fluttered, his cock hard and wanting to spear the sweet pink paradise before him. He had to taste her. He bent, putting his face close to her mound. It had the smallest strip of hair there, as if guiding him to the point of pleasure.

Corbin managed to control himself enough to touch her swollen clit tenderly, rubbing it, making her jerk under his expert touch. Mae was so very responsive to his touch that it drove him onward. He gained pleasure by giving to her. With great care, he inserted a finger into her tight, wet entrance, breaking through the barrier there. She cried out, her legs drawing in, his shoulders blocking her from being able to close them all the way.

Corbin licked her clit and pushed his finger in deeper, the walls of her pussy clenching on him. The slight smell of blood filled him. If she was this tight and only his finger was in her, she'd never be able to take his cock. He licked her swollen bud, adding his thumb to the area. He rubbed lightly and she twitched under him, making his cock do the same.

Mae moaned and clamped her legs tighter on him. He drew in the scent of her cunt and let it burn into his brain. Everything about her was sheer perfection. He'd never tasted anything so divine.

He rubbed more and added licks, fucking her with his finger all the while. She stiffened and then cried out, her legs shaking. He nodded, continuing to finger her. "Love, let go. Come for me."

And she did.

She exploded and Corbin kissed her inner thigh, his lion suddenly rising, beating at him, wanting free. He thought himself strong enough to contain it, but as he felt his gums burn, he knew better. His first instinct was to scramble off Mae and put distance between them. That wasn't what happened. He eased up and over her, his mouth burning with the change. He lined up with her entrance, his gaze finding hers.

She bucked under him, causing the head of his cock to enter her just a bit. He nearly came then and there. Mae grabbed at his shoulders. "I burn. Please."

Unable to deny her, Corbin pushed in more, her pussy so tight around his cock he wasn't sure he could go any deeper. Mae cried out and thrust up hard against him, driving herself onto his cock more. Corbin went ramrod stiff, afraid to move. If he did, he'd come. He clenched his jaw as she rotated her hips under him, clearly eager for more than he was giving.

She tugged at his shoulders. "Don't stop."

"Mae," he managed through a partially shifted mouth.

"Corbin, please," she said in a sing-song voice a second before she began to hum. Corbin was powerless to stop himself then.

Giving in, he rooted there and she wrapped her legs around his waist, holding him there as every muscle in his body strained to hold onto control. He wasn't sure if he'd shift forms or come.

Maybe both.

He didn't want to do either.

He wanted to enjoy every second of being in her. Of being one with his mate.

My mate , he thought as his lion unfurled more, pushing upwards, demanding he do more. It wanted him to mark her. To claim her.

Fuck.

He wanted it too.

He pounded into her, his cock spearing her again and again. She was heaven to him. Molding to fit him with precision. Corbin's nails lengthened, his lion winning out more and more. He struggled, pounding into Mae, needing release and soon. She tipped her head to the side at the very moment his lion roared inside him.

Claim her!

"Mine," he managed, though the word was barely recognizable due to his teeth.

"Yes," she whispered. "Yours."

The smell of her cream drove him over the edge. He buried his cock deep in her, his balls drawing up a second before he began to jet seed into her, filling her completely. He pressed his mouth to her shoulder and bit, her blood coating his tongue at once.

She clung to him, her nails digging into his upper arms as his cock continued to pulse, spurting seed into her. Mae's hands found his hair and she held him to her shoulder as her pussy milked his cock.

"Mine," she whispered back. The second the word left her, power flared between them. Corbin gulped, releasing her shoulder, his mouth reforming quickly, his cock still nestled in her. For a moment, he thought they'd fused. That their entire bodies

had melted into one another. As the reality of what had happened hit him, he froze.

She looked up at him, her cheeks flushed and her lips swollen. Well-sated and thoroughly claimed.

The burning need to fuck lessened inside of him and he strongly suspected it was because he'd spent his seed in her. That and he'd claimed her, making his beast happy, but causing his stomach to tighten with worry.

She'd hate him.

He hated himself.

He'd done this when he should have been getting her out of the facility, away from harm. Instead, he'd been weak. He closed his eyes and withdrew from her.

She gazed up at him through tear-filled eyes, making his heart shatter. He'd hurt her.

"Mae, I'm sorry."

Confusion coated her face. "Sorry?"

"I hurt you. I took you on the floor like an animal when I should have been focused on escaping with you."

Lazily, she touched his cheek, the edges of her lips curving upwards. "Do shut up, Corbin."

He did, his eyes widening.

She grinned, looking so sexy that he wanted to fall upon her and fuck her again. "We

should get off this floor and be ready for the escape to start, but if you dare act like you regret this, I will claw your eyes out.”

“Wait? You don’t regret this?”

“You were shutting up, remember?” she asked, with a wink.

He tucked himself into his pants and then stood, bringing Mae with him gently. He righted her gown as best he could and realized she was not only full of his seed but wearing it as well. She also bore his mark—his claim.

She was his wife.

He dragged her against him and held her, shaking slightly as the reality of it all sank in. He kissed the top of her head. “I know I’m to be quiet now, but love, I need to get us out of here.”

“I know,” she said, touching his chest. “But don’t do anything stupid. I didn’t used to think you were real. Now that I know who you are, I’d like to keep you in one piece.”

He snickered. “Yes, dear.”

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“Go.” Corbin released her and then pointed to the other side of the infirmary. He wanted her safe and away from the entrance should his plan go south. He couldn’t wait any longer for an extraction. His gut told him they were on borrowed time as it was. He’d not risk Mae.

She nodded and did as he instructed. He turned and began to take inventory of their surroundings. Something, that as a trained soldier, he should have done the minute he woke there. His cock had guided his actions. It was time for his head to do so now.

There was a clanking noise and then a rancid smell filled the room. He twisted to find Mae near a long counter with various vials of liquid on it. One vial was now on the floor, broken open, sizzling.

Mae’s lips pursed into a thin line and her brows quirked upward. “Sorry. I didn’t see it there.”

He remembered her in glasses then the night he’d seen her on campus. “Love, try not to blow us up, okay?”

She shrugged. “I’ll do my best. No promises. I’m clumsy. Amazing I haven’t broken my own neck in here yet today.”

He didn’t bother to hide his smile. His wife was funny on top of being beautiful and clearly brave. She’d survived two weeks of being held by the enemy and hadn’t broken. She was a strong woman—albeit one who couldn’t see very well at the moment.

Corbin sniffed the air once more, making sure the chemical on the floor wasn't one that would cause harm to anyone if inhaled. He was satisfied it was safe and set his attention upon the door. It didn't open. Not that he expected it would. He tried to pry it open but it held firm. He even attempted to override the access panel to no avail.

A thought occurred to him and he looked back to find Mae touching various vials on the counter near her. Good gods, did the woman have a death wish? Who knew what the scientists here were working on? His mate could blow herself up if she wasn't careful.

He covered the distance to her quickly and lifted her, causing her to gasp. He set her on the bed and stared at her. "Sit here. Touch nothing."

"I was just wondering what they all were," she said, her voice making his body warm. He wanted her again, but it wasn't the time for that. He needed to get her to safety. "I was hoping to find something that would help your wound."

Corbin glanced at his side, all but forgetting he'd been hurt. It was healed over for the most part, the scar ugly and fresh looking. It would fade away in days. He took Mae's hand and brought it to his side, wondering just how bad her vision was without her glasses. "I'm fine, love."

"Wow, I thought you said what they gave you slowed your healing."

"It has."

She blinked. "And you've healed over that much already?"

He kissed the tip of her nose. "Sit tight. I beg of you. The vial you knocked over has something corrosive in it. Had that spilled on you—" He shuddered at the thought. "I can't handle anything happening to you. I'm hanging on by a thread as it is. I need

you to listen to me. Please.”

She huffed. “I’ll sit here and be good.”

“Thank you.”

Corbin moved in the direction of the long counter full of liquids. He searched for one that smelled and looked the same as the one on the floor. When he found it, he lifted it carefully and went for the door. He poured it over the access panel and then grabbed a pole used to hang IV bags and rammed it into the melting mess. The door popped open in the center, but didn’t open all the way.

He used the pole to pry it open enough to get his hands in. Once he did, he drew upon his strength and yanked hard. The doors gave way enough to be able to get Mae and himself through, one by one. He turned and put his hand out to his mate, before realizing she probably couldn’t see the action from across the room.

He didn’t want her trying to come to him on her own if her vision was off. He went to her instead, taking her hand in his. “Time to go, love.”

She tugged on his hand. “In case this goes sideways, thank you for coming for me. And thank you for helping take away the pain. Our first date has been interesting, to say the least.”

He stiffened. He’d learned enough of the Fae to know some had the ability to sense impending danger. Could she, and if so, did she sense her own demise? Panic assailed him and he had to fight to temper it. He shook slightly as he held her hand in his. Unable to help himself, he bent, his lips claiming hers, needing to know she was alive and well. When he broke the kiss, he stared down at her. “Stay behind me, love.”

He was about to say more but he heard men approaching. “Guards are coming.”

She gasped. “Lie down and I’ll lay the chains on your wrists and ankles. They won’t know you’re undone.”

He admired her creative thinking, but that wouldn’t work. The guards would see the door was pried open and they’d know she wasn’t strong enough to do it. He lifted his mate and ran with her to one of the glass cells to the side in the infirmary that seemed to double as a lab. He’d seen cells like them before and knew they were sturdy. He selected the one closest to the entrance of the infirmary, but off to the right. If he was right, and he hoped he was, the glass that was there was built to withstand a supernatural trying to break free from it and that meant, it was bullet proof.

He placed Mae on her feet within the small cell and stepped out, into the open area of the infirmary, shutting the door to her cell, but not locking it. She stared wide-eyed at him, shock on her face. “Mae, stay there.”

“Why put me in here?”

He sighed. “Love, its safest for you there. I’m right here. I just need to be sure you’re safe and well while I deal with the threat coming.”

Corbin twisted and put his back to the clear cell wall, hoping the guards would enter the infirmary to see what had happened and not just start firing weapons through the pried open doors. The men’s chatter ended and one stepped into the open area of the infirmary, weapon drawn.

Corbin disarmed him with ease and struck him in the back of the head with the butt of his weapon. He made a move to grab the other guard through the opening, but the man reared back and punched an alarm on the wall before aiming at Corbin. Sirens went off and white lights flashed through the building. Every guard in the place would respond.

Ducking back, Corbin stayed out of the line of fire, but the counter full of chemicals towards the back of the large infirmary, was not as lucky. Vials broke and smoke filled the room, the fumes causing his eyes, nose and throat to burn. He'd seen enough lab accidents lately back at headquarters to know how dangerous fumes could be. They filled the entire area, flooding the adjacent cells as well. He didn't care about himself. His only worry was his mate.

Mae!

Corbin ran at the cell he'd put her in for safekeeping. He could barely see his hand before his face with all the fumes and smoke and knew she wouldn't be able to see anything. The sound of gunfire increased and Corbin strongly suspected more than one guard was now in the laboratory. A bullet whizzed past his head, narrowly missing him, but going right at the cell Mae was in. He heard the impact of it against the glass and the ricochet. Additional gunfire sounded around him, all aimed in his direction as he fumbled for the door to the cell. He knew the guards were just laying down fire, unsure where he was with all the fumes and smoke. The problem was, their attempt to cover the room in bullets meant they were also firing at Mae. Even though she was behind glass that didn't mean she was safe.

As the sound of the cell glass cracking filled Corbin's head, fear gripped him. The glass door gave way under his touch, shattering to the floor. Corbin leapt into the cell. "Mae!"

He couldn't find her; the smoke was too thick. It choked him and he stumbled forward, his arms out as he searched frantically for his mate. "M-Mae!"

No response.

He took another step forward, his boot connecting with something, causing him to nearly trip. When he realized it was a body, his lion surged, wanting up. He bent,

touching the lump on the floor. He felt it then and realized it was indeed his woman.

His wife.

And she wasn't moving.

He smelled blood and everything on him shut off. He knew he wouldn't be able to hold off his lion and he didn't care. They'd done this to his mate. They'd hurt her. They'd die.

With a roar he stood and spun, stepping through the broken glass, his focus on the guards in the large infirmary with him. He let his lion up. Let it take control and he lunged at them.

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*Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 2:42 pm*

Brad paced the cell, his body on edge. They'd taken Mae hours ago and he'd not seen anyone since. He'd seen many women come and go since he'd been taken. For a while he'd desensitized himself from it all, but Mae had changed that for him. He felt a strange friendship forming with her. It wasn't sexual, but he did care about her and her well-being.

He heard footsteps and then smelled one of the guards. He smelled something else too. Strawberries and mint? What a strange combination. His wolf took notice of the scent as well, wanting to know the source.

Brad looked through the display window into Mae's cell as the door to her room opened. It wasn't Mae who entered. A leggy redhead staggered in, turning to glare at the guard near her.

"Hey, I told you that Ezra said to bring you to this cell," the man said. "Stop looking at me like you want to rip my nuts off."

"Oh, I do," she snapped, her voice making Brad's cock stir. "I want to spoon feed them to you, asshole."

The guard nodded. "I know. Crazy bitch."

He shut the cell door and the woman folded her arms under her large breasts.

"Dick!"

Brad grinned, liking her fire.

She looked around the cell and froze when she turned to see the window between the cells. Her brows met. “Who are you?”

“Brad. And you?”

“Alice,” she said, glancing around the room more. Gasping, she ran to the bed and bent. When she stood she had Mae’s glasses in her hand. Her gaze snapped to him. “Who was in here before me?”

“That is Mae’s cell,” he said softly. “They took her hours ago. She was having a reaction to the drugs they’re giving us.”

Alice shook, clutching the glasses in one hand, looking much more vulnerable than she had when she’d first arrived. “They have Mae too?”

“You know her?” he asked.

“She’s my best friend,” answered Alice, the fight seeming to leave her. She sank to the floor and sat, holding the glasses to her chest. “She’s so innocent and always forgetting things. She’s not a fighter. She can’t handle this.”

Brad didn’t point out that not many people could handle it. Another thought hit him. “How long have you been here?”

She didn’t respond at first, when she finally did, she sounded tired. “At this facility, just today. I was at a different one for a couple of weeks. I think. Time is hard to keep without a clock.”

He knew what she meant.

She kept going, “They said I was too difficult to deal with at the other place. They

brought me here. Something about it being higher security or something. Oh gods, they've had Mae this whole time, haven't they?"

Brad's chest tightened at the sound of her grief. "She's been here just over two weeks. She mentioned being taken the night of a blind date."

Alice gasped and met his gaze. "I was taken then too."

The door to the room Alice was in opened and Ezra entered. Brad couldn't help but feel a spark of jealousy at the way Alice's body relaxed at the sight of the man. "They have my friend Mae."

Ezra nodded. "I know."

"Why didn't you tell me?" she demanded, holding Mae's glasses to her chest as though they were precious. "You came with me from the other place and you never once mentioned they have my best friend too?"

He sighed. "I only just found out this morning. I didn't know that two of you were taken from the same location. That information wasn't presented to me prior. She's fine, Alice. I promise."

"Did they force her to breed?" asked Alice, her face paling. "Like they threatened to do to me?"

Ezra snorted and Brad punched the window, flipping the man off. It was no laughing matter. Ezra shook his head. "Relax, wolf. I'm only laughing because any man who tries to get near Alice has been very sorry."

Brad wasn't sure he bought the beautiful creature in the cell next to him was capable of more than a harsh verbal tongue lashing, but this was the second guard to reference

her piss and vinegar.

Alice shrugged nonchalantly. “I told them they weren’t touching me. They should have listened.”

“Not sure the one you went at this morning will ever have use of his manhood again,” said Ezra with a grin.

Alice smiled, looking very proud of herself. “Good. Asshole should know it’s wrong to touch a woman who doesn’t want to be touched. Now every time his dick doesn’t work, he’ll remember why that is.”

Brad liked her. A lot.

Ezra held his hand out. “Mae needs her glasses. She’s resting now and I made sure to leave someone with her who will keep her safe.”

Alice stiffened, her gaze narrowing. “This Caesar guy you’re working with?”

“The fact you were able to read my thoughts before I figured it out and started blocking you is unnerving,” said Ezra. “And to answer your question, no. Caesar isn’t with her. He’s not checked in with me yet. He should have.”

“You think something happened to him, don’t you?”

Ezra offered a curt nod. “I have to say you’re one of the few people in my long life who can do that—who can read me. I’m not really a fan of it.”

Alice shrugged again as if it was no big deal. “Never met a guy who could shift into a dragon. Hell, I didn’t think dragons were ever real.”

“Most people assume werewolves aren’t real,” replied Ezra. “And I think Brad would be the first to dispute that claim.”

“I’m a lycan,” he said, posturing. He wasn’t bitten, dammit. There was a difference.

Ezra glanced at him. “You’re a hell of a lot more than just a lycan now after the Corporation got their hands on you and you know it.”

“The Corporation?” he asked and then stepped back. “The people who took me to start with?”

Ezra spoke, “I was planted with them, in one of their German facilities to start with. It became clear I was needed on this end more.”

Alice stepped closer to Ezra and handed him the glasses. “Tell Brad about the Shadow Agent Ops thing.”

Groaning, Ezra eyed her. “Announce it to everyone, why don’t you, little succubus?”

She was a succubus?

She looked him over. “Like he’s going to tell them. He wants them dead as much as me. Maybe more.”

Ezra stared in Brad’s direction. “I’m guessing much, much more, Alice. Brad has been held against his will nearly a year, at least from what I can tell by his paper trail.”

Brad touched the glass. “Do you know about Vic or Kimberly?”

Ezra glanced at the door and then back to the window. “Vic is still being held by the

Corporation. They have him buried deep in one of the black sites. I suspect they intended the same for you, but you were liberated from their holding station.”

Liberated?

One bad situation to another was more like it. And odds were, he’d be auctioned off to the fucking Corporation and end up right back where he started from. “I’m not going back.”

“Didn’t think you’d want to,” said Ezra.

“Kimberly?” he asked, needing to know about his friend.

“Kimberly has been free for months. That is all I know. I’ve been in too deep to keep up on it all.”

Exhaling, Brad put his head against the glass. Kimberly was safe. Good. At least one of them had made it out. He looked to Ezra. “Get Mae and Alice out of here no matter the cost. Use me as a diversion if need be. I want them safe.”

“You don’t even know me,” snapped Alice. “Why would you sacrifice yourself for me? Are you stupid?”

“I still want you safe.”

Ezra stood tall. “I want all of you safe.”

Brad didn’t bother to get his hopes up. They’d been dashed far too many times in the past to bother and his spirit couldn’t take another letdown.

The door to Mae’s cell opened and another of the guards appeared. “Ezra, we have a

problem. Something is happening at the other facility. Felix has given the green light on Operation Red.”

As Ezra tensed, Brad knew what Operation Red was. It was the call to eliminate all the prisoners. He’d heard the term used before. Ezra nodded and held a hand up. “Go to the main room. I’ll be there in a minute. I’ll deal with these two myself.”

The guard left and Ezra grabbed Alice’s arm. “Alice, you need to listen to Brad. Caesar isn’t responding to my calls, and with what Felix ordered, I know something bad has happened to him.” He looked to Brad. “Alice, I’m going to trust Brad to get you out of here.”

She stiffened.

Ezra kept his gaze on Brad. “I’m unlocking you. Can I trust you with her?”

“I’m not leaving this place without Mae,” said Alice, her stubbornness showing.

Ezra held her firmly. “An operative I trust is with her. I need to get there and make sure he’s come out of the drugs given to him before any of these assholes decide to start the killings with him. The two of you need to get out. If Felix has Caesar, he’ll find a way to break him. It’s what he does. Caesar is strong, but not that strong.”

Brad moved to the door of his cell and waited. It opened and Ezra was there, holding Alice. He thrust the woman at Brad. “Take her and go.”

Alice huffed.

Ezra snatched the glasses from her hand. “Mae will need these.”

“I’m not leaving without my friend,” pressed Alice, her temper showing.

Brad and Ezra locked gazes and there was no question of what had to be done. If Brad didn't get Alice out of the place, she'd be killed. He wasn't going to allow that to happen. Bending, he grabbed her and flung her over his shoulder, the smell of her washing over him, exciting his shifter side as well as the man.

She shouted and hit at his back with her tiny fists. "Put me down!"

He swatted her backside and she yelped. "Silence, woman. I'm getting you out of here."

Ezra nodded and then pointed in the opposite direction. "Left, right and then two lefts. An exit is there. I have a safe house not far from here." He gave the address and then cast a worried look at Alice.

"Copy that," said Brad, moving quickly with Alice over his shoulder. He wasn't far when sirens went off, hurting his sensitive hearing. He winced and had to set Alice down for a moment to gather his bearings. He feared she might run or try to rip his nuts off too.

She eased closer to him. "Brad?"

He swayed, the pain in his head great. Whatever the Corporation had done had intensified all his shifter aspects. The alarms felt as if they were loud enough to pierce his eardrums.

Alice was suddenly there, her hands over his ears, her face before his. The woman was stunning. Her gaze locked on his and it was as if she was turning down the volume around them. He knew better. Knew she couldn't be, but still, her presence helped him gain control.

She gasped and twisted. As she did, Brad realized they were no longer alone and the

men descending upon them were not friendlies. With a roar, he pulled Alice behind him protectively and went at the guards. They rammed him with a shock stick. He'd been hit with them before. They were charged with volts of electricity. Enough to drop a shifter male. But Brad was no ordinary shifter male and he wasn't about to let them near Alice.

He swung and knocked one off his feet. His charger dropped and Alice grabbed it, jabbing it at the man nearest her. Brad twisted, expecting the little minx to light him up too. She didn't. She touched under his nose and came away with blood.

He couldn't worry about his body right now or how long it would hold up. He had to get her out. He grabbed her free hand and spun, following the path Ezra had told him to take. They made it several more paces before gunfire erupted. Brad threw Alice against the wall, shielding her, taking a couple of bullets.

He winced but didn't go down. He couldn't. He had to get the woman to safety.

My woman , he thought.

The bullets continued and he felt the smallest of pinches in his legs and side. Ignoring the pain, he looked down at the redhead pinned to the wall to be sure she was safe.

He was about to ask when the compound rocked, the telltale sound of grenades sounding. Brad seized the moment to yank Alice from the wall and rush her down the hall, taking the last turn Ezra had told him would lead to freedom.

"You're bleeding!" yelled Alice a second before heat swelled around them.

*Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 2:42 pm*

Striker nodded as Malik threw up the hand signal to enter the compound. Boomer tossed a flash grenade and the men went in hard, weapons out, ready to drop anyone who got between them and their teammate. It had taken them a bit to catch Corbin's scent near the docks. His SUV was nowhere to be found. Once they'd caught the faint scent of their captain, the men had combined their tracking skills and figured out quickly that Corbin had engaged the enemy and had killed a few from the looks of the blood on the scene. From there, they'd tracked Corbin's scent to the building they were now breaching.

Malik went first, and the men took turns, securing a spot, giving the signal to advance to the next man and so forth. Bounding forward, a well-oiled unit, having done similar insertions too many times to count in their long careers together. Within seconds they met with resistance and dealt with it accordingly.

Malik took down the first threat and Striker handled the next. Boomer slid up next to him and grinned as he held another grenade. The werepanther had too much love of anything that exploded. He probably should have seen a professional about it.

He threw it down the hall and laughed as it exploded, sending more of the enemy scattering out like rats. Boomer smiled. "Like fish in a barrel."

"You worry me," said Striker, shaking his head.

Malik glanced over his shoulder, his dark gaze landing on them both. "Imagine how I feel with the two of you at my back."

Boomer and Striker shared a look and flashed wide smiles, making Malik groan. He

motioned to the split in the hall ahead. “I’ll go in search of the woman and any other captives.”

Striker nodded. They’d cover more ground split up, and each was armed enough to deal with just about anything. Besides, this was hardly their first mission. “I’ll find the captain and whoever else may be near him.”

Boomer grinned. “I’ll set charges to blow this place when we’re done. Twenty minutes, okay?”

“Och, we do nae need twenty minutes.”

Malik grunted. “Give us twenty minutes.”

“Sounds good!” yelled Boomer as he ran off, looking far too excited to get to level the place.

Malik headed in the other direction, grinning, enjoying himself far too much. Striker moved through the halls, killing any guard who tried to stand between him and his objective—his captain.

He inhaled, catching the scent of something that burned his nose and throat. He heard it then, the sound of a really pissed-off lion roaring. Wasting no time, Striker ran in the direction of the sounds, already knowing who the lion was.

Corbin.

And he sounded fucking livid.

Striker made it to a set of doors that were pried open. Greenish smoke filtered out of the room and he coughed. He didn’t exactly want to enter the room with whatever it

was in the air, but he knew without a doubt his friend was in there and needed help.

Malik came around the corner from the other end of the hall, his weapon out, his gaze locking on Striker. “I couldn’t find any signs of prisoners in that direction. Did I hear the captain’s roar?”

“Aye,” said Striker with a nod. He tipped his head towards the pried open door. Smoke continued to come out of it. “He’s in there. Whatever that is in there, it burns to breathe in.”

“Captain is still alive so it won’t kill us,” added Malik, though his expression said he wasn’t so sure. “You want to take the lead?”

“Thanks,” said Striker dryly, taking point. He moved in, crouching down, his eyes burning as he did. He spent a fair amount of time around Mercy in the labs back at headquarters and had accidentally started a number of lab incidents, so he was familiar with safety protocols. Twisting, he put his hand out, feeling around the wall for anything that was like the lab at headquarters. When he found a series of buttons, hit them all. One would probably work. He hoped.

In an instant the room was bathed in some liquid that didn’t smell like water as it poured down from a sprinkler system. Exhaust fans kicked on and the fumes dissipated slowly, revealing Corbin there in the center of the huge room, partially shifted, his hands and face bloodied.

Malik came up short behind Striker. “Dear Gods.”

They’d seen Corbin do partial shifts before. They weren’t caught off guard by that. It was the pure red in his eyes. The raw, feral look on his face. He was in the throes of bloodlust, and that was bad.

Very bad.

There were guards all over in the room. Most of them were dead. The ones left standing looked scared shitless of what they were witnessing.

Malik lifted his weapon and aimed at a guard. Striker glanced to the side of the room, past a mound of broken glass and spotted a crumpled pile on the floor. It took him a minute to realize the pile was a woman. Not just any woman. The one from the pictures he'd seen in the dorm room.

Mae.

He pushed on the end of Malik's weapon, forcing him to lower it. "No. Look. 'Tis his woman there. Do nae take his kills. This is his right."

Malik looked in the direction Striker was pointing and gasped. "We're not going to be able to pull him back from this."

"Shut up and do nae draw his attention to us just yet."

"Did you find him?" yelled Boomer, entering from behind, pulling Corbin's gaze to them. There was no recognition in their captain's red eyes. He saw everything around him as a threat and he'd kill everyone if given the chance.

Boomer drew to a fast stop. "Sweet fucking hell. He did all this?"

Malik motioned to the woman on the floor. "Look."

Boomer stiffened and then tipped his head. "Listen. Do you hear it?"

Corbin went at a guard near him, slicing the man's throat.

Striker glanced at Boomer. “Hear what?”

“A heartbeat.” Boomer pointed to the woman.

Malik gasped. “He’s right. The woman lives.”

“I do nae think he knows as much,” said Striker, his gaze on Corbin. “Anyone want to tell him?”

Boomer bit his inner cheek. “Rock, scissors, paper?”

Malik groaned. “We’re a bit old for that.”

“Fine. I call not it ,” added Boomer quickly.

Malik shook his head. “Me either.”

“I’m nae goin’ near him. You two do it,” said Striker to Boomer. “Yer cat shifters. You all can meow together or somethin’. Chase yarn balls or whatever it is you lot do. Scratch your claws on furniture. I do nae know what tickles you all.” He reached into his pocket and pulled out lint. “Probably nae enough for him to want to chase from the end of a string is it?”

Boomer looked at Corbin as the captain lifted a guard off the ground and yanked the man in half, letting each half fall to the floor with a loud thud. “I think we might be past the meow and yarn ball stage of things.”

“Most certainly,” added Malik.

“What about a cardboard box?” asked Striker. “Yer kind likes to play in boxes, don’t they?”

Boomer groaned. “We’re not house cats, dumbass. Do you like to be put on a leash and taken for a walk?”

Striker rubbed his beard and thought about being tied up by a hot woman and then lead around. “Aye. I do.”

“Asshole.”

Striker stepped back. “I left the dart gun in the SUV.”

Boomer shook his head, his gaze never leaving Corbin as the captain killed another guard. “We’re gonna need a bigger dart gun.”

“Aye.”

Corbin tore through another guard as if the man were tissue paper. Striker, Malik and Boomer took large steps back, none wanting to be on the receiving end of their boss’s wrath.

Boomer grunted. “I forgot to mention I set charges.”

Malik and Striker turned very slowly to look at their friend. Malik spoke. “Tell me you went with twenty minutes. Nothing less.”

Boomer pursed his lips. “So you want me to lie?”

“How long do we have?” asked Striker.

Boomer glanced at his watch as a series of large bangs went off. The entire compound shook, and Striker’s ears rang. Flames rushed down the hall in his direction. Groaning, he hit Boomer and knocked the man to the lab floor. Malik

turned and Striker wasn't fast enough to grab him too. The blast hit Malik, knocking him backwards. Flames rolled over everyone and then sucked backwards.

Striker looked up. "Malik?"

"Ouch," said Malik, indicating he was alive.

"Shit, did Corbin notice us?" asked Boomer from under Striker.

Striker glanced in the other direction slowly to find Corbin, still in partially shifted form, blood dripping from his claws and mouth. He was breathing heavy, his head tipped to the side, looking at the men like they were lunch. "Aye."

"Shit."

"Aye." Striker swallowed hard and put his hands up, still on Boomer. "Captain, you do nae want to eat us. We're friendlies. And Boomer is full of silver. He'd cause indigestion."

"Thanks," said Boomer.

"No problem, but you should know, if he comes for us, I'm throwin' you to him."

Boomer chuckled. "I'd rather be eaten alive than stay under you longer. Dude, that had better be a fucking gun in your pocket."

"Och, it's a clip. I've no hard-on for you, kitty," snapped Striker, rolling off Boomer slowly, his gaze never leaving the real threat—Corbin. He started to push off the floor, but Corbin roared.

Malik grumbled, rolling to his side. "Captain."

Corbin roared again.

Striker stayed low. “Alrighty then. I’ll be stayin’ here. Though, I’d like to check on the lass. She looks like she needs help. She’s still alive, Brit. Her heart still beats. She needs assistance, nae this. Nae you behavin’ like a bloody fool.”

Corbin’s brows met and for the briefest of seconds, Striker thought he saw a flicker of his friend in there. That meant there was still hope.

The woman on the floor moved slightly, drawing Corbin’s attention. Fearful that Corbin would hurt her with the bloodlust controlling him, Striker leapt up and rushed to the woman, putting himself in front of her. “You do nae want to hurt her!”

She coughed several times and touched the back of Striker’s leg. “W-what happened? Who are you? Where is Corbin?”

He chanced a glance at the woman. Sure, Corbin was partially shifted, but it was easy enough to tell it was the Brit. Was the female daft?

She squinted up at him. “You’re really hairy.”

“Och, look at him. He’s more so.” He pointed to Corbin. “He’s partially shifted for cryin’ out loud. And before you ask, I’m nae French.”

“French?” She glanced in Corbin’s direction, squinting more. “C-Corbin, is that you? What happened? Why am I on the ground? Ouch, my chest burns. Before you yell, I didn’t touch any more chemicals.”

“Lass, quiet. He’s nae himself. My guess is, he thought you were dead,” said Striker, trying to keep Corbin’s attention off her.

She tugged on Striker's leg, using it to help her stand. Each time she made contact with Striker, Corbin looked more and more lethal. She stood and swayed. Striker caught her with one arm and held up his other. "Corbin, look. She's nae dead. See. Safe and sound."

The woman touched Striker's chest. "What's wrong with him? Is he hurt? Ohmygod, did he get shot?"

"Aye, he did, but I do nae think it bothered him much."

She shrieked. "He's shot? Corbin?"

Boomer held his hands up, staying near the entrance to the lab. "Striker, I don't think she can see him."

"Lass, can you nae see?"

She locked gazes with him. "My glasses are in my cell. Why isn't he answering me? Corbin?"

Striker kept an arm around her, steadying her, knowing he was tempting fate by making contact with her. She needed his help. Corbin would just have to kill him for it. "Lass, he's been shot, but in his state of mind he's nae thinkin' clearly. He's worried for you. Nothin' else."

She cupped her mouth and squinted in the direction Corbin stood. "Corbin, please. I'm scared. I need to know you're okay."

Corbin shook and then bent his head, his upper body heaving. He slumped, and then when he righted himself Striker watched in stunned awe as Corbin managed to pull himself back from the throes of bloodlust. Back from the point of no return. It was a

testament to just how powerful the man was.

“Mae?”

She gasped and squeezed Striker’s hand. “Corbin?”

The captain came for her quickly, but Striker shook his head. “Boss, yer hands and face.”

Corbin paused and looked down, his eyes widening at the sight of all the blood and flesh.

Boomer lowered his arms. “There is a sink over there.”

Malik pushed off the floor. “I’m too old for this shit.”

He turned to face Striker and Striker froze. Laughter bubbled up from within and he was unable to hold it in at the sight of one of his best friends with no eyebrows to speak of. “It would appear the flames were nae kind to you, Tut.”

“What?” asked Malik.

Boomer glanced at the man and then looked up at the ceiling, doing his best to keep a straight face. “Nothing. Nothing at all.”

“What did you do?” demanded Malik.

Boomer put his hands in his front pockets and whistled, still looking up at the ceiling.

Corbin appeared again, mostly blood free. He reached for Mae and Striker helped to steady her as Corbin pulled her against him. He shook and held her as if she were the

single most important thing in all the world to him. He kissed her temple and looked at Striker, mouthing “thank you”.

“Aye.”

There was another boom and the building rocked. Striker looked to Boomer. He shook his head. “That wasn’t me.”

There was a commotion and Striker turned to the entrance to the lab and spotted a man he’d not seen in decades. “Ezra?”

At last check Ezra had joined the Shadow Ops, a division of PSI that dealt with undercover and solo operatives. The Ops had a handler, but other than that, they had little to no interactions with PSI-Ops in order to maintain their cover.

Ezra entered, his arms coated in scales that vanished quickly. The man shook his head and puffed out smoke. He glanced around the room. “Mae?”

Malik stepped out of the way, allowing Ezra to see Mae being held against Corbin. Ezra exhaled slowly, looking relieved. He stepped forward, holding out his hand, a pair of glasses in it. “Here.”

“Help!” Mae shouted as Corbin went down hard, his head bouncing off the floor.

*Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 2:42 pm*

Mae stayed behind Ezra as a bearded man with long red hair followed her, carrying Corbin's unmoving form through the smoke-filled halls. The man had a plaid strip of cloth tied around his upper arm, and whenever he spoke she had to lean in a touch because his Scottish brogue was so thick. Leaning in didn't actually help clear it up though. She kept looking behind her to be sure the man hadn't decided against bringing what was obviously dead weight to him.

Ezra grabbed her hand. "Mae, move faster or I will carry you."

"But Corbin is bleeding. A lot!"

"Striker has him and he won't let anything happen to him. Son-of-a-bitch," exclaimed Ezra, twisting at the last minute and shoving her against the wall, his body covering hers as he shouted for everyone to take cover. Intense heat rolled over her and Ezra's body hardened to the point she half thought the man had shifted into cement. When she realized her fingers were brushing over hardened scales, she gasped, looking up to see his face was covered in them as well. More importantly, the flames that had licked by them hadn't harmed him at all.

His tongue flickered out and she yelped as she realized it was now forked. He winked, and right before her eyes, the scales and the forked tongue changed back into the man who had helped her and who was still trying to help her. He grinned. "Dragon shifter."

She gulped. She hadn't realized those existed. There was a lot she didn't know about and she felt as if she'd had a crash course in opening her mind over the past two weeks. It wasn't that long ago when she'd thought she'd cling to her virginity until

she met the right man.

You did meet him , she thought. Concern gripped her when she didn't see the man called Striker anywhere. Corbin was gone too.

Another man, this one missing eyebrows, appeared, holding a large weapon. It was the kind of gun military men in the movies held. "We're good. What was that?"

Ezra shook his head. "Malik, Felix is paranoid. He has fail-safes all over this place. The last thing he wants is his buyer's information falling into a rival companies' hands. My guess is, this entire place is rigged to blow."

A man with long, ink-black hair and eyes that screamed feline came out of a recessed area of the hall. His right arm was charred slightly and he wiped the blackened area away, the skin looking unharmed. Mae couldn't help but stare at his odd attire. He looked more like he was about to attend a Goth rave than take part in a rescue operation. His tongue darted out and over a lip ring. "I'm Boomer. Nice to meet you, miss."

Mae held Ezra's arms tight, still no sight of Corbin anywhere. Had he been hurt more in the blast? "Corbin and the loud guy? Striker or something?"

Boomer laughed. "Yep. That would be Striker. Hold on."

He moved to a door near him and kicked it, knocking it open. The redhead came out, still holding Corbin like a sack of potatoes, as the man gave the Goth a hard look. "Och, you dinnae have to throw me into a closet, kitty."

"Didn't have to, but it was damn fun," returned Boomer, flashing a wide smile. He pointed to Corbin, his gaze on Mae. "Still out cold, but he's not burnt to a crisp so it's a win."

She glanced at the men. “You’re all very odd.”

Ezra chortled. “No. Mostly they’re just assholes, but they’re assholes who love your mate like a brother.”

She tensed at the mention of mate, before reaching a hand out in Corbin’s direction. The need to make contact with him outweighed her reservations about being called his mate. “He’s bleeding. A lot.”

Strike’s jaw set. “Aye.”

“It’s bad, isn’t it?”

Malik, the man with no eyebrows, moved closer to her. “Mae, the faster we get him to help, the greater his chances of healing this damage are. Do you understand?”

“Less talk, more walk?” she questioned.

He offered a warm smile and she realized that even without eyebrows, he was handsome. He reminded her of a warrior from a movie she’d watched about an evil mummy coming back from the dead.

She paused. “He said they gave him something that was slowing his healing.”

“Dammit. She’s right. Their newest sedative has a mix of several drugs in it. A side effect to some can be decreased healing. Others it increases the ability.” Ezra took her hand in his. “We need to move now.”

“Caesar isn’t coming, is he?” Deep down she knew something bad had happened to him. She couldn’t help but mourn him.

“No. He’s not.”

“Brad?”

Ezra pulled her along, forcing her to move. “I let him out of his cell. And I tasked him with protecting someone. I don’t know if they made it out. I can only hope they did.”

He was hiding something, she was sure of it, but Corbin needed medical attention so she didn’t push. Within minutes they were free from the building and moving in the direction of a set of SUVs. Ezra held Mae’s hand out to Malik. “Get her to safety. I’ll come after I search for signs of Brad and, well, yes, Brad.”

Malik didn’t give Mae a choice. He lifted her and loaded her into the backseat of one of the SUVs. He tossed a set of keys at Ezra. “Here. Take the other. Meet us back at headquarters. We’re driving straight through.”

Ezra stopped. “I have a safe house near here.”

Malik gazed uncomfortably in at her and then went to shut the door to speak more with Ezra. Mae put her foot out, blocking the door. She leaned. “He doesn’t want me to hear what bad shape Corbin is in. He thinks we need to go straight to where Corbin can get more medical attention. I’ll do it. I’ll go wherever is best for Corbin. You’ll find Brad. Right?”

Ezra nodded, something off in his eyes. “I will. Be well, Mae.”

Boomer took the driver’s seat and Striker loaded Corbin into the back of the SUV and made a move to climb into the area next to him. The spot was hardly adequate for Corbin’s mass, let alone Striker’s too. Mae yanked on her dress, moved some, and flipped the release to lay her portion of the second row bench down, allowing Striker

to lie Corbin out more. Mae climbed over Corbin, careful not to touch him. She motioned to the other seat. "Take it."

Striker moved around the vehicle and took the seat she left for him. Malik sat in the passenger seat. He looked to Striker. "How is he?"

"Brit has lost a lot of blood and I do nae know how close to his heart he was hit. I couldnae count all the shots. They're too many and there is too much blood."

Mae ripped at the bottom of her dress and used pieces of it to press to Corbin's bloodiest spots. She didn't cry at first as they drove. Each time they hit a bump, Corbin hissed in his sleep, and before long she found herself humming lightly next to him, trying to stop his bleeding, her heart breaking for him. He'd finally come into her life and the idea of him being ripped away was so cruel she couldn't think more on it.

Instead, she hummed, thinking relaxing thoughts. Trying to will peace, love and healing energy over him, despite having no real clue how to do such a thing or even if it could be done. Finally, he stopped responding to each bump of the SUV and slept soundly.

Her attention went to the other men in the SUV. Malik was asleep and Striker was doing something to him with a permanent marker while Boomer drove. Striker's gaze moved to her.

"Och, lass, keep singin'. He's sleepin' right through me giving him new eyebrows." Striker's tongue darted out as he concentrated on his task. Boomer hit a pot hole and the pen jerked hard in Striker's hand. He pursed his lips. "That one will be his evil villain brow."

Mae giggled and realized she'd found very little funny since she'd been taken.

Laughter was a welcome relief. She took Corbin's hand in hers and held it to her chest, wanting desperately for him to heal like he had in the lab. Deep down she knew his injuries were far worse than before.

*Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 2:42 pm*

Corbin came awake, and for a moment feared he was in the lab at the holding facility once more. It took him a minute to realize he was at PSI in one of their medical rooms. It helped that James was there, holding a chart and wearing a white lab coat.

“Mae?” Corbin asked, sitting up rapidly on the bed. Faster than he should have. The room spun and he grabbed a side rail to steady himself. An IV ran from his arm to a bag of fluid and a quick glance down showed he was wearing a pair of scrub bottoms. Nothing else. “Where is Mae? Is she okay?”

James eyed him. “What is the last thing you remember?”

“Is my mate okay?” he pressed. He wasn’t in the mood for games. When James crossed his arms over his chest and lifted a brow, Corbin knew the man wasn’t giving up any information until he got the answers he sought. With a sigh, Corbin responded. “There was gunfire and they hit the chemicals in the lab. Smoke filled the room. It hurt to breathe. I was worried for Mae. I wanted to get to her.” He thought harder on it all. About how he’d put her in a cell to try to keep her safe but how the men had shot at it until the glass gave way.

And he remembered Mae’s limp body.

He trembled as he lifted his head, his eyes searching his longtime friend’s face for any sign of hope that Mae was alive. James touched the foot of the bed and set the chart down. “She’s fine, Corbin. Not a scratch on her.”

He let out a breath he didn’t realize he’d been holding. “Where is she?”

“You claimed her,” said James matter-of-factly.

Corbin wasn’t proud of how he’d given into his baser side or how he’d claimed his mate. He’d wanted it to be special and wonderful. Not in some fucking lab. What was done was done. He just needed to get to her, to make sure with his own eyes that she was alive and well. “I did. And I’d do it again.”

James snorted. “Oh, I know.”

Corbin tried to stand, but found the room spinning once more. “What happened to me?”

“You got shot fourteen times,” replied James, giving him a disapproving glance once more.

“I got what?”

James groaned. “You took fourteen hits with bullets meant to kill a shifter.”

“How am I alive?” asked Corbin, getting his bearings somewhat. He put his feet on the floor but didn’t try to stand yet. “How long have I been out?”

“You’re alive because you mated with Mae. She’s got Fae in her and a lot of other stuff—I’d go into it all, but to be honest, the tests were inconclusive so I sent samples off to Dr. Green with the I-Ops for his opinion. But it’s safe to say that her blood gave you some resistance to silver. Mating to her saved your life.” James touched his shoulder and gave a tempered clasp. “You’ve been in here three days. We were only just able to convince Mae to leave your side. Striker is with her now. At last check he was offering to pose naked for her to sculpt, so I’d recommend feeling better and fast.”

Corbin groaned. “If I had more energy, I’d kill him.”

“I know. There is a change of clothes for you in the bathroom. Shower. Clean up before you go find her.”

Corbin nodded and then glanced at James. “What about the facility? What happened? Did we get everyone out?”

James stiffened and shook his head. “No. We retrieved some data. Not a lot because they blew most of their files and computers. The team has been trying to contact Ezra. He’s either still undercover or his cover was blown and well, I don’t want to speculate until we know more.” James sighed, the stress of it all showing. He’d been held prisoner not that long ago and many of his wounds weren’t ones that could be seen. Many were mental. “Corbin, from what we were able to gather, they were holding a man named Brad there. His name has come up by way of the I-Ops before. He was taken the same time one of the mates of an I-Ops was taken. Brad and Mae formed a bond in holding.”

Corbin wasn’t sure he liked where this was going. He stiffened.

James shook his head. “Not like that. From the files I was able to look at, there was enough overlap in their DNA that I think Mae and Brad are related to some degree. I don’t know that it’s enough for siblings, but I would say cousins maybe.”

“Did we get him out?”

From James’s expression the answer was no.

Corbin exhaled. “Does she know he didn’t make it?”

“She knows what we do,” said James, standing slowly. “That Ezra was there,

working undercover for PSI as a Shadow Operative and that Ezra freed Brad and we can only assume Alice.”

“Alice?”

“Mae’s roommate. She’d been taken at the same time from what we can tell. We recovered records on her too. They wanted to breed her as well.” James was quiet for a moment. “We’re still trying to piece it all together. We have a lead on the vampire who was running the operation there. Mae’s not been able to reach her. And before you find out from anyone else, your mother called and spoke with Mae directly. Colette asked if you ripped anyone apart, and when Striker confirmed you did, she wanted us to tell you good boy. She wanted to fly here to be by your side, but Striker convinced her you’d be fine and that you’d need time alone with your mate if she wanted grandchildren.”

It took him a moment to wrap his mind around what he was being told. Mae’s roommate had been taken as well? Corbin closed his eyes, his heart breaking for his mate. “I need to go to her, James. The shower will have to wait.”

They both turned at the sound of Striker’s voice filling the outer hall.

“Lass, he’s nae gonna be doin’ anythin’ other than lyin’ on his lazy English arse healin’. You do nae have to run.”

Mae appeared in the doorway. She was in a long skirt and a t-shirt. Her long hair was down. Her feet were bare. She had on glasses and her eyes were wide. “You’re awake!”

Striker scrambled in behind her, looking winded. “Och, by chance did they use the DNA of a track star in your makeup? Oh, Captain, yer awake.”

Mae beamed and then twisted, hugging Striker tight. “He’s okay.”

Striker wrapped his arms around Mae and patted her back gently. “Lass, when you cry, I cry. We had this talk already. You cannae be weepy around me. It makes me do the same and I’ve a manly code to live up to.”

“Why is he hugging my mate?” demanded Corbin.

James snorted. “Your mate has taken a shine to him. We can’t figure it out. He annoys the hell out of us, but she seems to be able to tolerate him. Strangest part of this all is, he’s not said anything inappropriate to her either. Malik and I think he’s probably dying or something.”

Corbin stood and met Striker’s gaze from across the room. He nodded to the man. “Thank you, Scot.”

“Och, Brit, she cannae help yer English.” Striker lifted a hand. “If you see Malik, do nae comment on his eyebrows. I took artist liberties with them and it does nae seem to want to wash off.”

Mae twisted to face Corbin, her eyes rimmed with tears. She looked to James first. “Can I hug him? I don’t want to hurt him.”

James chuckled. “You can. Though, I told him to shower first. Just so you know, I tried.”

She looked to Corbin and he saw it then, uncertainty in her gaze. He stiffened and Striker rubbed Mae’s arm lightly. “Lass, do nae fear him nae wantin’ you. I’ve explained to you already that he claimed you. His mark is all over you. Yer his wife, lass. He will nae change his mind on that.”

“Change my mind?” asked Corbin, needing to sit again. She thought he wouldn’t want her? “Mae?”

“How about we give them the room?” James motioned for Striker to go. The two men exited and Mae inched her way into the room more and more. She bit at her lower lip, her pink tongue easing out, making him hard in an instant.

Corbin pushed to his feet and opened his arms wide. Mae rushed to him and the next he knew, he was on his back on the bed, his mate on him, covering his face in kisses. He smiled, wrapping his arms around her and holding her close to him. As he realized that Striker had indeed explained in detail that Corbin had claimed Mae, he stiffened. “Mae?”

She stopped kissing him and stared down at him. “I’m hurting you, aren’t I?”

He held her in place. “No. I just, well, I’m sorry I claimed you the way I did. You deserve better. More.”

She pressed her lips to his mouth, shutting him up. He knew it was wrong to crave her the way he did, but he couldn’t help himself. Mae stole his hard-earned control. She eased off him, breaking the kiss, making him groan with frustration. A sly smile splayed over her face as she stood and began shedding her clothing, piece by painfully slow piece.

Corbin jerked, watching the erotic scene unfold, his cock hard enough to hammer nails. Mae was the single most beautiful woman he’d ever seen in all his immortally long life.

His gaze went to her low stomach and a fleeting thought hit him—what if he’d beget her with child. What if she was carrying his babe?

She touched his knee and then pulled on the scrub bottoms he wore, freeing him from them. “I want you so bad I hurt,” she said. “Tell me if you can’t do this. I don’t want to harm you.”

“Oh, I can do this,” he returned, making a motion to stand. She shook her head and pushed on him, forcing him to lie back on the bed. She climbed up and over him, inching down him. She lined her head up with his shaft and grinned once more.

“Mae, no,” he protested. “Let me love you.”

“Captain, you’re to lie back and enjoy this. That is an order.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Her lips eased over the head of his cock and Corbin nearly shot off the infirmary bed. He’d never last with her there, looking up at him, such a sultry expression upon her face, her naked form there, taunting him. She took the top of his cock deeper into her mouth and he tipped his head back, the muscles in his neck straining. As her hand wrapped round his shaft, massaging it, Corbin stifled a groan of delight. He lifted his arms above his head, knowing if he dared to touch her, he’d yank her off his cock and the pleasure would end. She had the ability to reduce him to this. The ability to make him nearly come at a moment’s notice.

Mae did a long lick of his cock, her hair falling down and onto his thighs. Corbin lifted his hands, knowing touching her would be bad, but he couldn’t stop himself. He took hold of the sides of her head, his fingers laced in her hair. Guiding her mouth over him, Corbin’s jaw dropped as she took him deep into her mouth, his cock touching the back of her throat. He jerked on the bed, thrusting upwards into her mouth, his body on autopilot. He pushed her head down more onto him and Mae moaned. His cock was soaked from her hot, wet mouth.

She raked her teeth over him and he lost it then, his ball sac drawing up, prepping for the explosion he knew was about to come. Corbin tried to lift her off his cock, but she locked gazes with him, remaining in place as his hot seed burst free from him, filling her mouth and throat. She swallowed and the sight of her drinking him down flipped his alpha switch. His lion wanted out, wanted to roar with victory. Corbin struggled to keep the beast locked down, his cock twitching, his body spurting every last drop of his semen into her.

Mae popped her mouth off his prick and licked her lips, the sight driving him mad with need for her. He should have been sated. Hell, he'd just had his cock sucked dry but he wanted more. He wanted her.

Corbin met her gaze, his body still jerking from pleasure. "Love, come here."

She obeyed, slinking up his body, nipping at his torso as she did. She was a little minx and he fucking loved it. She went for his lips and he ravished her mouth, tucking her hair behind her ears as he did. When the kiss finally broke, he grinned and wrapped his arms around her.

"Nearly made you shout my name," she said, with a sly smile. One that promised more pleasure. "Didn't I?"

She'd done far more than that. She'd almost made him shift in the middle of getting head. That wouldn't have gone over well. "You nearly did, love."

He reached down and took hold of his shaft, guiding it to her as she lowered herself onto him. He tensed, wanting to last for her. He was a skilled lover yet with her he could barely control himself.

Her pussy encased him fully and she gasped, her eyes widening. "Corbin."

He cupped her breasts, knowing it was painful for her. He didn't move. Not until he knew she was ready for him, her channel easing somewhat around him. She ground herself on him as he pumped up and into her, holding her tits as he did. The sight of her above him took him to the edge straight away. He teetered on the brink, thrusting, her body holding tight to him.

Mae stared down at him, her eyelids heavy and her lips full and wet. She bit her lower lip, increasing her pace on him as she began to hum. The second she did, Corbin threw his hands out to the side, scared to hold on to her breasts as he fought to keep from shifting forms. He knew without looking that fur coated his arms. And he felt it inching over his chest as well.

Mae kept going. The more she hummed, the more Corbin spiraled down the road to no control. He pumped up harder and harder, causing the entire bed to shake. The bed struck the wall over and over. He didn't stop and Mae didn't move off him. She kept going, kept humming, kept riding him. With a roar he flipped her, using all of himself to keep from cutting her with his clawed hands. Now above her, he took the lead, slamming himself into her welcoming body.

She clung to him as he went at her hard. She continued to hum though it was broken somewhat, mixed in with grunts of passion. They locked gazes and she began to sing. He didn't know the song. He couldn't even make out the words as his head spun with the raw need to possess the woman beneath him. He felt her pussy tightening on his cock and he knew she was coming. He pounded hard, the bed moving more before giving way under him. It crashed to the floor but he didn't dare stop.

"Corbin! Yes! Corbin!" she cried out. Mae wrapped her legs around him and tugged, drawing him down more on her, his face buried in the crook of her neck as she kept singing to him as he fucked her. The urge to sink his teeth into her won out and he was powerless to stop it. He bit the very spot where he'd claimed her, pumping until his balls drew up tight and then he held firm in her, jetting seed into her.

The door to the room slammed open and he turned, still buried in his mate, sweat dripping from all the parts of him that weren't yet shifted. He knew what he must look like to his two teammates who rushed in. Corbin had done the unthinkable. He'd taken his mate in a partially shifted form. The most blatant sign of no control there was. Shame filled him, but he couldn't pull out of her. He didn't want to be away from her.

Mae clung to him and giggled, staring up at him. "I think we gave them quite a show."

Growling, he grabbed for the sheet and yanked it up his side, making sure his woman was covered. His shifted hand tore the material and he exhaled slowly, his body tense.

"Captain?" asked Malik, his voice soft—his eyebrows looking drawn on, rather poorly. "I think maybe you should go."

Mae gasped and then surprised Corbin by moving slightly under him and peeking out over his shoulder at Malik and Striker. "You two go away."

"Miss," said Malik softly, his hands out. "He's not himself. We should take him."

"Och, he's actin' like a ruttin' fool and we need to drag his arse away from you before he harms you, lass," said Striker, dumbing it down for all involved.

Mae snorted and rotated her hips under Corbin, making his cock harden in her once more. "Mmm, I think he's acting just right. Go away."

"Mae, yer nae sayin' yer fine with this? The bloody fool is partially shifted."

She narrowed her gaze on him. "Dougal, I will not say it again. Out."

With a huff, Striker nodded and pulled Malik out of the room with him. Corbin couldn't help but laugh at Mae scolding Striker and it working.

He glanced at his arms and the fur there, his laughter died instantly. "Mae, they're right."

"Shh. I sang and it caused this. I couldn't help singing any more than you could help this." She touched his face tenderly. "You aren't hurting me and you're only shifted a little."

She wasn't scared of him?

"Kiss me and then get back to what you were doing before Evil Eyebrows and his side kick interrupted."

Corbin paused. "About Malik's eyebrows..."

Mae laughed. "Ask Striker. Now, where were we?"

*Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 2:42 pm*

Mae tried and failed to hide her laughter as the men on Corbin's team presented him with the Asshole of the Week award. They handed over the sculpture she'd done of him, along with a plaque with his name engraved on it. Malik got a matching one and a framed photo of himself with no eyebrows. Thankfully, they'd grown back, but he'd not stopped giving Striker and Boomer the stink eye over the ordeal.

Corbin glanced at the statue and then at her, lifting a brow in question. She shrugged and he came closer, placing it on a table near her and then bending, lifting her and sitting—setting her on his lap. There were plenty of chairs in the conference room but he didn't seem to care.

She leaned against her husband's chest and inhaled, savoring his scent. She closed her eyes, thankful he was fully healed. It had been nearly a week since he'd freed her at great cost to himself. A week since he'd claimed her and changed her world forever.

He wrapped his arms around her and kissed her temple. "I love you," he whispered.

"I love you too," she returned, not bothering to lower her voice. She'd learned the men in the room could hear just about anything.

Duke had his wife, Mercy, close to him. He leaned and kissed her neck. Boomer was standing near the right side of the room, holding his wife's hand, gazing at her lovingly. James's wife was sitting next to him, working on her laptop—that she was rarely without—as he bent and kissed her shoulder. Laney turned and tongued him to the point Mae blushed. Just like that, Laney returned to whatever it was she was working on.

Mae suspected it had something to do with Brad, Alice and Ezra. When Laney had learned the details of Mae's friends and possible family, the girl had made it her mission to dig for more information.

Deep down, Mae knew Alice was still alive. She was sure of it. And she was sure Brad was too. It was just a matter of finding them. Ezra was the one she wasn't so sure about. None of the men had outright said it, but she suspected they feared he was dead.

Striker clapped, drawing everyone's attention. "If you all could stop yer make-out sessions, I say it's time to break out the drinks. Here is to our two-way tie for Asshole of the Week. Tut and Captain, yer tough acts to follow."

"Would that I could fire him," said Corbin, making the others snicker.

"I think he's adorable," interjected Mae.

Striker beamed. "Aye, yer mate thinks I'm adorable."

Corbin groaned. "Don't remind me."

Mercy cleared her throat, looking hard at James. "Tell them."

Mae glanced around, wondering what other news they had to share. When James met her gaze, she gulped. He stood and smiled. "It would seem congratulations are in order."

"James?" asked Corbin.

James winked at him. "Green needed me to run another test on Mae."

Corbin nodded. "Yes. The two of you were trying to work out why her singing

doesn't seem to influence mated males."

"Right," said James, appearing uneasy. "We haven't nailed anything firm down there, but we did find out something else."

Mae wasn't sure she wanted to hear. She'd already learned she was a mix of a great number of supernaturals and that her birth mother had died as a result of a testing ring the men called Project Asia. She squeezed her husband's hand, thinking back to the day before when he'd confessed to saving her mother only to be called away on a mission long ago before returning to find she'd died. He still blamed himself, though she couldn't figure out why. She kissed his cheek.

He wrapped his arms around her firmly and held her against him. He looked to James. "Well, what else? What did the tests show?"

Striker tipped his head. "Anything reveal how she burned a man?"

James cleared his throat. "We believe the Fae in her did that, but no, that isn't what I wanted to tell you."

Laney snorted as she typed. "He always buries the lead."

James huffed. "Green and I were running those extra tests and Mercy suggested I do one more. I did and she was right to push for it. Mae is pregnant."

Mae's eyes widened. She tried to stand but Corbin held her to him. "Shut up!"

Mercy beamed and touched her low stomach. "This is good news, right? We can be pregnancy buddies."

Mae twisted, looking at Corbin, unsure what his reaction would be. His smile was so wide she thought his face might break. He grabbed her, his lips capturing hers, his

tongue darting into her mouth. He kissed her to the point her body heated and it wasn't until she remembered that they had an audience that she stopped him from going further.

"This is wonderful news," he said, his gaze never leaving Mae. His expression fell. "When my mother finds out, she's going to insist on flying over here to be closer to us and the baby."

James cringed. "About that..."

"Corbin Amias Herman Jones."

Mae recognized the woman's voice at once and stood just as Corbin's mother entered the conference room. She shook her finger at Corbin. "Of course I'd want to be closer to you both. Your father is handling our luggage. James found us a wonderful home to rent for the next few months."

Mae tried to hide her laughter at Corbin's obvious discomfort. He stood, giving James a hard look before he went to his mother and embraced her. She patted his back. "Darling, it's good to see you, but I want to see my daughter-in-law. Move."

"Yes, Mother."

Striker leaned, watching Corbin's mother walk. He whistled low. "Mmm."

Corbin growled.

The men all laughed.

THE END