



# Claimed By the Orc Emperor (Orc Mate Selection #1)

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**Category:** Fantasy

**Description:** As a monster smut romance author, my life is writing about creatures that only exist in my imagination ravaging humans and making them fall in love with them. Its a fantasy of mine to be ravaged by a monster, but theyre not real. My collection of feral toys is as close as Ill get to being with a real live monster.

That is, until I cross a barrier I had no idea existed and landed in a world that shouldn't be. There, I meet the most handsome orc I've ever laid eyes on.

Orcs exist! And one of them wants to claim me as his.

**Total Pages (Source):** 16

# Page 1

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## Chapter One

Rainn

“Suck me, human. You can fit me in...”

“Yes, human. Open wide for my cock. It is large, but you can accommodate.”

“Swallow my load, human...”

“Kai!” I call over my shoulder after I erase yet another line in my novel. “How big is too big for an alien dick? Fifteen inches?”

A loud bang sounds from the bathroom, followed by an endless stream of cursing.

My roommate and best friend steps into the room, rubbing at the large lump on his forehead. “What the fuck, Rainn? Made me bang my head on the sink. What is this about fifteen-inch dicks?”

I try to hold it in, but I can’t help it. I burst out laughing, watching him grumble about hurting his head on the ledge of the cabinet.

When I have myself under control, I smile at him. “I’m sorry. I didn’t know you were under there fixing that pipe.”

Kai is the type of guy that knows how to fix anything he gets his hands on. He keeps our apartment in tiptop shape.

He grins at me. “All good. Now, Rainn, fifteen inches?”

I shrug. “I mean, yeah. He’s an alien. It’s supposed to be bigger, right?”

Sighing, Kai comes to sit on my bed. He grabs one of my stuffies and starts to toss it in the air over and over. “Yes, but you want your lead to be able to take the dick. Fifteen inches is insane.”

“Oh come on. It’s fiction.”

“You don’t want your readers to cringe at the visual.”

He has a point there. But I’m not willing to give up. “Fifteen inches really isn’t big.”

Kai holds up a finger and hurries out of the room. He comes back about a minute later with his tape measure. “Okay, let’s see exactly how big fifteen inches is.”

He slowly starts to pull on the end of the tape measure. The more he pulls, the wider my eyes get. By the time he reaches fifteen inches my eyes almost pop out of my head.

He holds it up, shaking it in my direction. “Imagine a man with a cock that size coming anywhere near your hole.”

I give it a long look. I don’t have a dildo that big, but one is pretty close. It’s actually my favorite.

As a smutty monster romance author, I don’t write for realism. There are no elves, orcs, sirens, aliens, and ogres walking around, so I don’t have to make it believable. My readers don’t pick up my books for fact based storytelling, that’s for sure.

God, I wish I could be one of the main characters in my books. I make sure they have fun and can take fifteen-inch dicks with ease. The men and women who fuck these monsters have tight holes, like large cocks, and the humans can unhinge their jaws like a fucking snake.

It was my love for monster dildos that got me into writing monster smut. I stumbled upon a site five years ago that sold a unicorn dildo with bright, pretty colors and thought to myself, who would fuck a unicorn dildo ?

Me. I would fuck a unicorn dildo.

Then, I wondered what else there was out there. And man, oh man, there were a lot of monster dildos out there. I have a whole collection now: alien, kraken, dragon, demon, siren, and an orc dildo all line a shelf in my closet.

Well, I had to order the orc dildo more than once. The app said the package delivered, but I never got it. It was before I got an outdoor camera, so I didn't see if it was actually delivered or if someone lifted it from our door. I hope whoever took it enjoys a ten inch, almost Coke can wide orc dick. Hell, I hope they choke on it.

I know I do. The one I have might need replacing, with as much action as it gets.

Shaking myself from my lustful thoughts, I say, "Whatever, Kai. What about twelve inches? Is that feasible?"

He slides the tape measure down a few inches and looks at it. "I guess. Still pretty big."

"It's an eight-foot-tall alien, Kai! You want him to have an average human cock? Those are, like, five inches."

“Really?” Kai asks, looking down at his crotch. “Guess I’m above average, huh?”

I cover my ears with my hands and make a gagging noise. “I do not want to hear about your dick.”

Kai and I have been friends since high school, making an odd match to most people. I took advanced placement classes and was a bit of an outcast because I skipped a grade in middle school. Kai is...not the sharpest tool in the box. When we met, I was in the cafeteria, eating alone and he sat down with his tray laden with shitty school lunch and said, “You have a very bright aura.” I smiled at him, then ended up laughing my ass off when he leaned in and asked, “What does aura mean? I heard someone say it and always wanted to use it in a sentence.”

I loved him immediately. He was just a happy person, always so positive and welcoming to everyone. His jock friends wondered why we hung out, but Kai wouldn’t let them give me shit. He’s had my back for years, especially after my mother died and my older brother basically cut me off because I ‘had my head in the clouds’.

Kai is the brother I always wanted.

He smiles widely at me and snaps the tape measure shut, wincing when the strip slaps against his thumb. “Just thought you should know.”

I roll my eyes, turning back to my computer and the blank page in front of me. No matter what I try, the beginning of this book just isn’t coming to me. I like to have at least three books in a new series completed before I send it to my publisher, so I’m not behind schedule or have to push back releases. But fuck, I want to finish. I don’t often write a female lead, but this one really spoke to me and I thought I had enough of an overall plot to write a three-book series. Should have known better than try and write a slow burn. The alien and his human mate only kissed once in the first book.

That's it.

I would have been better off writing a fast burn and them fucking in the first five chapters.

Sighing, I close my laptop and spin my chair back around to Kai. "I think I'm going to go camping for a week or so." Hiking usually helps me figure out a plot and outline. "I can walk some trails and see if it sparks something." Hiking and camping are some of my favorite things to do. When I took a short hike with Kai one day, I figured out the plot for my best selling mafia-orc monster smut romance.

He frowns, poking his lip out. "I can't go.. I have that deck project this week."

"It's okay. I'm just going to Forest Glen. Nowhere fancy. There's that trail that leads to Sumner Cave I want to check out. It's long, but it's an established trail. Hell, I might even explore the cave. Sounds like fun."

Kai grins at me, leaning in like he's telling me a secret. "You know what they say about Sumner Cave. People go there to explore and never come back. Be careful."

I snort. "We've been here most of our lives. We know people get lost on those trails, trying to explore shit they shouldn't. Nothing supernatural is going on. People just get disoriented."

"Well, I heard there's some kind of great beast that snatches people right outside the cave, takes them inside and?—"

"Don't threaten me with a good time," I say, wagging my eyebrows.

"Your mind is always on monster-fucking."

I cackle, standing to stretch my sore muscles. “So is yours. As my beta reader, it’s your job to always think about monster-fucking.”

He grins widely. “True.”

“Think you can help me twist my hair?” I reach up and touch my coily ponytail. “I don’t want to have it loose when I go hiking. Last time I got branches caught in my hair and didn’t know until I washed it when I got home. Imagine the jump scare I had when I felt something scratching the back of my neck.”

I started growing my hair shortly after high school and it’s not only thick, but long. Twisting it on my own is a nightmare. After I taught Kai how to twist it so it wouldn’t unravel, he’s been doing half for me so I can save my poor wrists from the strain.

“Yep,” he says, cracking his knuckles. “Get your supplies and I’ll meet you in the living room.”

I kiss his cheeks, making him laugh. “You’re a god. I’ll brush your hair when we’re done. You’re getting shaggy.” I tug on the ends of his long blond hair. He chuckles as I rush to the bathroom to get my hair supplies. I’d washed and detangled my hair a few days ago, but just threw it in a ponytail so I could write.

That’s going oh so well.

Not.

When I get my hair supplies, I hustle to the living room and sit on the floor between Kai’s legs.

I love when someone helps me with my hair. It reminds me of my mom. Before she

passed, I would go to her house and she'd either twist or braid my hair for me while we talked or she told me stories of my childhood that I had no memories of. I'd even tell her about some of my book plots, sans all the fucking, of course.

"Your mind is an amazing place, my sweet Rainn Cloud," she'd say, making me laugh.

My name isn't Rainn Cloud, but she loved to poke fun at my name. My dad allowed her to name me Rainn, but drew the line at having my middle name as Cloud. He was a saint for that.

She told me she knew I'd be a free spirit, so she wanted to give me a name that reflected it. A lot of family members had something to say about it, especially since my older brother's name is Theodore. She said multiple people tried to talk her out of naming me Rainn, but she stuck to her guns. As always, my mother was right. Rainn fits me perfectly. I'm definitely a free spirit, loving being in nature and as she put it, I flow freely.. That's where I feel like myself.

I sigh, pulling some of my hair over my shoulder as I twist the strands between my fingers. I'm always bombarded with memories of my mother when I'm doing my hair. We were as thick as thieves. I resembled her more than my older brother, which is why I think my mother and I had a deeper connection. My mother and I had the same sepia skin, the same almond-shaped, thick-lashed eyes, the same bow-shaped mouth and the same high cheekbones. It's almost a shock sometimes, looking in the mirror every day, seeing her staring back at me. When I have my hair in twists, I'm reminded of how my mom looked with her locs freshly done.

Kai stops brushing my hair and tips my head back. "I know, Rainn. She's all around you in that nature you love so much. She never leaves you."

This is why Kai is my best friend. He knows me so well. He loved my mother just as



much as I did and knows how hard I took it when she died. He's been there for me through it all. Unlike my actual blood brother.

"Love you," I whisper.

He kisses my forehead. "Love you back. Now hold your head down. I want to make sure my parts are straight." I laugh and do what he says.

An hour later we're done with my hair and we switch places. Kai hands me his paddle brush so I can get the tangles out of his long blond hair. By the time I'm done, he's dozing off, his head drooping on my thigh. I hate to wake him, but if I'm going to get up early to hike, I have to get to bed.

I tap his shoulder gently so I don't startle him. "Come on, Kai. We both have places to be in the morning."

He yawns widely and stands, stretching his arms over his head. "Yeah, gotta be at work at seven." He looks down at his watch. "It's just after ten. Perfect. I can get my six hours."

I just smile at Kai and don't mention that it'll be about eight hours of sleep. He's so pretty that it doesn't even matter that he's terrible at math.

Kai saunters down the hall to his room, then stops and turns around. "If you fuck yourself with one of those huge dildos, please keep it down."

My cheeks heat with embarrassment, but I keep my head up high.

I try to keep it quiet, but the orc dildo has a vibrating function. That's one of the reasons it's my favorite. Who could be quiet with that?

With a barked laugh, I skip to my room. “No promises.”

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:39 am*

### Chapter Two

#### Axum

“Good, Your Grace,” Grukkin breathes heavily as he parries my sword thrusts, sliding under my guard. The practice swords we are using may not cut, but they are heavy and will cause bruising. I know first hand. In this session alone, a strike along my back has been throbbing for about half an hour. “Nice thrust.”

I duck just as he swings at my head, the air whooshing over me and whipping through my hair.

Grukkin chuckles and presses me with a complex series of movements until I fall on my backside. He presses the tip of his wooden sword to my throat with a wide grin on his face. His tusks flash in the light radiating from the sconces, white and sharp. “You did well today, Your Highness.”

I grunt and push the tip away. “Yes, but I did not best you.”

He tosses the sword away and holds his hand out to help me to my feet. “In your defense, sire, you have never bested me.”

That is an accurate statement. In the twenty years Grukkin has been my weapons and war trainer, the student has failed to surpass the teacher. But I do not wish to best him. If ever I do, I would need to find another that is better and that would be an impossible task; Grukkin is the best.

We meander over to the canteen and take several swigs of cold water. Training today has been hard, my muscles burning and begging for a reprieve from the harsh treatment. It would not be so bad if I did not have a meeting later that will sap even more of my energy.

“We have been at it for hours,” I say, checking the position of the sun in the sky. Just after dawn, I dragged myself from the comfort of my bed to meet Grukk here—it is closer to noon now.

Grukk nods, handing me a cloth to wipe my face. “Yes, but you have greatly improved. You were able to evade more than one of my blows. It has only taken you twenty years.”

Another grunt leaves my lips, though I smile as I wipe my face clean. “We shall not train on the morrow. I have court. My advisors have chastised me for not listening to the disputes of my subjects on a regular basis.”

A rumbling laugh leaves his throat as we leave the sparring room. “With all due respect, sire, you are the emperor. You can tell them to fuck themselves.”

“That’s an option,” I reply with humor.

We diverge when we reach the end of the hallway. I head up to my chambers so I can sit in my bathing pool to relax my muscles until it is time to meet my advisors.

Once I enter my chambers, I strip off my breeches and toss them into my soiled clothing piles for my staff to gather later. I step into my bathing room and wade into my pool, the cool water easing my sore and overheated muscles. I could heat the cold water with a simple spell, but the cold will do more for my aches and pains than warmer temperatures.

We have not had war in many years—though there have been minor skirmishes—but I like to keep in shape, just in case. Though most of my subjects have settled into my rule, there is always dissent somewhere. If that ever comes to pass, I'll be ready.

Holding my breath, I sink under the water until my head is fully submerged. The action soothes me more, a cool flush making me shiver before I come back up for air.

After I am sufficiently cooled, I take hold of the cloth left for me beside the bathing pool and cleansing bar, lathering it up sufficiently. Then I wash roughly over my green skin until a tinge of red crops under its surface. The sweet smell of the bar burrows into my nose as I continue to cleanse myself.

My hand dips under the water and I cup my shaft, washing it just as roughly as the rest of my body. It is not as if I am using it.

As a youth, I spent ample time between the legs of orcs of all genders. I'd wile away my days learning how to touch and please them. But as I have aged and my responsibilities have grown, I have found that I have less and less to express my carnal desires. Though I do miss it.

I soak for a little while longer, wanting to avoid my duties for as long as I can. They never cease.

But they cannot be avoided forever.

I climb out of my bathing pool and dry myself off. It is now well after noon and the day is sweltering. I forgo a tunic and slide on a pair of loose pants and a pair of well-worn sandals. Ordinarily, I would dress for my station, but I do not have any official duties, as I and my advisors will be walking the grounds while we discuss matters of my kingdom. If I am to roam, I would like to be comfortable as I do.

When I am dressed, I look into the polished reflecting glass and gather my hair into a ponytail, the tresses longer on the top and cut close to my scalp everywhere else. I tie it back with a leather thong, hoping to keep it out of my face as we walk through the kingdom.

I would like nothing more than to take a day off. Ever since I ascended to my throne fifteen years ago, I have not had more than a few hours to unwind. I have to always be present for any problems that need solving. It is wearing on me, but it is more important that my subjects are happy and I rule fairly. Maybe one day, I shall have a break from my duties, but today is not that day.

Sighing, I take one last look at myself in the mirror, noting the bags and the dull glint to my eyes. Then, I shake myself and head out of my chambers, ready to face the day.

My advisors are waiting for me in my throne room, discussing my schedule. My lead advisor, Larek, eyes my bare chest with a grin. “Less formal today, I see?”

I return his grin with one of my own, pointing to his similar attire. “It appears we had the same thought. It is scorching outdoors, is it not?”

Like me, Larek only has on a pair of loose-fitting breeches and sandals. The only difference in our attires is his pants are tan, where mine are white, and he is wearing a holster with a blade attached.

My other advisor, Olog, has on a fine-mesh shirt with slighter tighter breeches than Larek and I are wearing. He is also wearing white, so better to repel the hot rays of the sun.

“Nothing we cannot handle,” Larek says. “Though if we encounter a stream on our journey, we can take a quick dip and must only shuck our bottoms. Olog will be held up on the shore, fiddling with his tunic.” We all laugh at Olog’s expense, though he

does not seem to care about the friendly jab.

My city that houses my kingdom, Daz Vrokrad, nestled in the center of my country, Belzod, has plentiful streams. Oftentimes, you will find orcs swimming or simply having a midday repast near them. It is not uncommon to strip down to our undergarments on a hot day to cool down outdoors.

Waving my hand with a flourish, I say, “Lead the way, Larek.”

He barks a quick laugh and I, he and Olog leave my palace for the hot outdoors.

Our group steps out of the palace, the midday sun beaming down on us. The green tinge of our skin will darken the longer we are outside, but that does not bother me. Most of us orcs spend a fair amount of time outdoors and are used to the sun’s rays. The sweat dotting my brow and trickling down my back will help cool me for a time.

Larek puts his hands behind his back, walking on my left side. “Your Highness, there has been word from your brother that some orcs from his group have broken off on their own. There was a dispute about who would lead their pack. They are displeased with him, it seems. There have been a few minor skirmishes, but he has not indicated there is a big problem as of yet. Their leader is an orc by the name of Koth. How would you like to handle this?”

I do not answer right away, choosing my words wisely before I speak. My father had a terrible habit of speaking out of turn, then regretting his words later. One such instance brought about his death.

He met his end because he wanted to mount an attack on a group of ogres that were camping in our countryside. They were not causing harm or trouble, as they were simply passing through, but my father wanted them eradicated from his land for no other reason than he said they should be. His men thought it was a call to action

instead of a heated explosion of words, and gathered his forces. Instead of my father dispelling their incorrect assumptions, he went along with it, believing more and more that his cause was the correct path. I tried to talk sense into him, as the ogres never intruded on our land and were deferential to orcs. But he would hear none of it. And he paid with his life.

While ogres are a milder race than orcs, they are by no means pushovers. Like orcs, they are always ready for war, as they are threatened more often than they should be. When my sire arrived in the ogre camp, they were ready for our forces, putting up a formidable fight. One of the ogres struck my father in the chest with an ax, almost cleaving him in two. After seeing the emperor laid low, the other orcs in our forces threw down their arms and fled with my father on their shields.

I refused to retaliate against the ogres after my father's death, as they did not want to fight and did not initiate. I learned a valuable lesson after my sire's death: never speak out of turn and never let my ego get the best of me, so as not to jeopardize my kingdom.

After a few beats of silence, I ask, "How many?"

Olog pipes up, "From our reports thus far, more than ten but less than twenty."

I nod, looking out across the land as we walk. Twenty rogue orcs are not a large number, but any rogue orcs are too many. "Send a letter to my brother. Tell him to keep me in the loop and let me know if this rogue band gets out of order and I will send my guards to dispose of them. I want to know everything about this group before an uprising begins. We need to be prepared in case there is an attack."

"Good plan," Olog says, with Larek agreeing.

We pass by the market, orcs, a few humans and fairies bartering for their goods. A



few orc women bow to me and murmur, “Your Highness,” then giggle behind their hands as they shuffle off.

It is not often I leave the walls of my palace, as there is much that needs doing and I do not have time to simply walk around for leisure, but when I do, there are always women vying for my attention, wishing for me to wed them.

All around, there are different pairings of mates, some orcs with humans, some with fairies, and some with other orcs of the same gender. Here in Belzod, one does not concern themselves about whom another chooses to mate, just so long as you treat one another with respect.

Larek nods towards an orc who has his arms around a slender human woman with red hair. She peers up at him with a loving expression, and his gaze reflects back in kind. “Do you think your mate is human or orc? Or any creature besides? Your fated mate, I mean.”

I bark a laugh I cannot hold back. The very notion is absurd. “Neither. I have no mate. I do not believe in them. I will choose whom I would like to be with, the fates be damned.”

He glances over at me, shaking his head. “Fated mates may be rare, but they do exist. From the stories I hear, the attraction is undeniable.”

“You sound like Nash.” My troublemaking brother with a rogue orc problem, Nash.

Larek gives me a sidelong look, but only says, “How so?”.

Not many orcs care for Nash as I do. He does as he likes. Nash may be a lord under my rule, but he lives far away from society, only upholding duties that he deems important, like patrolling the borders and watching the portals for danger. He does

not waste his time on petty squabbles that he feels are beneath him. I sometimes envy that about him. I am greatly honored to represent the people of my land, but at times I wish I could leave it all behind as Nash did and live in the woods, enjoying a carefree life.

“He believes in the fated mates lore. I believe I will choose the individual I wish to mate and crown the empress or emperor consort of Belzod. He can keep those thoughts of the gods sending his mate to him. I am more realistic and make my own future. As most of us do.”

Both Larek and Olog are mated to orcs they chose. They were not sent some magical individual that was their perfect fit. I’ve always wondered why the so-called fates choose to give some people mates and not others. Are the gods so cruel that they do not believe everyone should have their perfect match? It seems unfair, as most of my kind think their mate is out there, waiting for them.

We meander around the market for another hour, then move on closer to our borders, discussing our weapons supplies and inspect the defenses we have around our perimeter. There have been no attacks or threats thereof since my father was killed fifteen years ago. Even still, I keep all of our defenses in great shape to avoid being overrun.

“Let us check in with scouts on the southern border and inspect the portal,” I say, not ready to return to the palace, where responsibilities await me. I want to be away from the stifling confines of the palace and the hard seat of my throne for a while longer.

Inspecting the portals is a duty I took upon myself when there was an influx of elves, humans, and fairies breaching them over the past fifteen years of my rule. All of them have found their mates, so they did not enter by mistake, but I must ensure no one else does.

For reasons no one of living memory can recall, there are portals all over Belzod that allow entry for the fated mates of subjects in my kingdom. They are in different places and from different worlds, and only those that are meant to be in my kingdom are granted entry. It is a mystery we have tried to solve for centuries, but we are no closer now than we were when they were discovered.

No unmated person from this side of the barrier can get through, even if they are walking side by side with someone that can. We have had many instances of someone crossing over while in a large group, causing more problems than we are able to solve quickly.

“As you wish,” Larek says, walking a step behind me. “While we walk, there is the matter of how we will take care of the rogue orcs when they are captured. Nash would need to be brought into the fold as well, of course. We could...”

As Larek goes into detail about our options, I only half-listen. My mind is still stuck on his question about mates. Going to the barrier always makes me wonder if they exist at all. The only way I will know for sure is if one crosses through for me. And that is unlikely to happen.

For now, I will be alone until which time I find it suitable to find a mate to call my own.

Being alone is not so bad.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:39 am*

### Chapter Three

Rainn

After a great masturbation session last night that put me to sleep immediately, I woke up the next morning feeling refreshed. I hope Kai didn't hear me, but if he did, that's on him. That's the only downside to him being my roommate, really. I am kinda loud, though Kai has his days too. When he brings women over, I have to plug my ears or wear noise canceling headphones.

And I brought out my favorite dildo last night for my self-love session. A veiny, vibrating cock in my ass pushing against my walls and relentlessly tagging my prostate was just what the doctor ordered.

I lie in bed for a few minutes, stretching my arms over my head. My ass aches from how roughly I fucked myself, but the twinge of pain feels good. It also highlights my loneliness. I've been single for longer than I can remember and haven't had any hookups recently. I mean, how could I expect a normal man to fuck me until I'm a babbling mess after riding a ridged unicorn dick? I've fucked up my love life by having unrealistic dick standards.

I snort to myself and roll out of bed, taking a quick shower so I can start my morning.

It doesn't take long for me to pack for a week of camping. I usually keep my camping bag packed and ready, swapping things out that need replacing. It takes less than an hour to get my pack together and all my supplies ready at the door.

After I check and double check my supplies, I get dressed and put on my sturdy boots—since I plan to go hiking before I settle in for the night—and shoulder my pack and my tent. Excitement bubbles through me as I head out of the door, eager at the thought of being out in nature.

Ever since I was a kid, I've loved nature. Loved being outside around all the beauty unmarred by technology and distractions. My mother and brother didn't like camping—didn't really like going outside in general—but my mother didn't want to dampen my hobbies. In place of taking me on camping trips she and Theodore would have hated, she would let me camp out in our backyard, checking on me throughout the night.

When I got older and begged her to come hiking with me, she would suck it up and we'd make a day of it, taking trails, picking flowers and being out in the crisp, clean air. She did not like hiking as much as me, and I'm sure my mom would have rather stayed inside, bonding over a TV show or movie, but she went with me anytime I asked. She really was the best.

The morning is cool, the slight breeze blowing my twists gently around my head. It's a nice spring day, perfect for camping and hiking. As long as the wind doesn't pick up later, I won't have issues setting up my tent once I reach my destination.

Before I head out to the campgrounds—one that Kai and I have visited often so he'll know where to find me in case he can join me for a few days—I stop in at our favorite convenience store. Well, one of the only convenience stores in town. Destiny, Maryland isn't that big, so we don't have many.

I step inside with a smile on my face. The cashier, Tanner, glances up from his magazine and grins at me.

“Hey, Rainn.” He pauses, taking in my attire. “Camping again?”

I'm a frequent flyer here right before I go camping, so he knows that's exactly why I'm here. "Yep."

"How's the writing going?"

Tanner knows I'm an author, but he doesn't know my pen name or exactly what I write. I wanted to keep that private so he doesn't look at me weird if he knew I had sexy little twinkles, beautiful women and hot non-binary people bending over and getting fucked by monsters. I don't think I'd be able to look him in the face if I did.

"It's going. Got an idea that I need to work out. The fresh air and trails will help me think." While we talk, I grab all my favorite snacks that I plan to eat over the next few days. I usually camp by a stream to fish and I also bring some canned foods to hold me over, but junk food is my weakness. I like to munch on unhealthy shit while I brainstorm.

Tanner nods as he rings me up, stuffing my purchases in a bag. "It's a slight chance of rain today, you know that, right?"

I frown as I turn and look out the window closest to me. The sky is pretty clear, with only one or two fluffy cumulus clouds floating around. Doesn't look like rainy weather to me. "You sure? I didn't hear anything."

He shrugs and hands me my bag after I pay. "It was on the weather app. I check every morning to see if I have to drive to work since I just stay a bit down the road. It said rain in the next hour or so."

Fuck, I hope not. I really want to get this book started and can't think in the confines of our apartment. If it rains, it'll definitely throw a wrench in my plans.

Searching the skies for another minute or so, I feel confident that the weather will

hold while I'm hiking. As long as it doesn't come down too hard, I'll chill in my tent and work until it stops. I have enough food with me that doesn't require cooking, though if it rains for too many days in a row, I'll have to cut my trip short.

"I think I'll be fine," I tell him. "It's clear out there."

Tanner nods, but doesn't look convinced. "The weather can turn quickly. Be careful out there. Set up your tent first so you're not struggling in a downpour."

Sound advice. "Definitely." I wave goodbye and head out.

My normal spot by the stream isn't in use, so, as Tanner suggested, I set up my tent immediately. It takes no time at all to arrange my bags inside and unroll my sleeping bag.

Once I'm finished, I take another look at the sky, those two clouds the only ones visible. Still, I'm nervous about venturing too far from my tent in case the weather changes quickly. I curse myself for not checking the weather app on my phone before I left the store. I don't get service out this far, so my phone doesn't refresh to show me the projected forecast for the rest of the day.

Instead of hiking to Sumner Cave like I told Kai I would, I decide to just take one of the trails nearby. They're short, but no less beautiful than one that wends deeper into the woods.

Before I leave, I ready my fire pit, circling a patch of firewood and kindling with rocks to contain a fire. It only takes me a few minutes to set up the pit to my liking, then I shoulder my pack and start my hike.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:39 am*

### Chapter Four

Rainn

The next day, I wake up to a crisp morning. It's so beautiful out here, the sounds of nature waking me from my slumber. It didn't rain yesterday or even overnight, so I'm not sure what Tanner was on, but whatever. I still got to hike and stretch my legs, so I'm not complaining.

I crawl out of my tent, close my eyes and tip my head back, breathing in the crisp scent of the morning air with a smile on my face. I love it out here. If it were up to me, I'd live here for the rest of my life.

Well, maybe not. I might say I want to live in the wilderness, but I wouldn't be able to give up the comfort of four walls and central air. Though it would help me save money.

My mom left me and Theodore a sizable inheritance when she passed, which is the main reason I can afford to write full time. Living in a tent would keep my bank account full...

..though there would be nowhere for me to store my dildo collection. Yeah, nevermind, I'll stick to living in society.

Sighing, I open my eyes, then frown. Fucking large as fuck cumulonimbus clouds dot the sky, looking gray, puffy and ominous. "Son of a bitch," I mutter as I stand and post my hands on my hips. I really fucking wish I had service so I could check the



estimated start time for the storm that is sure to come. The smart thing to do is to climb back in my tent and hike another day, but I don't want to. My blood is thrumming through my veins, the thought of a miles-long hike making my shoulders relax.

I've camped in the pouring rain before and wrangled out a plot after a day or two. But nothing gets my creative juices flowing as well as stretching my legs and pushing my endurance to the limit on a long trek.

Fuck it, I'll chance it.

After I wash my face in the nearby stream and brush my teeth, I cook a breakfast of fish I caught and some of the food I packed and enjoy sitting in the brisk morning for a while.

Once I'm finished eating and clean up my site of any food that may attract animals, I check my bag to make sure I have my notepad and some pens. Locating the items, I zip my backpack up, tie my boots tighter, and start my hike. The morning is heating up, so maybe the rain will hold off for a little while longer.

Early morning hours are my favorite time of day. Everything seems so still, almost like even the very trees are taking a rest to recharge for the day. Small animals scurry about, the sounds of their footfalls or rustling calming me like only nature can.

Before I left my tent, I checked the map to see how far I would have to hike to reach Sumner Cave. It's about five miles away, further than I'm used to hiking, but a doable distance. I'll just have lunch in or near the cave before I head back.

As I hike, flashes of a plot come to mind, not really coming together, but giving me hope that it won't be long before it all makes sense. It's not until I'm about halfway to the cave that the plot starts to play through my mind like a movie. I hustle to pull

out my notebook and pen to jot it all down.

I lean against a large beech tree and prop my notebook on my knees so I can rest comfortably while I plot. Some people would use their phones as it's easier to walk and type or even to dictate, but the plot unfolds better when I write it by hand.

My hand moves across the paper at lightning speed, smudging some of the ink as I try to get the words from my head down on the page. The worst thing about being a lefty is I always have ink on my hands when I'm writing quickly. Any other time it would irritate me, but right now, I'm too excited to care. A smile stretches across my face as I scribble down the notes in my head.

Once I finish plotting, I grin down at the paper. I filled in six pages in my notebook for the second book, and three for the third book. I'm sure I'll add more for them both, but right now, it's enough that I have the overall plot. I even know how the series will end.

I read over my notes one more time, satisfied with what I have. It'll make for a good series. And the main characters will fuck in chapter three, so I'm really thrilled about that.

After Kai showed me the measuring tape for fifteen inches, I gave my alien a twelve-inch schlong. Alien book dick and real human dick are different, so book dick can be a foot long and my MC will take it like a fucking champ.

Happy with my words, I stuff the notebook back into my bag and continue my hike. I could turn back, since I have what I need, but I want to see Sumner Cave.

Like Kai said, it's been rumored that the people who'd gotten lost or disappeared here entered Sumner Cave. There have only been two confirmed missing person's cases—one person was found dead from an animal attack and the other was found

with a broken leg miles from his campsite days later—but that doesn't stop the rumor mill from churning, making up all kinds of stories of monsters and serial killers stalking the woods and snatching up unsuspecting prey.

Give me a fucking break.

I push through the break in the trees where the cave is and behold it in all its creepy glory. It's nestled on top of a steep hill, the entrance wide and a little scary looking. But none of the stories of the cave are true, so I'm not worried.

Planting my hands on my hips, I look up at the sky...

...and a droplet of rain lands in the center of my forehead. As if satisfied with the small warning of what is to come, the skies open up and dump rainwater on me like I'm a fucking beacon for bullshit.

"Fuck," I shout, hopping over a few rocks to get to the cover of the cave. I slip once and roll down a few feet, but catch myself before I can go down too far.

I push myself off the ground and hop over the rocks—successfully this time—and dash into the cave. I'm soaked by the time the lip of the cave shelters me.

When I'm shielded from the storm by the cave walls, I pull my pack from across my back and reach inside, checking that my notebook is dry. I let out a long breath when I find my outline safe from the downpour. Ink bleeds and a heavy dose of rain would ruin all the progress I made for these notes.

Stepping back to the mouth of the cave, I take a look out over the forest below. Though the rain is coming down hard as fuck, it's beautiful. The sun is still shining through one of the fat gray clouds, causing a shaft of light to drift through to the ground. A rainbow reflects off the sheets of rain, the bright colors making me smile

despite myself. Everything is illuminated, making the world look brand new. The scent of pine needles, fresh earth, and the clean air surround me like a blanket.

It's fucking perfect.

I take a seat at the mouth of the cave, bringing my knees to my chest and wrapping my arms around them.

Watching the rain always makes me think of my mother. She told me when she was pregnant with me, I kicked like mad whenever it would storm outside. It was her favorite story to tell me, and it never fails to make me smile when it storms.

I sigh and look out over the landscape. The trees lean a little to the side from the force of the wind and the strength of the rain, but it's not scary. I feel safe under the cover of the cave. Besides, storms never bothered me much. They mean cleansing and the start of something new.

After about twenty minutes of the rain showing no sign of letting up, I figure I can explore the cave for a bit. It's what I came here for anyway. Besides, if there is something in here that will ravage me, who am I to deny them their meal?

Or their pleasure?

I brush the dirt and grass from my pants and pull out my flashlight before I shoulder my backpack once more.

The bright light illuminates the walls of the cave with shadows dancing and reflecting from the beam. Some of the walls are interspersed with roots growing through the cracks, giving it an eerie, yet beautiful aesthetic. I stop and pull out my phone, snapping a few pictures of the uninhibited growth of the grass and roots and other wild things.. No matter what, the grass will find a way to grow, even through the

tough cave walls. It's admirable.

I wish I could send the photos to Kai. He loves it when I get excited about stuff like this. When I get service, I'll send them to him, even though I'll be on my way home.

Slowly, I trek through the cave, the smell of the earth getting stronger. I breathe in deeply, holding it in my lungs for as long as I can as I continue forward. The further in I walk, the more the air smells stale, a slight hint of mildew and decay in the air. But it's the natural scent of the cave, so I enjoy it, glad I get to experience it.

About twenty yards or so into my exploration, the cave splits off into two different directions. I can either go left or right. When I reach the junction, I shine the light down both directions. From what I can see, both go further than twenty yards, but I don't see other offshoots, so I doubt I'll get lost going either way.

I'm not sure which entrance to take, so, under my breath, I say, "Eeny, meeny, minny, moe," flicking the flashlight over each entrance. When I finish the little nursery rhyme, my light lands on the right. "Right it is," I say, and walk in that direction.

As I walk down the cave, I shine my flashlight around, hoping to see something neat, like a small section off-the-beaten-path that I can explore. But there's nothing. The path forward is straight and seemingly never-ending.

I almost turn around, but before I do, I come to another junction. Alarm bells tell me not to proceed further, that I've done enough exploration, but my curiosity gets the better of me and I prepare to do my eeny, meenie, minny, moe game again. But when I look to the right, I see a pinprick of light at the end.

"The fuck?" I whisper, my feet moving in that direction on their own.

Is this another entrance? But how could that be? For as long as I've lived in Destiny and heard tales about Sumner Cave, I've never heard about a second entrance. Now I'm really curious.

The light on the other end is dazzling now as I get closer and I throw my hand up to protect my vision. Is this passageway another part of the national park? It's so confusing because the forest in front of me looks more green and more vibrant, more...wild.

Blinking rapidly to clear my eyes of the tears gathering from the sudden brightness, I look out of the segment of the cave, taking in the most beautiful scenery I've ever seen. God, it's fucking picturesque. The trees are large and lush, the air smells like rich soil and the flowers. Holy fuck, the flowers.

I inch forward, trying to make out the plant in front of me with the plump red bulb. It doesn't resemble a plant I've ever seen before and I've explored a lot of places and seen a lot of foliage.

The shape of the bulb is odd, almost like the shape of a heart with pointed tips. The interior is purple, unlike any plant species I've seen or heard of. It's...breathtaking.

I quicken my footsteps, wanting to take a greedy pull of the fragrance from the beautiful flower in front of me. God, what if I've discovered a new plant species?

When I walk through the mouth of the cave, the same cold sensation that passed over me when I washed my face in the stream passes through me, but I pay it no mind. I'm already on my knees in front of the plant, staring at it in wonder. The aroma coming off it is so intoxicating, I sit there drawing in deep lungfuls of the scent before I even look around at my surroundings.

It's probably not the best idea to breathe in its fragrance so close. But, for some

reason, I can't pull myself away from the flower. It's like it has ensnared me in its beauty and won't let me go until I've fully appreciated it.

I don't know how long I sit in front of the plant, staring at its unusual color combination and design, but before long, I hear voices. But they're not speaking English. I tip my head to the side, trying to catch some of the words, but I can't make sense of them.

Is it German? Swedish? It's like no language I've ever heard before.

“Mensi virnu cmlaru je'e.”

What the hell? What are they saying? I'm not the type of person that feels like I need to know what a bi-or multilingual person is saying, but something about the language seems... not human .

What a strange thought. Of course they're humans. I'm still somewhere in Destiny. Bears and fucking wolves can't speak, so these are clearly human beings.

My heart thuds as the voices get closer, growing in volume. I turn around and my breath catches when I see three large, large men walking up the path across from me. Well, not men . They can't be men. They're green. Emerald fucking green and large. Did I mention large? So huge that I can't really fathom it initially.

With a jolt, I realize what I'm looking at. Or who , rather. They're orcs. Real live fucking orcs .

The one in the front is the one who's speaking, his hands tucked behind his back as he looks around. The two men— orcs —flanking him look thoughtful, nodding, and adding a few tidbits here and there.

I'm not sure if I make a noise to alert him to my presence because the lead orc looks up at me, confusion crossing his features.

Holy fuck, he's hot. Are orcs supposed to be hot? Well, this one is. He has a heavy brow with a circlet sitting atop it. Is he a king? Even though I'm a good distance away from him, I see his eyes are violet, like a shocking purple that's unbelievable. A broad nose, full lips, and tusks that jut from his lower jaw complete the look. And fuck, it's a good fucking look.

A flush blooms over my body and something shifts within me. What the fuck? I feel almost faint as I stare at him, something passing between us that I can't name, but feels... old. Old, but somewhat familiar and comforting. Like I instantly feel at home, though I've never been to this place before.

"Fegli xamgu erve?" he asks—or at least I think it's a question, judging by the inflection in his tone.

When he speaks, it breaks whatever weird hold he had on me, snapping me into action. A 'meep' sound leaves my lips and I turn to run back the way I came...

Just to run headlong into a solid barrier, and fall onto my back, my forehead throbbing in pain.

"Fuck," I groan, holding my face. How is that space solid? I just came through it.

The orc with the circlet enters my field of vision and either I've knocked all my good sense from my head or his good looks have me mesmerized. I smile at him and surprisingly, he smiles back.

Swallowing roughly, I say, "Did I pass out?"



The sexy green man's— orc —smile widens, showing even, but slightly sharp-looking teeth. The tusks coming from his mandible flash and I have the insane urge to reach up and touch them.

He shakes his head as if to clear it and I keep my hand firmly to myself.

“Where am I?” I ask. Yeah, all my good sense is gone because of a good looking orc. I should be scared out of my wits, but instead, I’m inquiring about my location.

He says something, and, initially, I’m fixated on how his mouth forms syllables. Then I realized that what he said wasn’t in English or any language I understand. “Huh?” I ask, sitting up and pressing my back to what was supposed to be an entrance but is now solid.

The sexy orc sighs and snaps his fingers. One of the orcs behind him drops something in his hand. A necklace? He motions for me to open my hand, so I do and he drops the necklace into my palm. Some part of my brain unlocks, a part that I didn’t know existed.

“Better?” the orc asks in English, making me jump. I already knew his voice was deep and rumble, but hearing him enunciate words in English is...fuck. Like a cool stream of water flowing over rocks. I close my eyes and nod, hoping he’ll say more. He doesn’t disappoint. “You are in the country of Belzod. This city is called Daz Vrorkrad.”

“Not in Kansas anymore,” I murmur, rubbing over the knot that’s rapidly rising on my forehead.

His rumbling laugh sparks something inside me. Why is he affecting me so much? I shouldn’t lean into him just because he laughs. “No, Not Kans-ass. I am afraid you may never see your homeland of Kans-ass again.” He looks broken up about it, but I

can't really tell since his features are foreign to me.

My head feels a little floaty, either from my headlong rush into the barrier or from the overwhelming nature of being in another world.

"It's okay." I wave him off with a chuckle, my body feeling heavy and light at the same time. "I live in Maryland anyway. Never been to Kansas." He tilts his head as he assesses me. I can't read the look on his face, so I don't know if he's curious about my words or if I suddenly look delicious. "Are you going to kill me? Roast my body over an open fire?"

I keep my scoff to myself. It's kinda late to ask that question. If he wanted to, he would have done it anyway. My brain is finally catching up to the fact that this handsome man isn't a man, but an orc. As I write them, they're scary creatures that like to take humans captive and use their bodies roughly until they bend to their wills. Though that last bit would not be a hardship for me. I'd bend over right now if he asked me to, audience be damned.

A half smile crosses his lips as his violet eyes flash. "I am not. I do not eat humans. I hear their meat is tough."

I gasp and gulp, my eyes widening as I search his face. When I see his eyes twinkle, a laugh tumbles from my throat. "I hear the same. Zero out of ten, would not recommend." I crack a smile and the orcs standing behind my orc laugh as well. And okay, yeah, they're also hot as fuck, but don't have the magnetism that my orc does.

Not my orc. The one speaking to me right now. That orc.

"Can I help you up, human?"

"Rainn," I say, grasping the hand he holds out for me. A jolt goes up my arm, making

my eyes peel wide and meet his. His violet orbs are just as wide, a look of surprise crossing his features. My heart thunders and I feel a deep connection to him, even though we don't know each other.

What the fuck?

After he clears his throat, he stands to his full height, pulling me up with him. Damn, he's tall as fuck. I'm only five-eight and this orc has to have more than a foot on me. Not only is he taller than me, but far bulkier. I thought Kai was big, but he has nothing on this orc. His arms are thick and corded and his long linen pants—are they linen?—pull at his thick thighs. He doesn't have on a shirt, so his abs and heavy pecs are on display, looking good enough to eat. Or for me to run my tongue all over them, getting a taste of that green skin.

The orc tips his head back, a look of confusion crossing his face as he stares at the sky. “No. It has rained in days past, but the weather is clear for the next week or so, according to our weather experts.”

My brain is sluggish as I take in what he says. Then it clicks. “Oh, no. That's my name. Rainn. With two n's.”

“Such an odd name,” he says as he looks back down at me. “I am Emperor Axum Yagnatz. It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance.”

“Axum is an odd name too.”

His smile seems permanently etched on his face. “So it is, to humans.” His open expression shutters and a look of concern replaces it. “Are you well, Rainn with two N's? You do not look so good.”

My head swims and my vision blurs. When I gaze up at him, I see two Axums.

“I’m...I..”

With that, I fall to my knees and my vision darkens. The last thing I remember is rough hands catching me before I hit the ground. Then nothing.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:39 am*

### Chapter Five

#### Axum

The human's weight is slight in my arms when I scoop him up. I am not sure if he was overwhelmed being in unfamiliar surroundings or if he was hurt from running headlong into the barrier. He has a small bump on his forehead, so I believe it was his trying to escape that hurt him.

During our short conversation, he did not seem to be afraid or upset by his current predicament. In fact, he took seeing me, Olog, and Larek in stride, even making a joke. Who is this human? Usually when humans or elves or fairies drift through our barriers, it takes some getting used to for them to speak to any orc without fear in their voice. Not Rainn with two n's. He took seeing three large orcs like it was an everyday occurrence.

Looking down at his face, I am struck anew with a funny feeling in my chest. When I laid eyes on him, I felt like a spider, trapped in the web of his gaze. I did not know what to make of it and I had to force myself to speak, asking if he was well. Of course he could not speak Orcish, so he could not understand me. But what I felt when he looked at me did not leave. It intensified when I touched him to help him up, something shifting in my chest. Like something long buried had been found. I do not know what it is and do not know who to ask.

Human facial features are still foreign to me, but I know the man in my arms is striking. He is so handsome, so fair of face with smooth, chestnut-brown skin that looks soft and delicate. Long black hair done in a complex style, secured on top of his

head snugly. A bow-shaped mouth and a delicate nose sits perfectly in the middle of his face. Fine features that remind me of something precious. In short, this human is radiant. I have never seen someone such as him.

“What will you do with him, Your Grace?” Larek says as we come within view of the palace.

“Do?” I ask, dragging my eyes away from Rainn with effort.

Larek smirks. “Yes. Anyone that crosses the barrier usually goes to?—”

“He will stay with me,” I say abruptly, my heart clenching at the thought of Rainn being anywhere else.

“Of course,” Olog says, bowing to me, though an expression I can’t name crosses his face. Happiness? Smugness, maybe? “Shall I summon healers for him?”

Before I can walk up the lane to get him to the palace and out of the heat of the day, Larek steps in front of me, looking down at Rainn. He grips his chin and turns his face towards him, studying Rainn’s visage in concentration.

Larek looks at me in surprise, his hand jerking from Rainn’s chin quickly. It takes a moment to realize that I am growling. I am sure my eyes flash with anger, the violet reflecting off his green skin as I stare him down.

Shaking my head, I take a small step back from Larek, but bring Rainn closer to my chest. “Have a healer come to my chambers. And cancel all of my appointments for the rest of the day.”

Both Larek and Olog bow. “As you wish,” Larek says, looking both contrite and smug. Yes, it was smugness on Olog’s face too. I wonder if it was because of the

conversation we had on the way here? That is something to ponder at a later time.

Larek hands me Rainn's discarded bag and I hold it in a firm grip but avoid jostling Rainn. It takes us less time to get back to the palace than it did getting to the portal, as we did not take any detours or walk at a leisurely pace.

When we step through the palace doors, I beeline to the stairs, taking them two at a time to get Rainn to my third floor chambers. I push into the room, leaving the door open so my advisors and healers can enter.

It concerns me that he hasn't regained consciousness, even after a fifteen-minute walk back to my palace, but he is still breathing so I know he has not expired. I am worried about a possible head injury, however.

I place him on the bed, moving my many pillows away from his face so he can breathe. I forcibly push away the thought of how much I think he belongs there. Rainn is a stranger. I do not know him. I cannot have these feelings cramped in my chest for him when we have known each other for mere moments.

Well, fuck.

I sit on my chaise by the window, my thoughts running a mile a minute. This is what Nash meant when he said my mate would come to me when I least expected it. I did not expect a human male, but there is no other explanation. I feel too strongly about him after such a brief encounter for him to be anything other than my mate.

As I stare at him from across the room, I imagine him in my life until the end of our days. Even after only a short conversation, my world would be darker if he were to leave, even though I do not know him and I have not claimed him.

Fuck, this human came through the barrier...for me.

Larek was correct—the feeling between fated mates is intense.

Before I can spiral deeper into my thoughts, there's a knock at my chamber doors. When I meet the healer's eyes, I wave them inside.

I wish I had the skills to heal with magic, but I do not. All orcs are capable of using magic, but we all cannot use the same brand of magic. There are those, like me, that can use magic to help with day-to-day tasks, like communicating with telepathy, heating my bathing pool, enchanting a piece of jewelry to use as a language translator with foreigners; whereas others use magic for their trades, such as tailors and blacksmiths, and yet others who use magic to heal. Everyone has their gifts.

The healer bows to me, then looks over at Rainn. “What happened, Your Highness?” he asks, keeping his distance from Rainn until I give permission. Larek must have told him that he suspected Rainn was my mate.

Fucking Larek.

“He ran headlong into the barrier after it solidified.” I wave my hand to Rainn so the healer can approach.

It takes but a moment for the healer to use a spell to check his condition. “He is just resting, Your Highness. He does not have a concussion, just a nasty bump from the barrier. He will be fine after a day or two of rest.” After he bows again, he leaves me alone with Rainn.

My mate.

I never thought I would find a mate. My job as ruler of this land is too trying to court anyone and I refused an arranged marriage. Though my parents' marriage was not terrible, they could never be with the people they chose for themselves. I never



wanted that for myself.

But with Rainn here, I can have who the gods meant for me. What will he say to that? He just walked into a world unknown to him. How will he react knowing an orc wants to claim him?

Rainn stirs on the bed, groaning softly. I want to rush over to him, but I do not want to scare him. I am over seven-feet-tall and more than three hundred pounds. That would scare anyone, especially a dainty human such as him.

He sits up slowly, looking around groggily. When his gaze clashes with mine, his eyes widen. His mouth forms a perfect 'o' before it stretches into a smile. "I didn't think you were real."

"I am very much real, Rainn with two n's."

He looks down shyly before he gasps. Rainn throws his legs over the side of the bed and looks around. He lets out an a-ha! when he spots his bag near the bed. He pulls it up to rest near him. "Shit! What time is it? I have to call my friend and let him know I'm stuck here. Wait, am I even on Earth?" I shrug. What is Urrth?

He holds a device in the air and scrunches his face. "No service. Where can I get bars around here?"

I shake my head. "Your human machines will not work here. I am sorry. You cannot contact your friend."

Rainn sighs and tosses his device back in the bag. "Just my luck, I suppose. When can I go back home?"

Slowly, I shake my head. "Not right now. There is...not right now."

“That blows.” He lies back on the bed, then moans sinfully. One of my hands drops in front of my groin, my cock growing half hard at the noise. “Holy fuck, this bed is soft. What is it? Memory foam?”

I frown. “I am not sure what that is, but it is made from Leocsela feathers.”

“Leoc—what?” he asks, his face a mask of confusion.

Smiling, I explain what Leoscelas are, as well as telling him a few more animals native to Belzod. “But our pillows and bedding are made from their feathers and fur,” I finish.

“So weird for an animal to have feathers and fur.” Rainn smiles at me, tucking his legs under him. His smile wavers. “I like this place, from what little I saw of it, but my best friend will be worried. I hate that I can’t tell him what happened.”

I feel for him. I could ask a human that has been claimed to deliver the message, but any human that comes through the portal has no desire to leave but for a short time. And wherever they are from is where the portal sends them back to. The human may not want to travel to the “Merry-land” Rainn spoke of.

I broach the idea to Rainn, but he only shakes his head. “No, that’s okay. It would be best for him to know, but I don’t want to put anyone out because of my curiosity.” I wonder at his statement, but do not ask questions. Rainn lets out a humorless laugh. “Besides, I think Kai would try to come here himself and would beat himself up if he couldn’t get through the portal. It was solid for me when I tried to go back, so I know it will be solid for him trying to get in.” Rainn pulls his knees to his chest. “I guess it’s for the best. I’ve always wanted to meet an orc.”

My eyebrows now rise on my forehead. “Truly? Why?”

His cheeks darken with a blush and he lowers his gaze, picking at the sheet. “For... reasons.” He glances around nervously, taking in my room as he fiddles with his fingers. “Is this your room?”

“It is. Would you like me to show you around?”

Rainn perks up, his eyes bright. “Yes. Oh god, yes. Please.” But when he stands, he sways on his feet.

I rush over to him and lower him back to the bed. “Maybe tomorrow. The healer said you would need to rest for a day or two after you hit your head.”

He nods, then hisses. “Good call. Can I sleep here or will I?—”

“You may sleep here. I can sleep in another chamber.”

“No,” he rushes to say, holding up his hands as if to stop me from leaving. “No, you can stay here. This bed is gigantic. There’s enough room for us both. Besides...” He lowers his eyes and lets out a shuddering breath. “Something inside me doesn’t want you to leave quite yet. Even the thought of it makes me feel jittery. Weird, huh?”

It is on the tip of my tongue to tell him about fated mates, but from what I understand about his species, they do not believe in them. I am sure I would scare him if I broached the subject. Soon. I will tell him soon. Just not while he is healing from his injury.

I sit on the bed beside him. “No, it is not. If you would like, you can rest. It is close to dusk. From what past humans have said, there is a time progression of close to six hours when you cross the barrier. Your sleep cycle will regulate quickly though.”

Rainn nods, eyes wide with interest. “Yeah. Okay. Crazy how crossing what felt like

a freezing cold waterfall could basically teleport me to the future.”

I give him a small, reassuring smile. “Would you like something to eat? I can go to the kitchens and gather you an evening meal?”

“You don’t have to do that,” he says, trying to sit up.

I press my hand lightly to his shoulder so he can lie back down. “It would be my pleasure. I will just be a moment. Rest until I come back. If you are up to it after dinner, we can talk more. Alright?”

He smiles at me, still unsure, but not exactly scared. What an odd human. “Alright. Thank you, Axum.”

With a smile on my face, I leave my chambers to gather dinner for my mate.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:39 am*

### Chapter Six

Rainn

The bed I wake up in is fucking heaven. God, I've never slept so well, especially in an unknown place. A whole new world.

I open my eyes the next morning and I'm greeted by the sight of Axum, his face relaxed as his warm breath drifts over me as he sleeps.

How the hell does he look good when he's asleep? It shouldn't be allowed.

I take in his face—the heavy brow, broad nose and soft-looking, kissable lips. Damn, how can an orc be fine? Like, so-fine-I'm-good-with-being-in-a-whole-new-world-so-I-can-be-in-his-orbit fine. Even his bright green skin draws me in. That could also have a lot to do with my secret orc fantasies.

My gaze locks on his tusks. They look so sharp, like, if I touch them, I'd prick my finger.

Before I realize what I'm doing, I reach out so I can trace along one of them, wanting to see if it's as deadly as it looks.

"They only look sharp," Axum says in a sleep-drenched voice. I gasp and pull my hand back before I make contact. I was so focused on his tusks that I didn't even see his eyes open or the small smirk on his face. "You may touch them," he says, stretching his arms over his head.

“I’m sorry,” I murmur, tucking my hand under my face. “I shouldn’t have tried. That was extremely rude.” Fucking personal space, Rainn.

“It is quite alright,” he says, smiling warmly at me. “It is only natural that humans are curious about our tusks, seeing as you don’t have any. If you would like to touch them, by all means...”

“You sure?”

“Very.”

Slowly, I reach over and touch the tip of one of his tusks. It’s keen, but also not? As if there is a barrier around it that takes away the worst of the sharpness.

“Wow,” I whisper, touching the back side of his left tusk. “I thought they’d be more knife-like. How do you get used to them?”

He shrugs. “I have known nothing else. It would be strange for you to suddenly grow tusks, since you do not have them now, but I always have. They’re a part of me.”

That makes sense. “I love them,” I say, letting my mouth run away from me. “They look scary, but they’re actually really beautiful.” My cheeks heat when I meet his eyes. “I’m sorry. Probably should have kept that to myself.”

“Nonsense. Thank you for the compliment.”

I sit up, the necklace he gave me yesterday trapped under my body. “This will take some getting used to. Do I have to wear it when I sleep?”

“No. But you will not understand me unless you put it on or have it in contact with your body. Our magicians have experimented with several ways for humans or elves

or anyone else that crosses the barrier to understand us. Enchanted items seem to be all that work.”

“Or I can learn orcish. That would be smarter.”

Axum’s eyes grow wide. “You would do that? Learn my language to speak to me? To my people?”

I nod. “Of course. If I can’t go home, I need to understand everyone in case I forget my necklace or don’t feel like wearing it.” Thinking about not going home sends a pang through my chest, the thought of leaving Kai alone without knowing what happened to me is gut-wrenching. But the thought of leaving Axum hurts even more. I push both unwanted thoughts away.

His face brightens, his violet eyes twinkling. “That is thoughtful, Rainn. I can teach you.” Then he backtracks quickly. “Or I can have a tutor assigned to you. I can?—”

I cover his large mouth with my hand. “I would like you to teach me. It could be fun. We could spend time together while you tutor me.”

His mouth tips up in a smile under my hand before I lower it to my lap.

I stretch my arms over my head, then wrinkle my nose. While I don’t smell awful, the scent of sweat clings to my skin. I feel gross that I slept without showering last night. What must Axum think of me?

“Is there somewhere I can shower? I don’t have other clothes or anything though. They’re in my second bag back at my campsite. Could I work for them? I don’t know how to do much, but I can learn.” Then another thought enters my head. “Shit, how will I pay for anything?”

Axum's smile is gentle as he watches me. "You do not have to pay for clothing. When humans cross the barrier, we help them get clothing and lodging since most do not travel with coins. If you would like, we can discuss you getting a job. You can wait a few weeks to get acclimated before that, however." Then he pauses with a frown. "What is a shower?"

"Oh. Um..." I sit and think of how to explain a shower. I've never had to, as everyone knows what they are. "Like where you stand in a stall and let water fall on you so you can wash? Like rain, but...like in a box?" I'm so fucking terrible at explaining things. Am I sure I'm an author?

Axum still looks confused. "We do not have a shower, but there is a bathing pool."

A bathing pool? I don't know what it is, but I like the sound of it. "You have an indoor pool? Where is it?"

"Where else would it be?" He looks so confused, which confuses me.

"Um...there are outdoor pools where I live. Most people have them outside."

"You bathe outside?" Axum sounds incredulous and I can't help it. I laugh. He sounds so concerned about people using soap and water outdoors.

"I mean, yeah," I say as I wipe under my eyes. "Some people do. But most bathtubs are inside."

"Yours is a confusing race, Rainn."

Taking my hand, he gently pulls me from the bed and leads me to a door across the room, to the right side of his bed. Pushing through it, he steps aside to let me walk ahead of him.



My breath catches and all I can say is, “Wow.”

It looks like a lake inside the castle walls. Lush green grass crunches beneath my bare feet and wildflowers grow all around me. Butterflies—or what look like butterflies—flap around, circling the flowers. A large tree grows from a space along the far wall, towering over us. And the bathing pool itself is huge. Tiny flowers dot the perimeter, filling the air with their sweet scent.

Looking up, I see there is a ceiling above, not an open area as I would imagine. But the ceiling doesn't look solid. I can't explain it other than to say it looks opaque.

“This is amazing,” I breathe, bending down to sniff at the flowers. “Is the water cold? Do I just hop in?”

“It is cold, but I can warm it for you.” He steps over and slips his fingertips into the water and murmurs a few words. Steam rises from the surface of the water as he stands.

Axum shakes his hand off, droplets of water flying off as he looks at me shyly. “If you need nothing else, I will be?—”

“Join me,” I say hurriedly. I mean, come on, I have a hot orc in front of me. There's no way I'm letting him get away from me when I've been salivating about meeting one. Hell, I didn't even know they existed. This is already beyond my wildest dreams. And to see one naked? Yeah, not going to pass that up.

His eyebrows fly up. “I would love to. I will get a cleaning and drying cloth for you. You are welcome to enter the bathing pool. I will return shortly.”

I don't miss the giddy smile on Axum's face as he walks past me. I also don't pretend I'm not watching his powerful ass in his sleep pants as he walks away. Holy hell,

what would it feel like under my hands as he pounds into me?

Wait, how big is Axum's dick? My favorite toy at home was more thick than long. The way Axum walks, with his loose stride and wide stance, gives me thoughts that he might be packing an anaconda. God, I hope so. Yeah, I've known him for a day, but fuck that. When I want something, I go after it. No shame in my game.

I quickly strip out of my clothes and sit at the edge of the lake— bathing pool . The blades of the grass feel good against my naked ass. I've never sat on grass butt-ass naked. It'll definitely be happening again.

Slowly, I slide into the bathing pool and groan happily. It's the perfect temperature.

I wade through the pool, though it's not deep at all. I can press my feet flat to the bottom and my head is still above water when I'm nearer the edge. The further I walk to the other side, the deeper it goes. It's a literal bathing pool.

I backtrack to where I can stand comfortably and close my eyes, enjoying the warm water. This is the fucking life. A lake that has all the trappings of the outdoors while being inside away from all the elements. It's fucking perfect.

My eyes snap open when Axum comes back into the room with two thick towels and cloths in his hands. He sets them on a rock and proceeds to get undressed.

Oh. My. God.

Everything about Axum is hot as fuck. Every article of clothing removed reveals a delight to my eyes. I already saw his strong arms and torso yesterday, but his thick thighs, toned calves and his thick, hanging cock have me swallowing roughly.

His dick is...beautiful. Long and thick, several veins prominent. He's smooth, the

area around his shaft and heavy sac hairless. His cock looks nothing like my orc dildo at home, but beautiful in its own way.

I don't avert my eyes. I'm sure most people would've be too shy to stare at a man—orc—they just met, but damn that. I want Axum, no denying that. Why hide it?

He smirks as he steps into the pool. "My eyes are here, Rainn." He points to his violet orbs, making me bark a loud laugh.

"I apologize," I say with a look that says I am absolutely not sorry at all and I think Axum knows that.

His smirk turns into a grin as he hands me one of the thick cloths. "I do not mind you ogling my body."

If I stare any longer, I'll want to jump his bones. I'm a size queen, but I'm not suicidal. Getting Axum's dick in my hole would take lots of training.

Lots. Of. Training.

To distract myself, I ask, "Can I ask you something?"

"Anything."

"I know you said I can't leave, but is there, like, a loophole where I can get a message to my friend? Just to let him know I'm okay. I promise to come right back."

He takes a while to answer, washing his body as his face scrunches in thought. He hands me the soap bar and I fall in love with the smell of some kind of citrus and cedar. Not only does it smell phenomenal, the bar glides over my skin and seems to infuse it with oil. It's fucking amazing. I eagerly rub some into my cloth and wash the

sweat and yesterday off my skin.

Axum dips his head under the water after he washes his hair. When he comes back up and squeezes the water out, he meets my gaze. “There is a way for you to go home, Rainn. But it is not exactly ideal at the present.”

Hope blooms in my chest as I think about getting back to Kai. Not forever, just long enough to tell him that I’m okay. But I don’t think I can stay gone for long. Just thinking about it makes my chest ache for some strange reason. Not the thought of leaving this place, but of leaving Axum. It’s a little odd, but I’m going with it.

Other than Kai, there is nothing for me in Destiny. Sure, my career as an author is waiting for me, but I’d rather stay here than peddling stories to make ends meet. Besides, I can write anywhere.

Even without knowing what I’m going to do, I know this is where I belong. My heart and soul feel at ease here.

“What is it? I promise I’ll come back, I just?—”

“Rainn, you would need to be claimed by an orc to leave this realm. And if an orc claims you, you are tied to them. Forever.”

My mouth drops open. Yeah, I see why he says it’s not ideal. Tying myself to someone? I’m not sure I want to do that just to get back home.

“What does it mean, an orc claiming me?”

I watch Axum swallow thickly and lick his lips. The thick flesh of his tongue swipes over one of his tusks and I again cannot stop staring. My dick twitches, itching to touch him, taste him...anything. “Rainn, have you felt...odd when you think about

being apart from me?”

A change of conversation, but I'll bite. “Yeah. It's the weirdest thing. Not bad, but I've never felt anything like it. It's mind-boggling.”

He nods, rubbing his hand over his wet hair. “I am not sure how to tell you this, but we are mates. You were only able to cross the barrier because you had a mate in this world. That is...me.”

A mate? Axum would be the orc I have to tie myself to? Well, that's...interesting.

“Since you are my mate,” he continues, “I would have to claim you. But it is a big decision. We would be together from the day we mate until the day we die. We would become physically ill if we were apart for too long and could die if we did not come back together. So if you are in the human world without me, we would both suffer.”

That's big. It's a lot to think about. Yes, I'd like to go home and see my best friend, but am I willing to tie myself to Axum? I like him, there's no doubt about that, and he says we're mates, but what if we get sick of each other? Forever is a long time. I mean, I'm in my late twenties, so I have at least fifty years left to live if I take care of myself. That's fifty years with one person, unable to leave if we don't work out or we'd suffer, as Axum says.

He's right, it's not ideal.

I wrap my arms around myself as my spirit, which was just flying high with hope, deflates and some of the light is taken out of my day. “I'm not sure what to say.”

“You do not have to say anything, Rainn. I will consult with my advisors and most accomplished spell weavers to see if there is another way. I will explore every avenue for you.”

Smiling, I say, “Thank you.” The silence is thick and awkward following my words. I don’t want things to be like this between me and Axum. I really enjoy his company. I don’t want him to feel guilty for something he can’t help. “What does ‘claiming’ mean? What do you— we —do?”

To my surprise, Axum’s eyes flare and my own grow wide when I see his cock grow hard and bob beneath the clear water. It should defy science for a dick that big to get that hard. Hell, I’m lightheaded just looking at it. Holy fuck.

He licks his lips, his gaze drifting down my body. “Are you sure you wish to know, Rainn?” His voice drops to a deep, sexy rumble that makes my dick twitch.

A flush blooms over my skin as I soak up his attention. Kicking my chin up, I answer, “Yes.”

As he speaks, Axum takes slow steps towards me, his movements sending a wave of warm water sluicing up my chest. “First, we must build a connection. A deep connection where we feel consumed by each other. So taken that there is no way we want to be away from one another.” I take small steps back as he advances on me, but not out of fear. I want to keep him in my line of sight so I can keep staring at him, keep watching how his gaze roams over my body. “Then, we must make love. While we make love, I would bite you. I will also knot you, as I would any other time I am inside you.”

My back hits the edge of the bathing pool. I’m out of room. But I barely even notice. My sole focus is on Axum and his alluring words.

“Knot me?” I ask in a husky voice that I hardly recognize.

“Yes. There is a knot that inflates within the base of my cock, locking us together until it goes down.” Axum is standing in front of me now, bracketing me with his

body. His cock bumps against my belly.

I'm still not sure what he means by 'knot', but there is an even more pressing question that races through my mind.

"Inside me? Can you..." I swallow hard. "Will you fit?"

"Oh yes." His hand lifts from the water and his fingers thread through my twists, tipping my head up. "We have pleasure oil. It will help you accommodate me. As you can see, orcs are rather large."

"Clearly," I say. And to my surprise as much as Axum's, I wrap my hands around his shaft, stroking him slowly. The skin of his shaft is silky, feeling great against the palm of my hand. He gasps, his eyes flashing as he stares down at me.

I ask, "What else happens when you claim me?"

He grunts, rolling his hips into my hands. He's hot here, so big in my hands. I have to make an effort for my fingers to touch around him. "Fuck, that feels good. It has been so long." Axum places his other hand beside my head, his fingers digging into the soil there, the fragrant aroma permeating the air. He grunts again before he says, "I must bite you for the claiming to take effect."

"Bite me?" I ask, my cock throbbing as I continue to jerk Axum.

His violet eyes land on me. He dips his head and drags those tusks over my skin. I whimper, my body positively shuddering against his. "I bite you." His tongue darts out and tastes the skin of my neck. A moan of delight leaves my lips and I move my hands faster on Axum's cock. "Here. When I sink my teeth into you, I will orgasm and claim you. Our bond will be solid."

Axum's hand drops under the water and wraps around my shaft, squeezing gently. "Oh, god," I murmur, his hand on me is fucking magical. The right amount of pressure, perfect technique. "Axum."

He hums, stroking me expertly. "Rainn, may I kiss you?"

I grin, finding it funny, but romantic that he asks that when he already has his hand on my cock, but I nod anyway, curious about how it will feel with his tusks.

Lowering his head, Axum captures my mouth in a sweet kiss that sets my soul on fire. I stand on my tiptoes to get closer to him. Axum snakes his tongue into my mouth tentatively, then, with more urgency, licking inside. His lips are soft and plush, melding perfectly with mine. His tusks scratch lightly on my cheeks, but not painfully. It ratchets up my arousal, making my dick harder than its ever been. I love how gentle and careful he is with me, even when I know he'd rather ravage me, if the way his dick is digging into my belly is anything to go by.

Overwhelmed, I grab his shoulder with my free hand, my head spinning from how fucking consumed I am by him. His tongue in my mouth, one hand in my hair and the other jerking my cock, has me lightheaded.

Then, Axum twists his hand on my dick and I fucking come undone. Back bowing, I come hard, spurt after spurt of my come shooting out of me with force. I moan into his mouth, unable to keep up with the motion of his tongue.

Axum strokes me through my release, a deep hum drifting through our fused mouths.

His hand drops from my hair and wraps around my back when he breaks the kiss. Good thing too, because my knees go weak. The only thing keeping my head above water is Axum's strong hold.



“Look at me, Rainn,” he says in a fucked-out voice that gets my attention in a big way. Snapping my eyes open, I look at Axum. His hand dips below the surface of the water where he removes my slack hand and cups himself, jerking hard and fast. “You look gorgeous when you come. I cannot wait to make you do it again.”

“Fuck, Axum,” I murmur, licking my lips as I watch him.

“I need to taste you again.”

“Anytime,” I manage to say before Axum’s mouth slams on mine. His tusks nip at my skin. They’re...smooth and almost blunt, though they look sharp and formidable.

When Axum thrusts his tongue into my mouth, his body shudders, his hand moving fast to milk himself. His deep groans vibrate against my tongue as he hungrily devours my mouth.

After he comes, he grabs one of my hands and brings it to his still-twitching shaft. “Here is my knot,” he says in a tight, blissed-out voice.

My eyes widen when I feel a swollen...nodule there near the base of his shaft. It’s thick and bulbous. My mouth waters to do more than touch it tentatively. About a minute later, it retreats back into his cock.

Sighing against my mouth, Axum moves back and looks down at me. “Are you okay?”

“I’m perfect. That was...that was great. If that’s what claiming is, sign me up for two.”

Axum laughs loudly, pulling me away from the side of the bathing pool and into his arms. “Did I hurt you?”

“No. Not at all.” I look down at the water, which is still clear, but we both just came while submerged in the bathing pool’s depths. “How is the bathing pool cleaned?” I don’t see a drain anywhere.

Axum kisses my cheek, his tusks sliding against me gently. “It is filtered through a system that...” He stops and shakes his head. “It is tedious to explain and I do not wish to bore you. Suffice to say that magic is involved.”

Scooping up my discarded cloth, he washes me again, then helps me out of the bathing pool. When he’s standing in front of me, a towel around his waist, he tips my head up with two fingers under my chin so I can look into those beautiful violet eyes. “I have a very busy day today, but I will come for you when I am finished.”

“What do you want me to do while you’re gone?” A pit forms in my belly at the thought of being away from him.

“You may rest. I can also send up some books that are in human English that you can read. They are what humans call ‘romance’. Some of the humans that have crossed onto this plane have brought them and have shared with others.”

My ears perk up. “Yes, please, yes. I’d love a book. That chaise you have would be perfect to read on.”

Axum smiles as he dries me off with the large towel—or what he calls a drying cloth. The necklace I have on catches on it a few times, making Axum frown at it.

I’m surprised to see he also bought a towel for my hair, collecting the water that drips from my twists with a small smile on his face.

After I’m dry, he takes my hand and leads me into his room. On the bed is a long shirt that looks soft to the touch.

He scoops it up and hands it to me. “I will have a tailor make you clothing soon. In the meantime, would you like to wear a tunic of mine?”

His expression is shy, soft. How could I turn down this sweet orc?

I take the garment from him, sliding it quickly over my head. It billows around me, making me aware that I am not wearing underwear. But, fuck, this material feels good against my skin. So soft and airy. “Thank you, Axum.”

The smile that stretches his face is fucking beautiful. Axum is hot as fuck. I’m one lucky human. “You are welcome. I will return with food and books for you and will complete my work before dusk.”

He kisses me quickly, then breezes out of the door. With a sigh, I fall back on the bed, grinning at the ceiling. How is this my life?

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:39 am*

### Chapter Seven

#### Axum

A headache pounds behind my eyelids, frustration churning in my gut. I hate getting bad news and this has to be the worst. “What do you mean, you cannot find the rogue orcs? Did Nash not give you coordinates to patrol?”

Larek looks as frustrated as I feel as we glare down at the soldiers standing before us. Last week, I sent scouts to my brother to get as much information about the rogue orcs as they could, but it seems as if it was a fruitless endeavor.

The lead soldier steps forward, eyes downcast. “Once we linked with Lord Nash, we heard whispers they were in the Dostinl region, but they were not there. We found their tracks, so they may have been tipped off that we were inquiring of their location.”

Olog grunts, his arms crossed over his massive chest. “Did it occur to you not to ask anyone in that region, for they may have been sympathetic to those...orcs’ cause?”

The soldier’s cheeks darken. “It did not, sir.”

I grumble, “So you lost them?”

“Yes, Your Highness. But we shall return to help Lord Nash and?—”

“Enough,” I say almost wearily, raising my hand. “I will confer with my brother to

better assist him. You may go.”

Before he leaves, the soldier bows and says, “I apologize for disappointing you, Your Highness.”

“You will do better next time.”

His face brightens, though his eyes still reflect the sting of his failure.

It is customary to relieve soldiers of duty when they are unable to perform the tasks set before them, sending them back to their trades. It would be a great dishonor to return to your trade before the six-month mandatory duty is served. What I just did for this orc was save him from dishonor, allowing him to keep his post as a soldier until his time has ended.

He places a fist over his chest, bowing more deeply. “Thank you. This will not happen again.” He and the other guards bow repeatedly as they head out of the door of the throne room.

Larek rests a hand on my shoulder. “Your father was fair, but he would not have been that kind. You may have earned yourself a loyal servant.”

I frown. “I did not do it to earn a servant. I did not want to disgrace him for a mistake. A big mistake, but a mistake all the same. This is their first mission. They will conduct themselves accordingly the next time.”

“As you say.”

I snap my fingers and a scribe steps forward, quill poised over a parchment. “Your Grace.”

“Send a letter to Nash. Inform him that we haven’t found any information on the rogue orcs. So he has full reins in locating them. If he has to, he can involve Mahk. He would be itching to get called in.”

The scribe's hands move quickly over the parchment, taking my notes. “Yes, Your Grace. I will send this forthwith.”

After transcribing the message, my scribe hurries from the throne room to send a raven to Nash. My brother has stopped all telepathic communication, so I have to send him messages by mundane means.

“Do you trust your brother with this?” Olog asks. “He is a great fighter, but not a great lord. He never shows up to court and when he does, he pays little attention to the goings on. Will he take this task seriously?”

Standing, I make my way down the stairs of my dais, knowing they will follow me. I put my hands behind my back, clasping my wrists. “Nash may live...unconventionally, but he is loyal to the realm. I have no doubt he will do what needs done to ensure I am not hurt or usurped, especially because it is from his group the rogue orcs broke off from.”

Larek and Olog walk flush with me. Larek says, “I trust in Nash’s abilities. If he is not able to free the land of this infestation, Mahk will. They are both formidable.”

I push through the doors of the throne room and walk onto the palace grounds, making my way to the forge.

The necklace Larek gave me for Rainn when he arrived works perfectly, enabling us to communicate in his native tongue while I teach him orcish, but I see how it annoys him when it gets in his way or if it catches on some of his clothing. Well, my clothing. Even though he would like some of his own, he is content to walk around in

my tunics. And I like seeing him in them.

After about ten minutes, the forge comes into view. I have something specific I want for Rainn and it is not that necklace that causes him grief.

The blacksmiths see me coming and all but those working bellows or hammering hot metal drop to one knee to bow.

“Rise,” I say as I step under the awning and am immediately engulfed by the sweltering heat. They all get to their feet. “Who is in charge here?”

An orc a few inches shorter than me starts, but steps forward, bowing at the waist. “I am, Your Highness. I am Xolag. How may I be of assistance?” He appears nervous, as if he believes I am here to cause trouble for him.

“There is something I would like crafted for me. Walk with me so we can discuss.”

He falls in step beside me as we start down a lane adjacent to the forge. It is the same lane that leads to the barrier, but I try to ignore that, pushing down the excited feelings I have when I think of Rainn.

He has been in my kingdom for a week and it has been the best week of my life. We talk and laugh about any and everything. He is hilarious, able to make me laugh like I have not since I was a youth.

Our time together has been superficial, however. We discuss nothing of importance. But I would like to. Rainn is my mate and I want to get to know everything about him.

Xolag asks again, “How may I be of assistance?”

“I would like you to make something for me. For my mate.”

Xolag stops beside me, his turquoise eyes wide. “You wish...me to make something for the emperor’s consort?”

That title brings me up short. I knew when I mated someone, they would become the my consort. I am not sure why it slipped my mind to tell Rainn that myself.

I incline my head. “Yes, I would. Is that agreeable?”

Xolag bows his head. “Yes. Yes it is. I would be honored. What is it you need? I am quite adept at making shields and spear tips. Any form of weaponry you, or your mate, would like.”

I chuckle. I don’t think Rainn is the type that would be in the thick of a battle. “No, nothing of that nature.”

I tell Xolag what I want in as great a detail as I can. I give him the measurements I acquired from Rainn’s wrist while he was sleeping. Xolag nods, listening intently. He informs me that I will have my order in less than a week. Once I receive it, I will imbue it with magic for Rainn.

Clapping him on the shoulder, I thank Xolag when we return to the forge. Larek and Olog inquire about what I needed and I smile, a giddy feeling dancing in my chest. “Something for my mate.”

Larek rolls his eyes, though he smiles. “You are far gone, are you not, Your Highness?”

“No denying it.”



They both laugh and I join in.

We head back to the palace so we can continue our business for the day. But when we walk in, Rainn is knocking on the door of the throne room, looking edible in one of my dark green tunics. He has on those heavy duty boots he wore when he entered the barrier, but nothing else. I can tell from the outline of his backside that he does not have on any undergarments.

My cock twitches in my trousers. Rainn and I have been touching and kissing each other for the past week. I do believe I know every inch of his body by feel, my hands itching to touch him again.

A deep chuckle from Larek brings Rainn's head up and around to us. His cheeks pink as he walks over to us. "Hey. I was coming to see?—"

I cut him off by grabbing him around the waist and hauling him to me, kissing him deeply. Rainn moans in my mouth and wraps his arms around my neck. Everything around me disappears as I ravage his mouth. Nothing else exists but Rainn and how he feels in my arms. If it were up to me, I would have him against the wall, his legs around my waist as I pump in and out of him, pleasure oil be damned.

Throats clearing interrupt me and my mate. I growl and pull my lips from Rainn's. I look over my shoulder at Larek, who tries to look innocent.

Rainn giggles sweetly, pasting himself to my side. "Hey, Larek, Olog."

Since he has been here, Rainn has become acquainted with my advisors, asking after their families and about their work. If I am not mistaken, they are all half in love with him.

Not many people inquire about our days or our work. Our job is a thankless one. So I

understand why Larek and Olog are always eager to talk to him. Looks as if my mate has found loyal servants as well.

Olog bows, making Rainn blush. “Rainn. How do you fare today?”

“I’m well. You? How’s your mate?”

My advisor's face brightens. “She is fantastic. She works the booth in our market if you would like to meet her.”

“I would love to.” He looks up at me with a smile. “Can you take me to the market tomorrow?”

“Anything you want.” I look at Larek. “Cancel my schedule for the day. I will take care of everything the day after tomorrow.” Larek and Olog bow and leave us. “Did you need me?” I ask Rainn.

He shakes his head. “No. Well, yes. I wanted to see if you’ve eaten. You told me yesterday that you don’t always eat while you’re working.”

It was a throw-away comment when he laughed at how much I ate at dinner last night. I did not think it was information that Rainn would latch onto.

My heart warms that he came to check on me. I have spent so much time alone, so much time taking care of myself that it is disconcerting that someone else does it—but in a good way. If I was not aware from a biological standpoint, this small act alone would tell me he is my mate. Rainn is perfect.

“I have not. Let us go to the kitchens and beg food. I will have you fed before I take you upstairs with me.”

His eyes become hooded before he tucks himself to my side.

We enter the kitchens and the cooks scramble to make whatever Rainn asks for. He has gotten accustomed to our cuisine here, loving the oxiolly. He says it reminds him of something he calls a carrot where he is from. I am sure to tell the cooks to make extra oxiolly for my sweet Rainn. Once we have plates piled high with food, we go to the dining room to eat.

As always, the food smells delicious. My stomach growls from the scent wafting up to me. I did not notice how hungry I was until this very moment.

“Tell me about your brothers,” Rainn says after we have been eating for a few minutes. I told him I had two brothers, one that stays in isolation, but that is all I divulged. We were too busy touching each other to say more.

I swallow the food in my mouth and say, “Nash and Mahk. Nash is the middle brother and Mahk is the youngest.”

“What are they like? Why don’t they live here?”

I shake my head. “Nash would not want to live here. He is...eccentric. He and his band of loyal orcs roam around and live in tents. He loves his own space. He is a lord, but does not conduct himself as such.” Though I say it as a rebuke, I find myself smiling.

“Is that a bad thing?” he asks, stuffing a piece of oxiolly in his mouth with a pleased groan.

“It is not. In fact, I envy him sometimes for his freedom. He comes when he is summoned, but he does not hold to the duties of a normal lord. I am sure if I were not emperor, he would be stripped of his title. But it is unfathomable to me to do that to

anyone, let alone my brother.”

“And your other brother?”

I look at him, my gaze searching his face. I am not sure he can handle what Mahk does, but I will tell him because he asked. “He is the royal assassin.”

Rainn’s eyes widen. “Oh. Well...that’s...”

“It is a position he is good at, though he is not needed much,” I defend, not wanting him to think less of Mahk. My youngest brother chose his job, but he is not evil. He dispatches those I order him to, and nothing more.

He nods. Rainn looks nervous about the information, but not afraid. “That’s Mahk? Like Mark with a Boston accent?” He giggles, then says “Maaaaahhhhk! Pahhk the caahh!” and giggles harder.

I look at him with a tilt of my head, wondering what is so funny.

Composing himself, Rainn says, “I’m sorry. If you knew about Boston, you’d understand why that’s funny.”

I only smile and nod. “Yes, Mahk is the assassin. Nash is the lord.”

“Are they next in line for the throne? I’m not sure how royal succession works for orcs.”

“No. They cannot inherit the throne because they are not of my dam and sire’s bloodline. My mother and father were only together to produce an heir, me. My father had mistresses and those unions produced Mahk and Nash. It was not uncommon for emperors to be with others, but what was uncommon was giving a

child born outside the royal mating royal positions. It was not a very popular decision, but my father loved his sons and wanted them to be royalty as he was.”

“That’s sweet and very honorable. Were your parents at least...happy? With him...cheating and all?”

“Oh yes. They were best friends until the day my mother died. They were not in love, however.”

A relieved look crosses Rainn’s face. Most emperors do not love their mates, only paired to produce a strong heir. I was lucky that my dam and sire were friends, getting along well in private, when they did not have to keep up pretenses of undying love for the kingdom. The only blight in their relationship was the kingdom knowing my sire had mistresses. They’d assumed, but Nash and Mahk were the proof.

Like my father, my mother loved my brothers too. They were always welcome in the palace, staying weeks at a time with us whenever they wanted. It was not a decision that endeared subjects to my father, but he did not care. He refused to turn his back on his children. My father was a flawed man, thinking more with his emotions than logic, but he was fair and a good father. His legacy to this kingdom is extremely complicated.

“So,” Rainn says, pushing food around on his plate, “your brother, the lord, doesn’t want to be a lord, and your other brother likes to kill people?”

My lips twitch as I say, “Yes, exactly.”

“I’d love to meet them.”

“You will. At least Mahk. He visits court often, mostly to ensure he does not have any duties from me. You also have a brother, correct?”

Rainn scowls. “Yes. Though I haven’t talked to him in years.”

“Why? I cannot imagine not speaking to Nash and Mahk for years. We may not live near each other, but we are close.”

He sighs, a shadow crossing his face. “So, I’m really smart, right? And I’m not saying it to be funny or full of myself, it’s a fact. I skipped the seventh grade and could have gone to high school at twelve, but my mother wanted me to have a semblance of a childhood. My brother is smarter. He went to college at sixteen, medical school at twenty, and became a cardiothoracic surgeon by the time he was thirty-three.”

“What is a cardeeoh...surgeon?” I cannot remember the word he said, though I am hanging on to every syllable that leaves his lips.

“A heart surgeon, mostly, but they work on everything in the chest. The esophagus, the heart, the lungs, and any other part of the chest that needs operating on. He’s smart and he knows it. He likes being smart and ahead of his peers. We are like night and day. I was shy, but more of a people person than him. He liked school, liked learning, but didn’t like people and would have much rather had been homeschooled. I never liked school. I was more interested in working outside, in nature, you know?” I nod, though I am not sure. Orcs choose their occupations mostly based on their skills in magic, but not always. We are free to take whatever path we wish. Unless you are born to the throne, like me.

Rainn continues. “When I quit my job as a human resource manager when I was twenty-six—something he’d already said that was beneath me—to become an author, he told me I no longer fit in the life he’d made for himself. That when I got my act together and got a job that reflected my standing in society as a genius, I could contact him again. I haven’t talked to him since.”

A growl leaves my lips as I think about his brother not wanting to talk to him because of some rule his society put on him. “What about doing what makes you happy? Why is that not enough?”

Rainn shrugs, not looking too upset. “Who knows? My mother loved that I did what made me happy. She knew I liked to do my own thing and never made me feel bad about it. My brother is just a dick.”

“Knew?” I ask, though I know in my heart what him using the past tense means. It is how I speak of my dam.

Now Rainn’s face looks drawn and hurt shines clearly from his eyes. He sets his fork down as if he has lost his appetite. “She died some time ago. She was...the best.” His voice cracks on the last word and my heart goes out to him.

I rest a hand on his, offering him my condolences through touch. “I am sorry. I understand your pain. My dam died when I was fifty. Though the pain of loss becomes bearable, it does not get any easier.”

“No, it doesn’t. What about your father? He had to have passed away if you are the emperor. What happened to him, if you don’t mind me asking.”

“I do not mind.” I pause to collect my words. “He died only fifteen years ago. Though I loved him, he made a very foolish decision based on anger, hunting down a tribe of ogres that were causing no harm to us or our kingdom. He was struck in the chest with an axe and our healers could not save him.”

“Jesus, Axum. I’m so sorry to hear that. Are you okay?”

No one has asked me that before and it does funny things to my heart. “I am, sweet Rainn. Thank you for asking.”

“Do you miss him?”

That is a hard question to answer. My father was a good orc, but not an extremely adept emperor. His lessons have only stuck with me in his death so I do not make the same mistakes that he did. But I was not trained for my role as I should have been. If not for my sire’s advisors, I may not have been prepared at all.

“I miss him as a father, but not as an emperor. I wish...I wish we had spent more time together while he was teaching me for my position, but I enjoyed the time we spent together as father and son. Our relationship was...complicated.” I flick my eyes up to his. “What of your father? Is he...?”

“He passed away before I was born. I never met him. My mother and others told me he was a good man, though. So I had two good parents, though I only met one.”

“I am sorry, sweet Rainn.”

He nods, then purses his lips. “Enough with the sad stuff. Can we go out for a walk? I’m not really dressed to go far, but I’d like some fresh air.”

“You are perfect the way you are.” I collect our plates and take them to the kitchen. “I did not train this morning, so a walk would be nice for some exercise,” I say when I return.

“I haven’t really stretched my legs all week.” Rainn stands and grabs my hand, eagerly leading me outside. His strides are much shorter than mine, two of his making up one of mine. I slow down so I do not drag him behind me.

Side by side, we meander down a road leading away from the market. We are silent for a few minutes, enjoying the breeze and the warm weather. It is not as hot today as the day Rainn arrived.



A question I have been wondering all week pops in my head. “Can I ask how you got through the barrier? From what I understand, they are not in locations that are easily accessible.”

“I got caught in a rainstorm,” he tells me, leaning his head on my forearm as we continue leisurely down the lane. “When I have issues with the plots for my books, I go camping or for a hike. I decided to do both this go round so I could get the plots organized and written down. I was hiking and got caught in a downpour. There was a cave nearby that I was going to explore, so I hurried inside to take cover. I watched the rain for a while, enjoying the peace. Then I started exploring. After maybe an hour or so, I saw the opening at the end of one of the passages and walked through. That’s when I saw you, Larek, and Olog.”

“Would you like to see the portal? You were injured last time.”

“Yes, please.”

I guide Rainn from the established road to a field with shin-high grass—almost knee-high for Rainn—so we can take a more easterly direction to get to the portal.

“I do find it funny,” I say, looking down at him, “that your name is Rainn, but you did not want to get wet in a downpour.”

Chuckling, he says, “Well, I don’t usually shy away from the rain, but I was too far away from my camp to hike back. I’m not afraid of it, but I am afraid of lightning strikes.”

I hum. “Your name, it is unusual, no? I am not sure how it is for humans, but orcs have never named their children after the elements.”

“It is, and it isn’t. People with the same name spell it differently than I do. But it’s not

really common. My mom named me Rainn because when she was pregnant with me, she said the first time I kicked was during a really bad storm. Then every time it rained after that, I would kick and kick until the storm went away. Imagine being woken up in the middle of the night not only by rain outside, but your kid kicking nonstop.” He smiles, his eyes taking on a faraway look as he is dragged back into a good memory. “She said I earned that name many times over.”

“It is a sweet story, Rainn. I wish I could have met your mother. She sounds wonderful.”

“She was. If she knew about orcs, I’m sure she would have warned me to stay away, but probably would have known I wouldn’t.”

I laugh loudly and Rainn joins in. “I am sure. We may look fearsome, but looks are sometimes deceiving.”

“Oh, I’m sure you’re pretty fearsome.” He bumps my arm with his. “But you don’t look scary. Not to me.”

My cheeks flame as I try to form words of thanks for his compliment. In the end, nothing sufficient comes to mind, so I remain quiet.

A few minutes later, we reach another road and walk a few hundred feet before we reach another small hill. After we crest it, I point ahead of us to an outcropping of trees. “There. The barrier.”

“Just looks like trees to me.” I think I detect a note of disappointment in his tone.

“Look closely, sweet Rainn.”

We stop walking and he squints at the area I pointed to. He opens his mouth as if to

repeat that he sees nothing, but then he gasps and says, “Oh.”

The barrier is not visible unless you know what you are looking for. There is a ripple along the trees where the glamor shifts with the breeze. As an orc, I am always aware of where a barrier is. Once I claim Rainn, he will too.

We approach it and Rainn reaches out to touch it. “So I really can’t go back home, huh?”

Sadness fills in my heart at the longing in his voice. I wish I could give him another answer, or, better yet, take him home myself, but that is not possible. I am sure there are no orcs in his homeland and I am not too keen to live the rest of my days on that side of the barrier. And my position would not allow it. “I am sorry you are trapped here.”

“What?” He shakes himself and glances up at me. “I’m not. I love it here. I feel at home. Nothing to be sorry about.”

“Truly?” Happiness dances in my chest, though trepidation follows on its heels. I want Rainn to be happy with me. I want him to love Daz Vrorgrad as I do, but I have to be aware that this is not the home he is used to. It will take some time for him to become acclimated.

“Yeah, truly.”

“Would you like to see more of the countryside or go back to the palace?”

“We can walk a little more. But tell me if there are any solid areas like this portal so I don’t hurt myself.”

I grin as we skirt around the barrier and walk deeper into the woods on a small path.

As we walk, Rainn looks around with wide eyes, taking it all in. We stop at a paddock where we house our Rhinoppek. “They look like horses. Well, besides their angular heads and six legs,” Rainn says as he points to them.

“They are magnificent creatures. And strong. They needs must if they can pull a carriage with four to five orcs that weigh close to or over three hundred pounds each.”

Rainn whistles. “Yeah, they would have to be.” He smiles as he looks up at the sky. “It’s so beautiful out here. Much different than the forests where I live. The colors are so vibrant and the air is so fresh.” He breathes in deeply, then wrinkles his nose. “Well, when we’re not close to horse shit.” I chuckle. Rainn sighs and leans against me, nestling close to my body. “I will never regret being stuck here. The beauty of the land alone is worth it.”

“You really enjoy it?”

“I really do.” He says with a smile. “It’s perfect.”

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*Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:39 am*

### Chapter Eight

Rainn

Axum and I talk every morning before he goes about his royal duties. It's really nice. He tells me about Daz Vrorhrad and I tell him about Destiny. He has so many questions about the human world. Before my phone died, I showed him a few game apps that I played to help me focus in between writing chapters.

"Why do you play on this device instead of playing games with friends?" he asked, frowning at the matching game he was playing. He seemed to find it distasteful, which I found hilarious.

I shrugged. "Sometimes, talking to people is... trying."

He looked up at me, a look of concern on his face. "Do you find me trying? I am sorry if I?—"

Climbing in his lap, I kissed his lips to stop his chatter. "You are perfect, Axum. I really love talking to you and being around you."

His smile filled me with happiness.

A few days later, Axum wakes me up with a grin on his face. "How would you like to visit the market today?"

I smile sleepily at him. "I'd love to."

He kisses me quickly, then helps me out of bed. We go to the bathing pool to wash and we clean our teeth before I get dressed in one of Axum's tunics. He told me we'd be going to the tailor today so I can have a variety of my own clothes, but he said I would always be welcome to wear his tunics.

Over the past week or so, I've grown accustomed to wearing his clothes, with no underwear underneath. There's something freeing about walking around with my dick and balls swinging, feeling the breeze on my skin there. From what Axum told me, not many people here wear underwear, so I fit right in.

Axum cinches a cloth tie around my waist so the tunic doesn't blow around all willy nilly. I have to admit it's a nice addition.

Taking my hand, he guides me outside, telling me about the market. It's not often that Axum isn't holding my hand or touching me in some way, even when we're in his room. I love it more than I care to admit.

There are over one hundred booths with orcs and anyone that crossed through the barrier selling their wares. I've looked at the market from our bedroom window, but didn't want to venture there alone. Not because I was afraid, but because I wanted to share that first experience with Axum.

"Olog's mate works at a booth near the front of the market. We can go visit her so you two can meet," Axum says, motioning to the entrance of the market.

It's bustling in the market, orcs walking around, talking loudly and laughing as they barter. The sounds of tinkling coins and the crinkling of paper wrapping goods fills the air. Everyone is so happy and I smile at the younger orcs dashing around with their friends.

I watch in wonder, loving this sense of community. In Destiny, we don't have

anything close to this. Sure, we have flea markets, but everyone keeps to themselves, only speaking when absolutely necessary. They walk around with their noses in the air, touching items for sale as if they're beneath them. It's maddening.

But here, people talk and laugh and compliment items sold and haggle fairly. I really fucking love it here.

Axum and I walk forward and he introduces me to Olog's mate, Duma. She embraces me, her large arms wrapped around me as if we're old friends. I sink into them, smiling up at her.

Orc women look different to their men. Still tall and strong, with rippling muscles, but more lean and their facial features are softer. Their tusks are also shorter, not jutting as much from their lower jaw.

"Olog has told me much about the emperor's consort," she says.

I look at Axum with a raised eyebrow. His cheeks darken with a blush. Shaking my head, I focus back on Duma. "I hope it was all good things."

"Of course."

She shows me all of the brooches and pins she made, as well as some sort of belt thingy that would cinch around my waist much as the tie I have around it now. It's much prettier than the belt, so I immediately ask for its price so I can wear it now.

Picking it up, she helps me put it on and steps back, smiling at her handiwork. "It is yours, Rainn. No charge."

"Oh no," I say, handing the strip of cloth to Axum, who tucks it into his satchel. "I have to pay. I can't take it for free. It's too extravagant." My eyes widen as I look up

at Axum. “I don’t have money. I cant...” My shoulders deflate as I look at the beautiful belt.

She smiles and inclines her head at my compliment. “If you would like to pay for it, come down to the market some day and help me sell. I would enjoy the company.”

“Done,” I say quickly. We chat for another few minutes before Duma’s booth is overrun with customers.

Axum and I meander around the market for a while more, stopping at every few booths. Many orcs, elves, and fairies bow to Axum, murmuring, “Your Highness” or “Your Grace.” Axum inclines his head, asking a few people how they are and inquiring about their health and their families. It makes me smile at how personable he is.

With no coins or anything to barter, I am content to window shop, but anytime I admire something for too long, Axum snatches it up and presses it into my hands, paying for the items himself. I roll my eyes, but don’t ask him to stop. His expression every time he buys something for me is so happy and excited when I allow him to do it.

Arms laden with things I want, but don’t really need, we’re walking towards the exit when an orc stops Axum, bowing low, then asking if he can have a few minutes of his time. The orc’s eyes dart to me quickly, then focus back on Axum. I wonder at it, but think nothing of it.

“Go,” I say, nodding towards the exit. “I’ll wait for you over there.”

Axum kisses me lightly, then turns his attention to one of his subjects.

I walk slowly to the exit, peeking at booths that I haven’t checked out yet. Since I



don't have coins, I can only look, but those that run the booths are happy to chat with me, telling me in great detail how they got started crafting whatever is on sale and inviting me to come back anytime to sit and chat with them.

It warms my heart how welcoming and friendly everyone is. I do miss Destiny, but not because of the city or my life there. It's the familiarity and Kai that I miss. But the open and friendly nature of everyone here makes me realize that I really didn't like Destiny all that much. Or at all, really. The people weren't friendly and the area wasn't really thriving. Jobs were scarce and the cost of living was going up at an alarming rate. Not much to miss on that front.

The best thing about that place was Kai.

As I meander about, I hear snatches of conversations, mostly about how great it is that Axum is mingling with the common people, showing that he cares about them. Most find him approachable and fair, while also being a stern leader to keep the kingdom afloat.

I smile as I listen to how much people love him. He's told me a time or two how he is unsure if he's doing the right thing, since his father wasn't the best leader. But from what his subjects are saying, he's doing well.

I also catch snatches of gossip about me and Axum when I walk past. A lot of people are surprised Axum has found a mate and are genuinely happy for him. I have to fight to suppress my grins.

Around ten minutes later, Axum returns to me, with a mischievous grin, almost like he has a secret he's dying to share, but won't.

Okay, big green orc. Keep your secrets.

We leave the market and Axum says we are going to a building about a mile away. While we walk, Axum shows me some of the oxioolly fields, some of the Xeeasalo prancing about and Leocseela flying overhead. A few other animals make their presence known, hopping or scurrying in front of us. I take it all in with a grin.

When we reach our destination, Axum opens the door for me and ushers me inside. The seamstress bows deeply when she sees Axum and, to my surprise, bows just as deeply to me. I'm used to the acknowledgment over the past week or so, but nothing like this. It must be the whole 'emperor's consort' thing.

"It is a pleasure to have you here," the orc woman says. "I am Larshka. Please, tell me your signature colors and the items you would like."

She pulls out a book and opens it, showing me some of the clothing designs that are native to Belzod. I pick some and Larshka gets to work, keeping up a running commentary when I ask her how she got involved with tailoring.

The hut we're in has been passed down from her mother and father, and it was passed down from her grandparents, all the way back about eight generations. "I love my what I do," she says fondly as he puts several pins in my clothing. "It was what I was meant to do. When I realized I was adept at magic for tailoring like my mother and father before me, I was very pleased."

She's such a sweet orc. God, I love all the people I've met here.

After my measurements are taken and the cloth is cut, Larshka hangs them all on a rack and says some words in orcish that I can't understand, even with my necklace on. Must be her special brand of magic, because right before my eyes, the clothes morph and shrink.

"There," Larshka says, waving her hand in a flourish. "Your items are ready. Do

return if you require anything else.”

“Thank you,” I say.

“Yes, thank you for seeing us on such short notice,” Axum tacks on.

Larshka bows deeply again. “I am always be available to the emperor and his consort.”

When we’re outside, Axum’s arms weighed down with all my new treasures, I ask, “What is an emperor consort?”

“It means my mate. My subjects have accepted you as my mate.”

The smile pasted on my face is permanent as we walk back to the palace.

Once we’re back in our room and after Axum hangs my clothes beside his in his extremely large closet, he asks, “How would you feel about going somewhere with me in a few days? I have work that must be addressed first, but after that?”

“I say yes. I think I’ll go to hang out with Duma for the next few days at the market. If you finish early, come find me.”

We go to take a bath then get ready for bed. We’d spent more time at the seamstress’s hut than I thought, as the sun had already set when we were walking home.

Usually, we’d fool around before we go to sleep, kissing and touching each other everywhere. Tonight, I’m too exhausted. So I climb onto Axum’s chest and lie down, getting comfortable against his warm flesh.

He kisses the top of my head and I smile. “I need to take my hair down soon. I didn’t

bring any products with me though. I'll need shampoo, conditioner and something to moisturize my hair." If I'd known I'd be trapped somewhere without a hair store, I would have packed all my supplies with me.

"Not to worry," Axum says. "I have been working on a serum for your hair. It shall be ready in a few days."

"How?"

He shrugs. "There are others in the kingdom with hair texture such as yours. I inquired of them and they told me what their mates made for them. I am using the same formula, but it will have a different fragrance. One I think you will enjoy."

I sigh, nuzzling closer to him. Just when I think Axum is already perfect, he surpasses it. I didn't mention before tonight that I need hair products and he already had something in the works for me. Whatever I did to deserve Axum, I want to keep doing it.

"Thank you," I say, choked up by his thoughtfulness.

"Anything for you, Rainn."

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### Chapter Nine

#### Axum

“Thank you, Xolag,” I tell the blacksmith, closing my hand around Rainn’s gift. It is small, so I tuck it into my bag so I will not drop it.

Xolag bows, his cheeks flushing a deeper green. “You are most welcome, Your Highness. I am glad it is to your liking.”

“It is perfect. Please, if there is anything I can do for you, let me know.”

He lifts his head with a wide grin. “Doing this for you was honor enough. I can tell my children and my children’s children that I made a token for the emperor's consort. What a tale for them to pass down.”

Placing my hand over my heart, I tip my head to him. “You honor me with your words.”

With that, Xolag and I part ways and I head back to the palace to retrieve Rainn. I know how much he loves nature and the outdoors. I just hope he loves my secret place.

I only get two steps into the palace before a ball of energy jumps into my arms. I stumble back, catching myself against a pillar, laughing when Rainn wraps his arms around my neck.

“Eager, are we?” I ask when I right myself, my hands going under his ass to keep him close.

“Very. I’ve been up for ,like, an hour waiting for you to come get me. I even packed us a bag. I’m ready.”

With my free hand, I push the flap back of the bag slung over his shoulder and see there are refreshments and a blanket stuffed inside. I did not inform Rainn where we were going, but I am glad he had the foresight to pack a blanket.

Holding him close, I take measured steps down the hallways, not missing the soft grins my guards give us. “We should eat first. Then we can go.”

Rainn pecks me gently on the lips, sending sparks over my skin.

We eat breakfast quickly, then, hand in hand, we walk in the opposite direction of the barrier. We walk along the road for a few minutes in peaceful silence before I turn Rainn down a gully. He looks at me curiously, but I prod him on and he starts forward.

Carefully, we walk along the edges, watching as the water rushes by unimpeded. Rainn looks down and smiles as a school of Kirabura swim by. A few jump out of the water, flapping their fins before descending back into the depths of the gully.

On and on we walk, until we get to a game path. “Watch your step,” I murmur to Rainn, helping him step over a large root. He thanks me and we continue on our trek.

Alone, it would take me a little less than an hour to reach my secret place, but with Rainn and his short legs, it takes close to two hours before I see the familiar break in the woods.

“Are you okay?” I ask, watching the sweat drip from his brow.

He nods, wiping his face. “Yeah. I hike often, remember?” He points down to his boots. “Luckily I had these on when I crossed the barrier. They’re broken in, so this trek doesn’t bother me.”

I nod. Around the empire, he walks around either barefoot like the rest of us, or in the soft shoes Larshka fashioned for him with magic.

With my hand on his shoulders, I lead him into the space between the trees that is hidden from all those that may venture here. Rainn looks at me quizzically, but I urge him on, telling him, “It is safe, I swear it.”

“I trust you,” he says with a grin, then ducks under a low hanging branch. I push the branch aside with ease and pass through the tight confines.

Most do not know of this location because of how tightly the branches grow together. They would assume it is just a bramble of trees, nothing to see and nothing to explore.

But I am not most.

After we pass through the initial tight passage, we find ourselves on another path, though this one is littered with roots. The trees around us tower high, higher than those directly around my palace. I love this area because the trees make me feel small and put my life into perspective.

Rainn looks up at the trees, like sentries standing guard over us. Their canopies block out the heat, cooling the sweat that accumulated on our skin.

“Holy fuck, Axum. This place is?—”

His words are cut off when he trips over a tall root, almost falling face first onto the ground. Only my hand on his bag keeps him from hurting himself. “Careful, sweet Rainn.”

When he is back on his feet, he dusts himself off and grins. “I’m good. Thank you.”

“We’re almost there. Would you like me to carry you?”

His laughter is high and sweet, a melody that washes over me and makes my heart leap. “I swear I’m not always so clumsy. I can manage.”

I lead him a little further into the cover of tall trees until I hear the babbling of a brook.

Rainn looks at me with wide eyes. “What’s that?”

“Come and see.” I push aside a curtain of hanging reeds and wave him through.

When he steps past them, a soft gasp reaches my ears. “Axum. This is amazing. How did you find this place?”

He turns to look at me and I am struck speechless. I never knew the true meaning of sun-kissed until I saw Rainn’s skin as he stepped into a shaft of light. His brown skin, glistening with beads of sweat, almost glows, the sun reflecting back what true beauty is.

Rainn ducks his head, a blush high on his cheeks. “What?”

“I...you are gorgeous.”

His smile lights something inside me. “Thank you. But this...this is breathtaking.”



“It is almost as beautiful as you.”

He glows more with flaming cheeks as he looks around my secret space. I try to see it through his eyes, as a new surrounding.

The stream that flows through this hidden glen gurgles softly, drifting lazily over the rocks along the bed. Surrounding the stream are black and blue Buqicon flowers, their large bulbs hanging lazily.

Rainn spins around, beaming radiantly. “How did you find this place?”

I smile as I pull the blanket from his bag and unfurl it on the ground. “When I was in my eighteenth year, my sire wanted me to learn how to hunt Vilope. I did not want to be on a hunt, so when his guards brought me in this direction, I ran away. I wanted somewhere I could not be found and saw the small break in the woods. The deeper I came through, the more beauty I found. When I saw the hanging reeds, I pushed through and found this marvelous place. I come once every few months just to sit and think, if I have the time.”

“It’s amazing.”

“You are the first person I have brought here,” I confess softly, helping him to lower himself to the blanket.

He leans against me, settling between my legs. “Thank you. It’s really beautiful.”

We sit for a few hours, exchanging some of the refreshments Rainn packed and sharing stories about our lives. I tell Rainn more about my mother, whom I adored.

“It cannot last,” I tell him, plucking at the necklace around his neck. “Peace helps the kingdom thrive. I am striving to prove I am different from my sire.”

He nods. “Other orcs see it, you know?” He turns to look at me, placing a soft hand on my thigh. “I heard them talking in the market. They are happy with your leadership. They love a life of peace. Don’t let your father’s legacy be yours. You’re doing great.”

My heart flutters with happiness. Rainn is undeniably my mate. Not only has he integrated himself into my world, acting as emperor consort without even knowing, he is going out of his way to set me at ease.

An emperor’s consort is their rock, helping them run the kingdom while also being available for counsel. I did not even have to ask Rainn for counsel and comfort; he gives it to me freely. This is what I wanted if ever I mated. Someone that could effortlessly be with me without feeling the pressures of court. Rainn does not know what he is doing for me by just being him.

“Thank you, sweet Rainn.” I finger the necklace again, not loving the loose piece of jewelry. “I have something for you.”

“A present?” His face lights up with excitement. “Is it something from the market? There is so much I want to buy, but I didn’t feel comfortable asking. Since I don’t have coins, you know? I just?—”

I cut off his adorable rambling with a finger to his lips. “No, it is not from the market. I had it made for you.”

Reaching into my bag, I pull out the bracelet I commissioned from Xolag. It is delicate, but expertly crafted. The bracelet is fashioned into vines and every few centimeters, a different flower native to Daz Vrorgrad hangs as a small charm. The color of each flower flashes with brilliance as I clasp it onto his wrist. It fits him perfectly.

Rainn stares at it, tears brimming in his eyes. “Axum. This is....this is perfect.”

I pull the necklace from around his neck and stash it in my pouch. “I imbued it with the magic of translation myself. I am not a blacksmith, but I am an adept spell weaver, so I could do that for you.”

“It doesn’t matter that you didn’t make it,” he says, a single tear leaking from his eyes. I wipe it quickly. “It matters that you thought enough about me to have it made. I don’t have to take it off at all. It’s lightweight and fits perfectly.” He looks up at me, eyes shining. “Thank you.”

“You are—” My words are cut off when Rainn launches himself at me, planting a kiss on my lips that has my cock growing half hard in my breeches.

I pull him onto my lap, planting my hands on his small, but round ass. Rainn thrusts his tongue into my mouth and I groan, the feel of him heady.

He grinds his ass on my cock and it lengthens without effort. A simple touch from Rainn turns me on. His mouth on mine? Makes me want to bend him over and rut into him until he is leaking with my seed.

Rainn pulls his lips from mine and trails kisses down my neck. He breathes in against my throat and shudders. “You smell so fucking good. Flowers, pine trees and fresh air. I’ll never get used to filling my lungs with you.”

“Gods, Rainn.”

He presses his small hand against my chest, pushing at me until I am lying on my back. Rainn thrusts up my shirt, kissing and licking my torso. He has done this before, but now he is more frantic, his lips moving over my pecs and nipples with urgency.

Rainn lowers himself until he is resting between my thighs. As he pulls my pants down, he flicks his gaze up to mine. “Can I?”

“Please.” I hardly recognize my own voice.

His grin is mischievous as he tugs my pants down to my knees. With sure hands, he wraps them around my cock, stroking me slowly. “You know,” he says, his soft breaths ghosting over my cockhead, “I have an orc dildo at home. It’s my favorite.” Rainn’s tongue peeks out and drags over me gently.

“Your favorite?” I ask on a moan.

“Yes. But it doesn’t have a knot.” Rainn closes his mouth around my crown and suckles me. I flex my hips, though not much more of my length goes down his throat.

He cannot fit much in his mouth, but his enthusiasm makes this the best blowjob I have received in my life.

Rainn jerks me as his saliva drips down my shaft. My groans fly high, surely reaching the canopy of the trees.

My sac tingles as I look down at Rainn. His eyes are closed and a blissful expression is on his face as he sucks me.

“Fuck. Rainn. Feels so fucking good.”

His gaze flicks up to mine, the lust evident in his eyes. He hollows his cheeks as much as he can, sucking me hard.

“Yes, right there. Fuck. My knot will appear if you keep going. Show my knot as much attention as you show my shaft.”

Rainn pulls off my dick, jerking me fast and rough. “Let me see it, Axum. Show me.”

Then he dives back on my dick, more vigor in his ministrations, and lewd sucking sounds filling the air.

Pleasure licks along every inch of my skin as I watch Rainn trying his hardest to deep throat me. I love the effort, it is such a turn on that I cannot control myself.

“Rainn. My knot,” I say through clenched teeth, grabbing his hair to pull him away from my shaft.

As he moves his mouth from my dick, my knot inflates, the cool air drifting over it. Rainn dips down, licking my knot with fervor. When he closes his lips around it, my body bucks and my orgasm shoots through me.

“Oh Gods. Fuck!”

I explode, my cum shooting in the air, landing on my torso, since Rainn is holding my cock forward to get to my knot.

Rainn keeps attacking it with his mouth, making my orgasm seem endless.

Since I am not inside him, my knot withdraws after only about a minute. I collapse heavily to the ground, aftershocks rolling through my body.

He licks up my chest, collecting some of my release in his mouth. “You taste sweet,” he says, lapping at me. ‘I’ve never tasted anything like this. Like the sweetest fruit I’ve ever had.” He cleans me up with his tongue, collecting all of the orgasm from my belly.

He presses himself against my chest, kissing the underside of my chin.

I flip him to his back, making him giggle before I swallow the sound with a long kiss. I taste my orgasm on his tongue, mingling with his natural flavor.

After I have kissed him until he is panting, his blunt nails hard in my back and his legs spread wide for me, I pull back and peer down at him. I have had Rainn in this position before, as we've learned each other in my chambers. Our chambers. But we never took it further than our hands exploring. Now, I can taste Rainn. I can commit his flavor to memory, calling it up anytime I think about him.

Pulling away, I adjust the blanket so it is spread fully, then roll Rainn onto his belly. He gasps as I pull him up onto knees, his ass propped into the air.

He looks phenomenal like this, at my mercy, trusting me with his body.

I run gentle hands over his body, kneading his flesh. I find the space along his sides near the bottom of his ribs, lightly gliding over them, making him moan and wiggle under my touch.

"So beautiful," I say in a voice so deep, I hardly recognize it. Rainn has me so keyed up, I am almost coming out of my skin. "I would like to see your body surrounded by all this beauty."

"See me," he groans, looking over his shoulder at me with lust drunk eyes. "Please, Axum."

I make quick work of shedding Rainn's shirt and pants from his body. If we did not have to hike back to the palace I would have yanked them until they ripped, eager to get to Rainn's nakedness.

He looks so good without clothing. Flawless brown flesh, a tight ass, and a pretty hole begging for my tongue.

I spread him open, watching his pucker contract as the breeze drifts across it. Rainn moans, pushing back against my hands. “Axum, please. Touch me. Do something.”

He sounds so rapturous and I have not done anything yet.

“Soon, sweet Rainn. Allow me to look at you. Allow me to memorize every curve of your body. The beauty of your hole, begging for my tongue.”

“God yes,” he whimpers. He spreads his legs wider, his heavy balls hanging and dick sticking straight out.

I move one hand from his spread cheeks and drop it to his cock, stroking him gently, giving him friction but not enough to bring him to release. My own shaft hardens as I watch Rainn get lost in his pleasure.

I move forward, rubbing my cock against his hole. It looks obscene, how my large dick rests against his tiny entrance. If not for the pleasure oil that will loosen his channel enough to accommodate me, sex would not be possible for us.

“Fuck,” Rainn murmurs, rolling his hips so my dick slides between his cheeks. “Fuck me, Axum,” he begs, reaching back to stroke my dick as I continue to rock against him. “Oil,” he pants, “in my bag.”

I stop my teasing. “You brought pleasure oil? Where did you get it?”

He nods with a mischievous grin on his handsome face. “I may or may not have gotten a bottle from Larek.”

I smile at his forethought and reach for his bag, pulling out the small glass vial. Although I am dying to get inside Rainn, to thrust into him until my knot grows, I know he needs to be prepared first.

Pulling out the stopper, I pour some of the oil on my fingers, making sure they are slick.

“Are you ready, sweet Rainn?” I ask, wanting to be sure this is what he wants.

“Yes.”

With agonizing slowness, I press a finger into his hole, easing it inside. Rainn’s breath hitches, the sound sending a ripple down my spine. I can feel his tight channel widening, his body absorbing the pleasure oil and stretching to accommodate me.

“I am adding a second finger now, okay?” Rainn looks down at me with wide eyes, nodding frantically. “You’re taking it so well.”

“That oil is amazing,” he breathes as he winds his hips. “I can barely feel any pain and your fingers are huge.”

I chuckle and lean over him, kissing him as I push in a third finger. Rainn works his hips on my digits with increased fervor, making mewling noises that rumble against my tongue.

Rainn is panting and whining against my lips, begging me to fuck him. He is as stretched on my fingers as he will get.

Pulling my fingers out, I roll onto my back. “Ride me, Rainn. Take control of your pleasure.”

He scrambles up my body, eagerly positioning his ass over my cock. After adding pleasure oil to his hand, he grabs me with his small fist and smooths the oil down my shaft.



“Will it hurt?” he asks, though his eyes are bright and eager, like he will relish the bite of pain.

“Only until I am fully inside you, then your body will hug my cock of its own volition.”

Rainn curses softly as he places my cock against his hole. He sinks down slowly, his face twisted in discomfort. I grab his hips to stop him until he has adjusted, but he shakes his head. “I’m okay.” His voice is tight, but he continues to sink lower.

He gasps when my entire shaft is inside him. My hands on his hips hold him in place. If he moves now, I will explode.

“I can’t believe I took all of you.” He twists his hips with a hiss, tossing his head back. “Fuck, you feel good.”

Rainn plants his hands on my pecs, balancing himself to raise and lower himself on my cock. His ass is hot and slick, gripping my shaft as if it does not want to let me go. It takes all of my strength not to thrust up into him, instead allowing Rainn to set the pace.

His small fingers tweak my nipples as he rides me, drawing a long groan from my throat. Rainn’s rounded ass jiggles in my hands as I grip him tight, helping him move up and down.

“Yes, Axum. Oh god. Your dick...Jesus. I’m close. I’m so close.”

His sweet moans wash over me as he babbles. His face is pure bliss, eyes closed and his expression tight with concentration as he fucks me.

“Just like that, sweet Rainn,” I manage to grit out. My knot is tingling, eager to get

inside him and claim him this way first. There will be no claiming bite, but I can have him locked on my knot.

His sweet cock bounces as he rides me, precum leaking from his crown. I wish I could lean forward and lick it off, but I need to come inside him. His walls need to be painted with my spunk so all of Daz Vrorhrad, all of Belzod knows he belongs to me. Any orc in this kingdom will smell me on him and know that he is taken. They will know he is mine .

“Axum, oh fuck. Axum!” His dick bounces against his belly, his hips working fast and in an uncoordinated rhythm. Then he shoots his essence all over me. His dick kicks over and over, ropes of his release soaking me.

Before I can contain myself, I grab his ass tightly and fuck up into him, chasing my climax. Rainn screams in pleasure, more cum leaking from his pretty dick. I fuck him through it, watching greedily as his cum runs down my chest.

Then my knot inflates and I roar as I come, my hips bowing off the ground to try and get as much of my dick inside him as I can manage. Rainn squeezes my pecs, whimpering as my knot continues to grow inside him.

“That...oh god...that feels good.” I know my knot is thick and pleasure inside him, milking every drop out of him.

He collapses on my chest, breathing heavily. I continue to rock into him, needing one more release from him before my knot deflates.

Rainn moans softly, rolling a finger over my nipple. “Axum...more, more.”

I thrust shallowly, pushing my cum deep into him. I feel his body vibrating, his legs clamping down around my hips as he groans low in his throat.

A few seconds later, my torso is wet with another release, Rainn's voice hoarse from all of his cries of pleasure.

I bring him down from his orgasm high, holding him steady so my knot does not rock into him more. Rainn sighs against my chest, kissing me wherever he can reach.

After about ten minutes, my knot deflates and I pull Rainn higher on my chest, kissing him long and deep. My release leaks from his hole, mingling with his already painting my torso.

"Are you okay?" I ask. "Did I hurt you?"

He nods and sits up to look down at me. "I'm okay. I'll be sore in the morning, but I'm fine. Hell, I might not be able to walk out of here. Holy fuck, Axum. I can't believe I took all of you. My dildo is smaller than you and I could never fit the whole thing inside me. That pleasure oil is a life saver."

I chuckle and kiss him again.

Grinning, I pull him into my arms, holding him to my chest. "I will clean you in the stream. Then we must go back before it gets dark." Rainn nods against my chest.

I walk us into the stream, wishing there was more than water to wash him with. The stream is cold, but it feels good over our heated flesh.

Once we are clean of fluids, I help Rainn from the water, using the blanket as a towel.

After stuffing our refuse and the blanket in Rainn's bag, I turn my back to him and get down on one knee. "Climb on," I say. "I do not want you to trip as you did earlier, since it is getting dark, and you might be sore from how you rode me like I was a Rhinoppek."

Rainn laughs lightly as he climbs onto my back. His small hands tighten around my neck and a soft kiss lands behind my ear, making me shiver. “Thank you for today, Axum. It’s the best day I’ve ever had. You’re amazing.”

“No, my sweet Rainn. That is you.”

I am cautious as I navigate us out of the woods, careful not to hit any trees or brush up against any trunks. When we get out of the woods, I pick up my pace, striding back towards the gully.

“Am I heavy?” Rainn asks.

A loud laugh bursts from my chest. “You are light as a feather, my sweet Rainn.”

“If I get heavy, let me know.” He kisses behind my ear once more.

After around thirty minutes, Rainn lays his head against my shoulder. “I’m going to sleep like a baby tonight,” he says softly.

“And I will hold you all night,” I say, giving his legs a squeeze and turning my head for a quick kiss.

He sighs and kisses me back with more emotion than I’m used to. “I’d love that.”

### Chapter Ten

#### Axum

“It is not a long ride, Your Grace. We will be back in just a few hours,” Olog says. “You have left guards to watch over Rainn. He will be safe.”

I know he is right, as I assigned my best guards to keep an eye on my mate. But I hate being away from him. It is like I cannot draw in enough breath if we are not together.

It has only been a few weeks, but Rainn has become an integral part of my life. Waking up with him and seeing his beautiful face, and going to sleep with him, his warm weight on my chest, are the highlights of my day. And when he decides to show up to surprise me while I am working? It makes my heart flutter.

While I did not want to leave Rainn behind while I visited another city in my kingdom, I did not think he would have enjoyed sitting through several hours of listening to subject grievances.

Every quarter, I travel to different parts of the kingdom, speaking with those who are unable to travel all the way to Daz Vrokrad when they would like an audience. My sire refused to do that, saying if one of his subjects had an important enough issue, they would find a way to bring it before him.

Rainn says I will not be able to please everyone, but as long as I am trying to rule justly, I should not fret. I really love when he gives me what he calls his ‘pep talks’ after a particularly long day. I cannot wait to get back home so he can give me

another.

I do not mind traveling to see my subjects, but it still feels like it is not enough. I am not sure what else I can do, but I cannot shake the feeling that my rule is inadequate, much like my father's. It is not a prospect I enjoy thinking about.

We arrived at Addugrug less than an hour later, the Rhipponek making quick work of pulling our carriage.

As I thought, granting an audience to my subjects in the small, almost isolated town was not a lively affair. There were many land and pay disputes I had to rule on. Not all parties left the meeting happy, but no one could accuse me of not being fair. I made no rash decisions and I consulted with both Larek and Olog before I came to a final edict. One of my father's many failures was not listening to those around him and I value Olog and Larek's opinions, as they have as much knowledge as I do about the laws of the kingdom. To disregard their counsel would be the greatest of follies.

By the time we see the last subject, I am exhausted, hungry, and ready to get home to Rainn. He has been on my mind the entire time I have been in Addugrug and now that we are finished, I wish I had brought him with me. No doubt he would not have enjoyed sitting and listening to my subjects complain about elements of my kingdom he did not understand, but his very presence would have calmed me.

I resolve to bring him with me next quarter. I want him by my side. It does not matter that I have not claimed him yet—he is mine and I will keep him for as long as we are breathing. I will not leave him behind again.

Not only do I want him to learn how to conduct himself in a meeting of this caliber—in the event that he will have to attend in my stead on occasion—I would like to show Rainn more of my kingdom. I think he would enjoy that.

I tell Olog as much and he nods as our carriage trundles down the road, the Rhipponeks pulling us at a fast clip. “That is smart, Your Grace. Rainn may not know exactly how the kingdom works or all of our laws, but he is very smart and level-headed. Your subjects in Daz Vrorhrad already adore him—they will elsewhere as well.”

A smile crosses my face as he talks about my mate. Everyone who has met Rainn loves him. He already knows some of the workers at the market by name, asking after their families and if there is anything he can do for them. He has worked several booths with some of the orcs there, lending his support and learning about them and their livelihoods. He is the perfect emperor's consort.

I am a lucky orc to have him.

Settling back into the soft carriage seat, I say, “When we get back, I need you?—”

The cry of the Rhipponek sends chills down my spine just before the carriage jolts and tips violently on its side, sliding across the road. Larek, Olog, and I slam into each other, landing in a tangle of arms and legs.

When the carriage stops its forward momentum, we untangle ourselves, making sure we are unharmed. Larek has a cut on his forehead, and Olog's lip is split. Other than that, we are uninjured.

“What—” My question is cut off by the sound of war cries, full-throated and angry. Ice sings through my veins because I know what those cries mean. I have heard them before, though it has been more than twenty years since the sound last reverberated through my ears. “We are under attack.”

“Stay here, Your Grace. We will protect you,” Olog says, getting to his feet.

“Nonsense,” I say, standing as well. “We will fight together. Are you armed?”

I pull a Dulagsvane knife that is strapped on my hip from its sheath. It is a formidable weapon and I never venture out without it. I am glad to see both Olog and Larek are similarly armed.

The door to the carriage is now above us, so Larek pushes the door open and hoists himself out quickly. Olog and I do the same, dropping to the ground just as ten orcs surround us.

I get the measure of them. They are all around Larek’s height of six-foot-eleven, though one towers over the rest. Their breathing is harsh in the still evening air as they stare us down, rage dancing in their eyes. Like us, they do not have armor, but they are all armed with an assortment of weapons—knives, swords, axes, and halberds—as if they stole them or scavenged them from somewhere.

With a shout, one of the orcs runs at us, swinging a long, gruesome-looking sword. Larek steps forward, ducking the sword’s swing, and brings his knife up to slice across the throat of his attacker. Blue blood sprays from the wound, splashing over Larek. He jumps back just in time, avoiding a strike with an ax from the orc that took the downed orc’s place.

The other orcs run towards us, swinging their weapons with shouts of fury. None of them are coordinated with their attacks, flailing around with their weapons instead of swinging with any finesse. I assume they hoped to overwhelm us with sheer numbers. Unlucky for them that Olog, Larek, and I were trained by the best.

An orc with an axe rushes at me, swinging first at my belly, then at my head. Another approaches me from behind, managing to slice me across the arm with his sword before I can avoid the blow. I curse and spin, causing them to run into each other, the orc with the axe burying it in his accomplices chest. I scoop up the downed sword



and behead the axe-wielding orc.

Before I can assess my wound, two more orcs are on me, swinging their weapons with more aggression than skill.

The fight is a blur, filled with slashing, stabbing, and parrying. On the forefront of my mind is getting back to Rainn, as well as getting Larek and Olog back to their mates. We will not be lain low on a deserted road by people that?—

“Larek, behind you!” I yell after I disembowel one of the few remaining attackers.

As if materializing out of nowhere, the tallest orc comes up behind Larek with a halberd, poised to bring it down upon the back of his head.

Without thought, I throw my Dulagsvane, hitting the orc in the chest. He was mid-swing, so the halberd still comes down across Larek’s chest as he’d turned when I shouted his name.

Larek cries out, scrambling back to avoid the body of the orc with my knife sticking from his chest. Olog grabs Larek, pulling him towards the carriage.

One orc remains, looking at the bodies of his counterparts. Instead of trying his luck at bringing us down, he turns tail and runs.

“After him,” Larek rasps and tries to rise to his feet, hissing as his wound hinders his movements.

I shake my head and push him down. “No. Let him go. It is more important to assess your wound than it is to capture him.” I stand to my full height and look around. There is a town a kilometer or so back, light visible from our position on the road. I wonder if they heard the attack or if they are too far away.

“Olog, go to the town we just passed and ask for their assistance. First inquire if they have a healer. If they do not, we need transportation to get Larek to one immediately.”

Olog nods and takes off, running as fast as his legs will carry him.

After I check that all of our attackers are dead—finishing off those that are not—I kneel beside Larek, stripping off his tunic so I can see the damage. The wound is long, but not deep, though it is bleeding profusely. I rip off my tunic and, after finding a clean portion, press it to his chest. “We shall have you home soon, my friend.”

“Thank you...Your Grace,” he says, breathing through clenched teeth. “You saved...my life.”

“I did what anyone would have done.”

Half an hour later, Olog and a few villagers come back on several Rhipponeks.

“We do not have a healer,” one says, looking apologetic as he climbs off one of the animals, “but our Rhipponek are fast and sure-footed. They shall carry you to your palace with haste, Your Highness.”

“Thank you for your assistance. We shall return them at our earliest convenience,” I promise them. The people that live here need these animals for transportation. They are too isolated not to have them.

“It is our pleasure to assist you, sire.”

They assist in strapping Larek to the back of one of the large animals, arranging my tunic better to his wound to help control the bleeding.

After they bow and I thank them once more, we take off down the road, hurrying to get Larek back to safety and the arms of his mate.

I cannot wait to sink into the arms of my own.

### Chapter Eleven

#### Rainn

Axum adjusts me on his lap as we sit in the throne room, stifling a hiss of pain as he jostles his arm. I look at him with concern, but he waves me away as he looks over a letter he received just a few minutes ago.

Saying I was shocked when I saw the state of Axum, Larek, and Olog when they returned from their visit to another city is an understatement. Both Axum and Olog held an injured Larek between them, shouting for healers to come and tend to him, blue blood coating them and dripping on the white marble floor.

I ran after them, grabbing the towel I planned to use to wash my hair and gave to to Axum to use in place of the one that was soaked through already.

Once they got Larek to an empty room, healers began to work on him immediately, using some kind of potion that smoked when it touched his skin, making him cry out in pain. They also forced a concoction down his throat. I heard one say that his wound was too deep and the weapons were coated with some kind of poison too toxic for them to use magic alone. They had Axum take some of the concoction as well, since he had an open wound on his arm. He drank it quickly, then shoed them away when they tried to tend to him instead of working on Larek.

I stood back, wringing my hands, needing to do something, but not wanting to get in the way.

When Axum tasked his guards to retrieve Larek's mate, I demanded to go with them. My mate didn't look happy about it, but I needed to feel useful and I think he understood that. So I accompanied the three orcs to a modest home, about fifteen minutes away, to tell Larek's mate what happened and bring her to the palace. I'm sure the guards would have been able to get there far quicker without me, but they didn't complain, allowing me to set the pace.

They've been so kind to me.

We brought Larek's mate, Snakha, to the palace as quickly as we could and she sat by his bedside for the rest of the evening. We brought her everything she needed, ensuring she and Larek wanted for nothing.

Before we left their room, Larek held Axum's hand in a tight grip, thanking him over and over for bringing him back to his mate. Axum tried to shake off the praise, but neither Larek nor Snakha allowed it. He said that Larek was like family and he would have protected him with his life.

After we made sure Larek was okay and his wound wouldn't fester, I took Axum to our room and cleaned up the cut on his arm. The healers said it wasn't deep, so they said it was safe for me to dress it. While I was playing nurse, Axum told me what happened.

From what he gathered, from their weapons and attire, it was the rogue band of orcs he had been worried about. Axum also found a letter on one of the orcs from their leader, Koth, conspiring to kill Axum to get back at Nash. He said he, Larek, and Olog killed nine of them during the attack, and there are only about fifteen to twenty in the band. More are out there to hurt my mate. He said he may have a way to get to the others, but he has to wait to hear from his brother.

The letter he has in his hands now is just the word he was waiting on. I've learned

how to speak some orcish, but I'm unable to read it, so I don't know what it says.

Axum grunts, shaking his head with a slight grin.

"What is it?" I ask, resting my head on his shoulder.

"My brother, Nash. He says he will visit soon, but he is busy fucking his human mate." He chuckles. "In the meantime, he has asked for permission to hunt down the band of orcs on his own."

"Maybe you should have him and his human come here. They would be safe from that Koth guy."

Axum shakes his head as he motions to one of his scribes to give him a quill and ink. "He will not come. He does not enjoy being a part of the aristocracy, even though he loves his title. Besides, he will want to handle this himself. Nash has always been the type to fix what he deems are his mistakes."

His hand flies across the paper. I don't understand any of what he's writing, but his penmanship is pretty terrible. I don't know why he didn't have his scribes write it, but I guess since it's his brother, he wants to do it on his own.

With a small smile on his face, he says, "I have told Nash that he's more than welcome to lead the hunt with his trusted orcs."

"Good. You can also tell him you're fucking your own human mate." I chuckle against his neck, kissing him there gently.

Axum puts his quill down and pulls me back so he can meet my eyes. He searches my face, his gaze softening. "You do know that it is more than sex with us, correct? You are my mate. I—" He pauses, looking back at his scribes. They take the hint and bow

to him, leaving the throne room.

He slides the small table from in front of the throne and repositions me on his lap so I can look down at him. “It is more than sex, my sweet Rainn. We are mates.”

I smile at him, thumbing over his cheek. “I know, Axum. Though...” I slowly lower myself to my knees, looking up at him from that position. It’s so fucking hot to peer up at his big body surrounded by the gold throne he’s sitting on. “I love when you fuck me. I love when you touch me,” I drag my hands up his thighs, watching as his purple eyes flare as I brush over his hard dick, “and kiss me, and taste me.” I delve my hand into his trousers and pull out his hard cock. “And I love sucking you. So it’s not a lie if you tell your brother that you have your own human to fuck, right?”

He blows out an uneven breath, shaking his head. “No. It is not.”

I stick my tongue out and lick the underside of his dick. Axum groans, stretching his legs out around me. I do it again and again, licking him like a lollipop and suckling gently every time I get to his cockhead.

“Fuck, yes,” he groans, gliding his hands through my curls. “Open wide for me, sweet Rainn.”

I wrap my lips around his crown, sucking down as much of his dick as I can. Eagerly I swallow the bead of precum that leaks from his cockhead, humming as his taste floods my mouth. Axum’s dick throbs and leaks, more of his deliciousness coating my tongue.

Wrapping both hands around his dick, I jerk him as I bob up and down. Axum’s moans and grunts in my ears send fire dancing in my veins, my own cock hard and throbbing.

Flicking my eyes up at him, I see his violet eyes almost glowing, watching me with rapt attention as I try to take more than half of him down my throat. He's so fucking big that it's impossible, but I try.

Fuck, I love sucking him. I love how his hard, heavy cock fits between my lips. And I love how he looks at me with such reverence, like me sucking his dick is his salvation.

Before I can get more into the blowjob, content to make him come like this, Axum pulls me back onto his lap, kissing me hard as he slides my pants down my legs. I step out of them, then straddle his lap, rolling my hips against his straining length. A moan bursts from me when his crown bumps against the sensitive skin of my pucker.

"In my pants," I gasp when one of Axum's thick fingers glides down to my hole. "Pleasure oil...in my pants."

Axum chuckles against my lips. "I see you are always prepared to take my cock, sweet Rainn."

Heat drifts up my cheeks, but I don't regret having it on me. I want Axum every time I see him and the pleasure oil is the only way I can take him.

He scoops up my pants from the floor without removing his finger from pressing against my hole. I moan as his finger sinks into me just a little, stretching me. The sting is slight, even though he has no lube.

Axum makes quick work of slicking up his fingers and sliding them into my entrance, getting me ready for him. He toys with me, brushing against my prostate while he licks and nibbles at my throat. His tusks scrape across my skin, sending shivers down my spine.



A moan tumbles free as Axum glides two, then three fingers into me, stretching me wide. He twists his fingers inside, making me yelp as he pegs my secret spot over and over.

He growls, pushing upward, his rigid length brushing against me. “I love hearing you moan, sweet Rainn.”

Wrapping my arms around his neck, I toss my head back and fuck myself on his digits. “Axum. Please. I need you.”

“You have me, my mate.” He removes his fingers, lines his cock up with my hole and slides inside. He curses against my throat as I whimper at the feel of him. “Love being inside you. I will never get enough of your sweet ass.”

With his hands cupping my cheeks, Axum raises and lowers me onto his shaft. I bury my face in his neck and babble and moan words I can’t recall.

God, he feels like heaven—the way he’s touching me, kissing me, fucking me. I will never get enough of this, enough of being surrounded by Axum. His scent, his taste, his touch. I’m drawn to everything about him.

As I moan and grind on his dick, it hits me like a ton of bricks what this warm, effervescent feeling is in my chest.

I’m in love with Axum.

Fuck, I’m in love with him. I’m in love with my mate. I’m not sure when I fell completely, but it’s been a steady path to this destination. Axum is everything I’ve needed, but never knew I wanted.

His tusks slide over the sensitive skin of my neck again and I tremble in his arms.

“Axum,” I moan, rolling my hips as he controls my movements. “Knot me. I want to feel it again.”

His feral growl tingles my skin and I pull back to kiss him again, tangling our tongues.

Axum’s hands hold me tighter around my waist and I revel in his touch. With one final thrust, he stills, his knot expanding inside me. It pushes against my prostate, making me come on a torrent without warning. My body shudders as I spurt between us.

On a roar, Axum comes, his dick twitching in my hole, making his knot press more against my prostate.

After we catch our breaths, Axum chuckles against my skin. “My brother will be pleased to know he was right about fated mates.”

I try to catch my breath, swallowing roughly. “What...do you...mean?”

“Later,” Axum growls, thrusting up shallowly so that knot of his bumps my oversensitive prostate. “I will make you come again like this, sweet Rainn.” I throw my head back and moan loud enough that I know the entire palace can hear me. That bundle of nerves within me is overworked, but Axum’s knot feels so fucking good. I don’t want him to stop, not until I come for him once more.

He nips at my throat, sucking the skin between his lips. “I want more of you coating me. Come on, mate. Give me one more.”

“Fuck,” I whimper as my back bows and I cum in a wave, my breath trapped in my chest. It feels so fucking good to come like this—impaled on a large dick with the orc that I’m in love with talking me through it.

Axum hums, nipping at my throat. My body bucks. Is this what it will feel like when he claims me? When he plunges those teeth into me? God, I can't fucking wait.

Once I'm milked and can't come anymore, I sag against Axum's chest, my mouth open dragging in greedy pulls of air. Axum's rough palms drift up and down my spine, making me tremble and his knot brush my magic button.

Axum chuckles when I moan tiredly. "I am sorry, sweet Rainn. I will hold still."

"Thank you," I whisper, knowing I can't come anymore. I'm drained dry. "Tell me what your brother meant about mates."

"Nash believes in fated mates. Always has, since we were kids. He told me and Mahk that ours were out there and they would come to us when we least expected them. You came to me when I least expected you, Rainn. And I do not want to give you up."

"That's good," I say, kissing the underside of his chin. "I don't want to go anywhere. I don't want to leave you."

His knot goes down and Axum pulls out of me, his cum dripping from my hole. He pulls me higher onto his lap, kissing me gently. "I am glad you came through that portal."

"Me too, baby," I murmur, planting my lips on his, hoping to express all of my love for him through this kiss.

### Chapter Twelve

Rainn

It takes a week for Larek to feel strong enough to return home with his mate. Axum told them they could have stayed longer, but they said they didn't want to put him out. I believe they were just being polite, that they would be more comfortable around their own things and in their own home while Larek was still healing. I had to nudge Axum to stop pressuring them to stay. His heart was in the right place, but it was obvious my mate did not know how to read the room.

Both Axum and I accompanied them home on a pair of Rhipponek—surrounded by twenty of his most trained guards. Larek and his mate thanked us profusely for our hospitality. Axum told Larek he could come back to work only after he had fully healed, and we also promised we'd come visit every day.

Since Axum is down an advisor, he's been working longer hours, not coming back to our room until late in the night.

Tonight is no different. What is different is the sound of frustration I hear when he's removing his clothing to take a bath. Most nights, I wake up and he's already in bed. This is the first time he's woken me.

"Axum?" I ask sleepily, peeling my eyes open and blinking to bring him into focus. "You okay?"

He sighs and kneels beside the bed, pulling my hand to his lips to kiss the back. "I am

sorry I woke you. It has just been a long day, that is all.”

I sit up, sliding closer to the edge of the bed so my legs are on either side of his head. He leans against my thigh, wrapping his arms around me. I rub his hair, my fingers gliding through the silky strands. “What’s wrong?”

Axum shakes his head, sighing into my thigh. “I do not wish to burden you with my problems.”

“Your problems are my problems, Axum. We’re mates. Mates in my world share their problems. Isn’t it the same here?”

He blows out a long breath. “Yes, but...I am the emperor. I am supposed to have the answers to the problems. It is my job.”

“Oh, Axum,” I say in an exasperated tone. “No one has all the answers, no matter their position. If your mate isn’t the one you talk to, then who is? I know Olog and Larek are great advisors, but I know you won’t let your guard down with them because of your position. But you can with me. You are the emperor, but we’re also a team. If your mate isn’t the one that you can lean on, then who is?”

He lifts his head, looking at me with searching eyes. “I have never had anyone I can bare my soul to or all of my indecisions or failures with. If I were to tell my advisors, I fear someone would overhear and deem me unsuitable for my role. I cannot bear that. I want to right the wrongs my sire wrought, but I cannot do that if I am second-guessed.”

Framing his face, I say, “You can tell me anything and I wouldn’t say a word. Do you trust me?”

“More than you know,” he answers without missing a beat.

“Good.” I give him a quick kiss and slide off the bed. “Come on.” I drag him to his feet—with a lot of help from him—and pull him into the room with the bathing pool. I undress him and then myself, leading him into the cold water. Axum warms it with a few words in Orcish and we sink into the depths.

Axum sighs, pulling me to him so I can wrap my legs around his waist. I push his hair back, meeting his gaze. “What is it, baby? Tell me the problem. Maybe I won’t be able to give you advice, but talking about it could help.”

“It is not that I do not know the path forward. It is that the path forward is not what I want. If the band of orcs were just opposing me without trying to assassinate me, I would allow them to disagree in peace. I cannot make everyone assent to my rule. But if they did try to kill me, they must die. I do not take pleasure in handing down a death sentence, but the laws of Daz Vrorhrad are clear. Any threats on my life will earn an automatic death sentence.”

I let out a sad sigh. I can see why he isn’t feeling like himself. Axum is not a person that revels in violence and knowing he has to put someone to death will eat away at him.

I hug him, hoping to put all my love and strength into it. “I know it’s hard. I know it’s not what you want to do, but if it’s the law, the orcs that tried to kill you know that. They knew the laws of the kingdom and chose to try to kill you anyway. They knew the risk if they didn’t succeed and did it without regard to their own lives. You’re lucky to be alive. You said there were, what, ten orcs surrounding you?” He gives a clipped nod. “I don’t think they felt any guilt when they attacked you because they didn’t think you’d walk away.”

His eyes still look tortured. “You are right, but it does not make it any easier. I have been going back and forth on if I should have all of them set to hang or just the ones involved in the attack.”

“I would be worried if it were an easy decision. Not enjoying the thought of putting someone to death is admirable, even if you know it has to be done.”

“You truly believe that?”

“I do,” I say, hoping he hears in my voice that I’m telling him the truth. “What do your advisors say?”

“They are in agreement with me. They will all have to die. I just wish there was another way.”

“I know you do, my love. Don’t feel bad about upholding the law. It was your life or theirs. Some of them already paid for their crimes, but who’s to say the ones left won’t try again? More cleverly the next time. I don’t like to think about what you have to do either, but if it’s between you and them, I’d rather you stay above ground.”

“If I do this...will you...would you see me as a bad person?”

Smiling sadly at him, I say, “No, baby. Of course not. You’re not excited about having to put people to death. I know you’re still troubled about having to kill the orcs that ambushed you.” He looks relieved at my answer. “I have an alternative for you, if you’re looking for another option.”

“I would love to hear whatever it is you think could help.”

“If you find all of the rogue orcs, the ones not directly involved with your ambush, hear them out, then sentence them to prison. They may not have wanted to attack you. They may have been outvoted or they may have not known at all. Trust your gut to make the decision. If your gut tells you they aren’t being truthful, then sentence them as you must. If you think otherwise, a long prison sentence would be a proper punishment. But don’t feel like you have to take my advice. Do what is best for you

and the kingdom.”

Axum kisses me gently, sliding one hand into my hair while holding me under my ass with the other. “Thank you, sweet Rainn. That is an alternative I can live with. I will have Olog dig deep into our laws to see what an appropriate punishment would be if we are to locate every dissenter. A lengthy confinement sentence would be appropriate instead of capital punishment. If I know Nash, he will take care of the ones directly involved with Koth and his plans.”

Smiling, I wiggle until he lets me down and sit on the side of the bathing pool. I grab a bar of soap and a clean cloth and start to wash him up. It’s like I can see the tension leaving his body as I drag the cloth all over his back. “How do you feel now?”

“Better. My mind is clearer and I can see a path forward.” He smiles at me over his shoulder. “Because of you.”

My cheeks heat at his open compliment. “That’s what I’m here for. Anytime you want to talk to me about your problems, you can. I will always help you. Always. Even if you just need to vent in the bathing pool. Whatever you need from me.”

We’re silent for a few beats, the only sound is the water splashing as I rinse the suds from Axum’s skin. Then I ask, “Can you take a break tomorrow? I know you’re working hard, but you’ll run yourself into the ground if you keep it up. Just...one day?”

He turns to me, resting his hands on my hips. “I am the emperor of Daz Vrorhrad, sweet Rainn. I can take a break whenever I would like. Tomorrow, we shall go to my brook, where we can be alone.”

I kiss him deeply, wrapping my arm around his neck. “I’d like that. I’ll have a basket packed and we can spend the entire day together.”



“The entire day, my sweet Rainn.”

### Chapter Thirteen

Rainn

I wake up the next morning, excited about our day together. Sure, Axum and I have spent time together, but it's only been brief snatches of time when he wasn't working, other than our first time deep in the woods. But even that was far too short. Now, we get an entire day together and it's going to be great.

There was a wrinkle in our plans when Axum had to assert to his guards that he was leaving and he was leaving on his own. Most of his guards backed down, but one, Varguk, stood his ground and convinced Axum to at least take some weapons with him in case of an ambush.

"The band of orcs are still out there, Your Grace," he said, meeting Axum's eyes evenly and earnestly, "so if you take your sword, you can dispatch them if you happen upon them. But if you leave this palace undefended, I will follow you and your mate. You may strip me of my guard and send me back to my post early, but I will still follow because you are the emperor and it is my duty to keep you and your mate safe."

I'm sure it took a lot of bravery to speak that way to Axum, as the orc emperor towered over him by at least five inches and about thirty pounds, but Varguk didn't back down.

Axum looked at Varguk with something close to approval in his eyes and conceded to doing what he asked. The guards ran to the weapons room and returned with a scary-

looking sword and some kind of arm strap for Axum to wear.

It took another ten minutes for us to leave when I asked for a weapon too. Axum gave me a stern look and tried to tell me I didn't need it and he could protect me. It took me raising my voice for him to see reason. "Dammit, Axum, what if I want to help protect you? You'll be distracted trying to protect me and you could die !"

He sighed and motioned for Varguk to bring me a weapon and a holster. The serrated blade that was strapped to my hip was long and looked sharp. Axum carefully strapped it to my hip, then made me walk and run with it before he was satisfied that it wouldn't get in the way if I had to flee.

I'm not a fighting person and abhor violence, but I would rather stand and fight with Axum than run away and hide if we are attacked.

With Axum pleased that I won't impale myself or accidentally hack off a limb, we were able to leave without any more concerns.

After Axum took the basket from my hands, we walked hand in hand to his secret spot. While we walked, Axum told me about his week, about the city he's going to visit next and asked if I wanted to accompany him.

"Of course," I answer happily, feeling giddy that I get to see more of Belzod. "Do I have to do anything?"

"No, sweet Rainn. All you have to do is stay by my side. And do not worry that you will be harmed. I will protect you."

"I know, my love."

During our entire conversation, he kept his attention on me, but I saw his eyes darting

around constantly, making sure no one snuck up on us.

Sighing, I look up at Axum, watching how the sun reflects off his beautiful green skin. “How are you feeling?”

“Good. It is nice to be outside the palace for more than a few minutes. It is beautiful out today.”

“It’s beautiful out everyday. Even when it rains,” I tell him, pasting myself to his side. The size difference between us is still taking some getting used to, but I love it. I love feeling so small and delicate when I’m with him.

I sigh, kissing the back of his hand. “I love it here so much. I never want to leave.”

Axum stops me from walking, turning me towards him as he frames my face. “Even when the portal opens for you?”

I nod. “Even when the portal opens.” I let out a shaky breath, gearing myself up for what I’m about to say. “You are my home now, Axum. Where you are is my home. I...I love you. I would never leave you.”

A yelp leaves my lips, followed by a giggle, when I’m plucked off my feet and into his arms. Axum hugs me tight to his chest, so close not even air can pass through. “I love you too, sweet Rainn. So much. You have become my whole world. You are my home as well.”

I touch my lips to his, feeling like everything is right in my world.

He sets me down on my feet and we continue the walk, both of us with goofy smiles on our faces.

We get to the brook and immediately set up our blanket and pull out our lunch. I sit in front of Axum, leaning against this broad chest as he feeds me. He chuckles when he pulls out the large bowl of oxiolly the kitchen staff packed for me. Everyone in the palace knows how obsessed I am with the vegetable. They didn't even have to ask if I wanted some prepared—they already had it on deck.

While we eat, Axum asks, "Tell me about your books, Rainn. I know you said you write...what did you call it? Smut?"

My cheeks heat, but I nod. "Yeah."

"What is smut?"

Oh god, kill me now. "It's...sex. My books have a plot, and a lot of fucking."

"The humans in your story, they have sex with orcs?"

I laugh, feeling embarrassment creep up my spine. "Yeah, and ogres. And sirens and fairies and krakens and aliens and any other supernatural creatures out there. But my favorite has been writing about orcs."

Axum chuckles. "Do you feel like one of the characters in your stories, sweet Rainn?"

"More than you know."

I tell Axum about my best selling series, which is my orc series, and he asks plenty of questions. He also laughs at the lore I made up for orcs, especially about the anatomy of their dicks.

"We do not have ridges that stroke your insides, as you know," he says matter of

factly, still keeping me on the edge of embarrassment, “but you did not include a knot..”

“I think I like the knot better,” I say, wiggling against him.

He laughs as we head over to the brook, resting our feet into the cold water. It’s bracing, making me shiver, but after a few seconds, it feels really good.

“Would you like to get in?” he asks, already removing his tunic to reveal his bare chest.

I pause in answering, staring at his well-defined chest. Fuck, Axum is so sexy, so much bigger than me that I can hardly believe it. It looks unreal, like a figment of my wildest and most feral imagination. I reach out and touch him, feeling his heart thump against my palm.

“Rainn?”

“Hmm?” I ask, swiping a thumb over his nipple, which hardens for me. “Yeah, let’s get in.”

Axum watches me for a few seconds, his purple eyes flashing with lust before he stands to remove his pants. His dick is rock-hard, flopping obscenely against his belly before bobbing back to stick straight in the air. My mouth waters, wanting to take him into my mouth, but I tamp it down, stripping out of my clothes to slide into the slow-moving water.

Once we’re both submerged, Axum pulls me close and I wrap my legs and arms around him, practically pasting myself to his body.

Axum holds me as if I weigh nothing and I lean my head against his chest, soaking up

his warmth. He feels so good, so big and hot, almost surrounding me. How could I give this up?

Sure, I'd like to keep writing and releasing my books, but I'd rather stay here with him, where I know I'm loved and appreciated and taken care of.

After a few minutes of silence, with my head still resting on Axum's chest, I say, "Tell me your dreams, Axum. Tell me what it is you want."

"I have the one thing I want in my arms right now."

A smile stretches my face. It's one of the things I love about Axum—he says the sweetest things, but not because he thinks he'll get some ass. He really feels what he says. I love how open he is with expressing his feelings for me.

"I feel the same way," I tell him honestly. "But other than me, what else do you want?"

He adjusts me more carefully in his arms so he can slide one of his hands into my hair, scratching along my scalp. Axum learned how much I love to have my scalp massaged and takes every opportunity to do it, knowing how much it relaxes me.

He says, "I would like to ensure my subjects are happy. I want to make my kingdom better. As I have told you, my sire was not the best ruler and for a time, he neglected his rule. I want everyone that lives in Daz Vrokrad to know that I am trying to make sure they are taken care of and to make their lives as easy as possible." He stops massaging my scalp and draws my head back gently so he can meet my eyes. "As I want to make your life easy. Rainn, I want to give you the world. I want to give you everything you have ever desired. I want you to have the easiest and most peaceful life I can give you. You, Rainn. You are my dream. Having someone that will be there for me, ensuring I take a break when I am feeling overwhelmed and allowing

me to pour out my problems and concerns without judgment. And also, helping me with my rule. With you by my side, I can have the kingdom I always wanted and the mate I did not know I needed. I love you, Rainn. You are my dream. I will spend the rest of my days making you happy.”

Tears prick my eyes as I listen to him. I’ve never had anyone tell me I was their dream before.

If nothing else tells me that Axum is the man— orc —for me, telling me I was what he needed did it for me.

Tears streaming down my face, I meet Axum’s gaze. “Then show me, Axum. Claim me. Make me yours.”



### Chapter Fourteen

#### Axum

My cock lengthens as Rainn presses his soft lips to mine. Thinking of Rainn wearing my claiming bite, showing the world that he belongs to me, makes my heart race and my knot tingle.

Hoisting him higher on my waist, I keep my lips planted on his as I climb out of the brook, laying him on the blanket. I lean over him, enjoying how his wide-eyed stare reflects all the heat and lust I am sure mine contains.

His small hand rests on my cheek, making me shudder with want. “What happens now? What do I do?”

I lower myself, pressing my weight into him. He is so slight beneath me, but he does not seem to mind my weight, wrapping his legs around me as best as he can. “As we make love and I reach my peak, I will bite you and knot you. The bite will imprint into your skin, showing the world that you belong to me.”

“Do I bite you too?”

“Yes. Your claiming bite will be locked into me as well. And I will wear it with pride.”

I bend and kiss him again, not getting enough of his mouth. Rainn returns my kiss with enthusiasm, grinding his length against mine. Patting around, I find the basket

we brought with us and dig out the pleasure oil, making sure it is within arm's reach for later.

Reaching between us, I grab his cock and stroke him from base to tip, using the fluid that leaks from his crown to make the glide easier.

Rainn snatches his mouth from mine, tossing his head back as he moans his pleasure. I watch him, loving the expression on his face as I take him closer and closer to the brink. Sweat dots his beautiful brown skin, making it glow under the canopy of my secret spot.

I have always dreamed of bringing someone special here, to the privacy of these woods that are so sacred to me. It is perfect that he is here with me now, so I can claim him as mine forever.

I continue to work Rainn with my hand while I kiss down his body, lapping over his gland where my mark will go. Rainn shivers, thrusting his fingers into my hair. His blunt nails against my scalp feel good, sending a jolt of awareness down my spine. Every touch and taste of him has me closer and closer to the edge. I have never been close to orgasm from touching someone before. I love that I can experience this with Rainn.

“Axum, god , your mouth feels so good.”

I hum against him, lapping at the hard buds of his nipples. I draw the dusky buds into my lips, biting down gently before letting go. I blow over the area, enjoying how he trembles beneath me.

Lowering myself further down his body, I lick and nip at him, dragging my tusks over sensitive parts of his skin. His cock twitches in my hand every time I reach a particularly delicate spot. So I tease the area over and over as he cries out, begging

me for more.

I want to claim him now. I want to climb on top of him and sink into his eager hole and fuck him until my teeth descend and my knot inflates inside him. But I want to touch and taste and play with him more.

My hand continues to jerk him as I dip my tongue into his belly button, loving the way he spasms in pleasure against me.

I lower myself more, until I come face to face with his cock. My mouth floods with saliva, eager to draw him between my lips and make him explode down my throat.

Wrapping my hand around his base, I suck him down, tasting the copious amount of precum that leaks from his dick. Rainn cries out, bowing his back so his rod presses further into my mouth. I hum around him, swallowing his essence down gratefully. I want to imprint the feel and taste of him into my soul, so I can keep it with me forever.

Over and over, I bob on his shaft, take him all the way to the base, humming on him. Rainn bucks into my mouth, holding my head so he can fuck my face. I allow him to take his pleasure from me.

“Axum, I’m close. I’m...fuck, I’m close.”

I pull off his dick and lift his legs, pushing them to his chest. I bite his plump ass several times before I flatten my tongue against his hole.

His flavor bursts onto my tongue and I groan. I lick and lap at his hole, needing more of his taste down my throat. Fuck, he tastes like heaven.

Clamping my mouth around his pucker, I suck at him, greedily hoarding how Rainn’s

breath hitches and his moans stutter. I roll his body up until only his shoulders are planted on the ground, and feast on him.

Rainn's nails dig into my arms, stinging my flesh, but I do not care. I want more. I want him to leave marks down my back as I make love to him, claiming him as mine.

"Oh, god, Axum," he moans, his tone sounding fucked-out. "I'm too close. You gotta...oh fuck...oh fuck!"

I pull back slightly, looking down at his blissed-out, but pained expression. "Do you want to come from my tongue, sweet Rainn? Or do you want my dick?"

"Your dick. Please. Oh fuck, Axum."

I close my mouth back around Rainn's pucker and spear my tongue, stretching him out before I use my fingers. For a little while, I fuck him with my tongue, his moans and groans making my dick so hard it hurts. His hole clenches around my tongue, pulsing as I fuck him with it.

"Axum....AxumAxumAxumAxumAxum...I'm coming. Fuck, I'm coming."

I wanted to pull his release from him on my cock, but I cannot stop tasting him. Wrapping my hand around his hard dick, I tug on the length. Two pumps later and he explodes, a strangled cry leaving his lips. His warm spunk slides down my hand and I remove my mouth from his entrance to lap it up.

Rainn stares up at me dazedly, still mewling from his orgasm. Lowering him back to the ground, I climb up the length of his body and drag his boneless legs around my waist. "Are you okay, sweet Rainn?"

He nods and licks his lips. "I'm perfect, Axum. I'm with you, so I'm perfect."

I kiss him softly, lazily dragging my tongue over his. “I will give you some time to rest.”

Rainn shakes his head. “Don’t need it. Just need you. Please.” His hand slides between us, grasping my dick. I hiss, thrusting into his smaller fist. “Claim me, please. I want to... need to belong to you.”

A feral growl drifts up my throat as I bury my hands in Rainn’s hair and pull him up to meet my mouth. I put every drop of emotion I feel for him into the kiss, claiming him this way first. Rainn moans, wrapping his arms snugly around me. He returns my kiss with just as much fervor as I do. I pull him up and set him in my lap, rolling my hips into him.

Blindly, I pat around on the blanket until my hand closes around the bottle of pleasure oil. I quickly coat my fingers and push two of them inside of Rainn’s tight channel. He snatches his mouth from mine, moaning as he pushes back on my probing fingers.

I lick and kiss along his throat, using my tusks to gently scrape along his pulse points. While I am sucking marks into his neck, I add a third finger, stretching him to accommodate my dick. Rainn hisses and curses, but keeps working himself on my fingers. I curl them and peg that sweet spot inside him, making him cry out and beg me to fuck him.

Pulling my fingers free, I adjust Rainn more securely on my lap and grab my cock, rubbing it against his slick opening. “I cannot wait to claim you, sweet Rainn. You will be mine until the end of our days.”

With that, I ease him down on my cock. Despite having Rainn intimately before, it feels different this time. Sensations are heightened as his hole hugs my dick. My breath catches in my throat as I lower him until he has the entirety of my shaft inside him.

I rest my hand on the small of his back while he takes a few seconds to get used to my size. He mewls softly, resting his head against my chest. “Baby. You feel...you’re so big...stretching me so wide.”

Lying him down on the blanket, I push one leg to his chest. Pulling my hips back, I sink into him slowly, watching my cock disappear into his waiting hole. “Gods, Rainn. You are taking me so well. My cock belongs in your hole.”

“Yes,” he moans, pulling his other leg back as he looks down at where we are connected. “You look good there. So fucking good, baby. Fuck me hard. Make me yours.”

Keeping hold of his thigh, I thrust into him over and over, pushing more and more of my dick into him. He is tight around me, his walls almost strangling my shaft. I grunt on every thrust, wanting to live inside him forever, here in our secret place.

One hand on his hip and the other holding his leg to his chest, I fuck into him, watching his hole swallow me in the most lascivious way. He’s stretched around my cock, his rim pink and almost swollen.

He’s a fucking vision like this, naked and wanton under me. He curses and moans, babbles and sobs as I speed up, pounding into him.

“I love you so much, my sweet Rainn,” I grunt out, watching his face transform from lust into a love so profound it makes my heart skip a beat.

“I love you...too...Ax...fuck, I love you too.”

I adjust my position so I can go deeper, pistoning into him at an almost frantic pace. I want to slow down, want to enjoy our claiming, but I cannot. He feels too good and I am too far gone from the heat of him surrounding me.

My balls draw closer to my body as Rainn starts to meet my thrusts, cupping his cock and jerking himself quickly. Precum leaks from his cockhead and my mouth waters to taste him again.

My gums tingle as my teeth prepare to descend, wanting to sink into Rainn. “Oh, fuck, sweet Rainn. I am ready to claim you.” My words sound garbled as my incisors descend to prepare for my bite.

When Rainn meets my eyes, his pupils are blown and lust comes off him in waves. “Do it,” he moans, then tips his head to the side, exposing his neck to me.

With a growl, I lower myself to him and sink my teeth into his throat, finally claiming my mate. Rainn cries out and wetness hits my belly as he cums between us. My knot inflates, pressing against his prostate to prolong his release. Wave after wave of his climax spurts onto me, making my head swim as I swallow down the copper taste of him.

Slowly, I withdraw my teeth and lick the area, lapping up the few drops of blood that escaped.

My orgasm is right at my tip, eager to shoot into him so I can soak his walls. I hold off, wanting his teeth in my skin when I breed him.

Turning my head to the side, I bring my neck to his lips as I rock into him. “Claim me, sweet Rainn. I need—Fuck!” I shout as I come hard from the feel of Rainn’s teeth sinking into my throat, his teeth sharper than normal because of our bond.

I hadn’t imagined being claimed would feel like this. It is like all I know is Rainn. He is etched in my mind, my heart, and my soul. Now, more than before, my world revolves around Rainn and making him happy, loving him for the rest of my days.

Rainn removes his teeth from my neck and licks along my throat, moaning lightly. “You taste good everywhere,” he murmurs.

Turning to him, I capture his mouth in a sweet kiss, tasting the remnants of my blood on his tongue. Rainn’s hands roam my body, moaning softly as he touches me everywhere he can reach.

I rock my hips, making Rainn whimper in my mouth. I keep going, driving into him until I feel his cock harden below me.

Pulling my lips from his, I fuck Rainn with my knot, watching how pleasure clouds his eyes and his moans burrow into my ears, deep into my soul.

“I’m going to come again. Oh, god!” Rainn’s back bows off the blanket and his dick twitches between us, small spurts of cum shooting onto my abs.

After he comes down from his orgasm high, my knot deflates and I pull out of him, lying beside him on the blanket.

I pull Rainn into my arms, kissing his forehead, then bending to kiss his claiming bite.

Fuck, I have a mate and I claimed him under the canopy of the trees near the brook that has become my solace. There is nothing more perfect than this moment.

Rainn’s soft fingers trace over my claiming bite. “It felt weird, biting you. Mainly because it didn’t feel weird at all. It felt like the most natural thing, even though I never would have dreamed of biting anyone else.”

I kiss his forehead again, loving the soft sigh that drifts over my skin. “Does it hurt? I know it is not a custom humans observe.”



“Way less than I thought with those long teeth of yours.” Axum chuckles, then gives me a quick kiss. “But it feels right, you know?”

“Yes, sweet Rainn, I know. Just as your mark feels right on me.” I pull him to lie on my chest, neither of us caring that we’re both covered in cum. “I love you more than life, Rainn. It may be too soon to feel so strongly, but I do. You are my entire world.”

“Just like you’re mine. Axum, I never want to leave you. Just thinking about it makes my heart skip a beat.” He lifts his head and peers down at me, an emotion I can’t decipher swimming in his gaze. “This is insane, right? Feeling this way when we just met weeks ago.”

I shrug. “When you meet your fated mate, an emotional bond can develop rapidly. It is natural to fall in love in a matter of days, sometimes hours. I knew when I saw you that you were the mate for me. I started falling for you immediately, even though I did not believe in fated mates or understand the bond.”

He rests his chin on the hand placed flat on my chest. “You know, I think I might have too. There was some kind of...shift when our eyes met. And then I got to know you and the feelings got stronger and stronger. I’m glad you feel the same.”

I kiss him tenderly before sitting up, holding him tight to my chest. “We should clean up before we head back. Then I would like to take you home and make love to you again.”

Rainn smiles beautifully at me, making my heart beat triple time. “Yeah, Axum. That sounds perfect.”

### Chapter Fifteen

#### Axum

Rainn's thick hair tickles my nose as I wake up, his warm body flush with mine. His plump ass presses against my erection, the heat from him making my dick throb. His soft snores let me know he is still asleep, though he rubs his ass on my shaft over and over.

My fingers trail down to his hole, still fucked-out and wet from the pleasure oil and how many times he took my dick yesterday. But, fuck, I cannot resist being inside him once more.

Angling my cock to his hole, I slide into his waiting entrance, moaning when I am fully inside his slick warmth. I hold Rainn's hip lightly and thrust into him, rolling my pelvis to brush against that special spot inside him.

He moans, coming awake slowly as I fuck into him. Rainn's breath hitches as I angle my hips and peg his prostate dead on. "Axum," he moans in a sleepy voice. "Harder."

I turn his head to the side so I can slot our mouths together as I pick up the pace, pistoning into him with abandon. Rainn moans into my mouth, the sound getting higher and louder the closer he gets to release.

"I'm gonna come," he gasps, pushing back to meet my thrusts. "Fuck, baby." Seconds later, he spurts his seed over the bedding, mewling as he orgasms.

As my knot grows, I lick along his claiming bite, tasting his skin. With a roar, I push into him as far as I can go and come hard. Rainn's ass is full of my cum, and he told me how much he loves it.

I hold Rainn close, kissing his neck while my knot remains inflated. I would fuck him with it, but I think his hole has had enough over the past twelve hours.

Planting one more kiss on his claiming bite, I ask, "How did you sleep?"

I can hear the smile in his voice when he says, "Really good. Woke up even better." Then he rolls his hips, gasping when my knot presses against his sensitive walls. A grunt of pleasure leaves my throat as he fucks himself on my knot.

"You are insatiable," I murmur, burying my nose in his hair and breathing in deeply. "Are you sore?"

He nods. "A little, but it's nothing a soak in the bathing pool won't fix."

A few minutes later, my knot deflates and I pull out of Rainn. I push a finger into him, fucking my cum back inside. He moans, wrapping an arm around my neck and bringing me down for a deep kiss. I continue to finger Rainn until he has another orgasm.

Sleepily, Rainn says, "If I'm to do anything today besides lie in bed, we have to stop."

I hop off the bed, then scoop Rainn into my arms, taking him to the bathing pool. After I heat the water with a quick spell, I lower us into its depths. Grabbing a new cloth, I wash Rainn gently, making sure he is clean everywhere. Then I help him wash his hair, smiling as he uses the concoction I had made just for him. Rainn has told me it smells like something called main-go in his world. I have never heard of

such a thing, but he seems to love the smell.

Once we are clean, we dress and head to Larek's home, surrounded by guards that are none too pleased with me for leaving them yesterday. It was well worth it, as I was able to claim my mate without an audience.

When we arrive at Larek's home, we find him and Snakha in good spirits. His wound is almost completely healed and the healers informed him that he could return to work in a few days time.

We visit with them for a while, enjoying an early lunch and good conversation.

When Rainn and Snakha retreat to the kitchen to clean the dishes, Larek gives me an appeasing look, his eyes bouncing between my eyes and my claiming bite. "It appears that your brother was correct in his belief in fated mates, was he not?"

My cheeks heat, but I do not lower my gaze from Larek's. "That he was. Rainn is the center of my universe. I can no longer see my life without him."

Larek nods. "That is good. He is a great human. In the short time he has been in Daz Vrorkrad, he has endeared himself to many of your subjects here. You have chosen well, Your Grace."

"No," I say, looking through the door of the kitchen, watching how Rainn talks and laughs effortlessly with Snakha, "I do believe Rainn chose me. I am lucky he did."

When they return from the kitchen, we take our leave, Rainn suggesting that the two of them come to the palace for dinner soon, as we would enjoy their company.

"Would you like to return to the palace now?" I ask Rainn as we walk slowly down the road from Larek's abode.

“No. It’s really pretty outside today. Can we walk a bit more?”

I nod. “We can. Would you like to visit the portal again? Since you are claimed, you are free to leave.”

My heart clenches thinking about Rainn leaving. He said he did not want to leave after I claimed him, but being so close to the portal, he may miss his best friend and want to go through and never come back.

“I can see it now?” he asks, lifting a brow.

“Yes. It should be visible to you now.”

“Then yes, let’s go to the portal. It would be nice to see it and not run headlong into nothingness.”

I hide a laugh as I remember our first meeting—Rainn trying to escape and running into a solid portal. I did not like that he was hurt, but it was humorous to see him try to escape.

Hand in hand, we walk down the lane. We stop a few times when we happen upon orcs that greet us, Rainn chatting with them as if they are old friends. I stand back, watching how everyone seems to glow when talking to my mate. There is something so pure about him, so genuine that others cannot help but see.

The closer we get to the portal, the more my heart races. When Rainn was last here, he could not see it, so I am sure he had no hope of crossing through. But now, he can find it effortlessly and go home. He could leave me. He says he wants to stay, but will that always be the case? Or will I wake up in the night to find my mate gone?

We crest the hill and I hear Rainn gasp as the portal comes into view. “It’s so weird

that I can see it now,” he says, as the vortex before us waxes and wanes. “Does it always look like that?”

“Yes.” I know my tone is clipped, but I do not want to lose my mate. It would have been wrong not to show him the portal, but I wish I did not have to.

Rainn laughs and pulls me forward. “This place is literally the best.” We stand before the portal and Rainn pushes his hand through, watching it disappear through the swirling vortex. “This is so strange, but so fucking cool,” he says with another laugh.

“Will you leave now?” I ask, voicing my fears. I hate how pleading I sound, but it cannot be helped. I would not survive Rainn leaving me. I would rather cut out my own heart now than be without him.

Rainn looks up at me curiously. “No. Why would you think that?”

“Well, you have expressed you missed your best friend, so I assumed you?—”

He wraps his arms around me, squeezing me as tightly as his smaller arms will allow. “I do miss Kai. I miss him a lot. But I don’t want to leave yet. Maybe in a few months or something I’ll go back and tell him I’m okay, but that’s something you and I can talk about. Right now, I don’t want to leave.” He pulls back and meets my eyes, uncertainty shining back at me. “Do you...do you want me to leave?”

“No!” I shout, making Rainn flinch from the volume. I take a deep breath to calm myself, framing his face. “No, sweet Rainn. I do not ever want you to leave. I want you to be happy, so if you want to go, I would not stop you. But be advised, I would not like it and would follow you.” I pause, looking up at the sky in thought. “Mostly because I am curious to see your monster sex toy collection.”

Rainn barks a laugh. “Well, I’m ruined for anything other than the real thing now.”

He chuckles a little more, but sobers quickly. “I wouldn’t want to go without you. Don’t worry, baby. You’re stuck with me.”

“There is no place I would rather be,” I tell him honestly, hugging him tightly as I bend to place a kiss on his lips.

## Page 16

*Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:39 am*

Rainn

Two weeks later...

I flutter around the dining room, making sure everything is in place for Nash and his mate to visit for dinner.

A week ago, Axum received a letter from his brother with news of the rogue orcs but he wanted to give more details to Axum in person. He said he would bring his mate, and since we were both humans, we'd have someone to talk to while they talked business.

I like being around my mate, but it would be nice to hang out with a human I can talk to about normal human shit.

My mate. God, that sounds so weird, but it's also fitting. If I were in Destiny, I would never call my other half my 'mate', but here, it's normal.

I never thought I'd even have a mate. While I never shied away from relationships, I never thought I'd want to be with someone long-term. Now, I can't see my life without Axum in it.

As he said he would the day he claimed me, he's made my life so easy and so filled with love that I fear I'll choke on it. But I wouldn't have it any other way.

We've fallen into a rhythm, Axum and I. We move easily around each other, Axum working as emperor and me as one of his scribes.



I got my job purely by accident. I was writing down an outline for a book—one I'll probably never write—and Axum came into the meeting room where I was waiting for him. He peeked over my shoulder and marveled at my handwriting. I told him that I'd taken calligraphy lessons in the past—I had to explain to him what calligraphy was—so I could perfect my author signature and he really loved it. He'd started teaching me how to read and write orcish, and he said with my handwriting, it would be perfect for when he needed to send important missives.

I also commented on how his handwriting was nearly illegible when he was teaching me to read orcish, making him laugh and tell me I really needed to be his scribe to ensure no one was subjected to his terrible penmanship.

I jumped on working for Axum, since I could be around him all the time, and I was paid a salary. It was way less than the other scribes earned—Axum did not like me haggling down for coins, but with him as the emperor, I didn't need much.

The amount of shit I bought from the market every time I got paid was insane.

But I liked spending money at the market. It's nice to support the subjects of Daz Vrorhrad, as well as stopping to gossip at nearly every booth. The orcs and other supernatural creatures that live here are some of the nicest, friendliest people I've ever met.

Axum comes into the dining room, smiling at me as he makes his way to my side of the table. "Everything is perfect, sweet Rainn," he says, kissing my claiming bite.

Any other time, I would melt into him, but right now, I can't stop wondering if the human Nash will be bringing with him is someone that uses all the utensils set beside the plates and bowls and saucers, or if he's like me and picks the one closest to his hand at the time.

That thought makes me laugh, as well as sends a wave of sadness through me. Kai

and I used to joke about pretentious people needing more than one fork to feed their over-inflated egos.

God, I miss him. I wish I could go see Kai, to tell him that I'm fine and he shouldn't worry about me, but on the heels of that thought, a strong, overwhelming urge to remain in Daz Vrorkrad overcomes me and I can't leave, no matter how much I miss my best friend. I can't bring myself to be separated by an entire world from my mate. Axum said there is a way for us to go to Destiny, and when he gets a free week or two, we can go visit. I'm eager to go, to talk to and hug my best friend, but I know how hard Axum is working to ensure the happiness of those in his kingdom. It's more than a full-time job for him—it's his life. I try to ease his burden and I think I'm succeeding, even if just a little. He looks lighter than he has in the past few weeks.

I sigh. "Do you know anything about Nash's human? I know you said your brother is more of a live-off-the-land type, but is his mate? Will they like all this?" I wave over the table with the place setting, the tablecloth and the bunch of flowers that I put in a vase in the center of the long table.

Axum shrugs. "I am not sure. I know nothing of him. Nash would rather eat on a blanket under the stars, but he is trying to at least be civilized this evening for his mate." He turns me around in his arms, using his index finger to tip up my chin. "Whatever you do, Nash and his mate will love it. You will win them both over, as you have done with everyone else."

I smile at him. "I hope so."

It means a lot for Axum's brother to like me. He doesn't say it, but I know Axum would like Nash to visit more often. Mahk as well.

Axum reached out to his youngest brother, inviting him to dinner as well, but he didn't get a reply. Axum said he wasn't on a job, so he might be away from home for other reasons. "I will try in another few weeks," he said when he didn't get a return

message after over a week.

“Come,” Axum says, pulling on my arm to lead me out of the room. “I have something I think you will like.”

“Yeah?” I ask, trailing behind him happily.

Axum knows how much I love gifts. Mostly, it’s things he finds when he’s taking a stroll with his guards or when he is out on scouting missions. I have rocks shaped like flowers, branches that make the shape of a heart, and broken pieces of bird egg shells that are the color of his eyes. He’s bought me plenty of items from the market, but I love the things he finds that remind him of me. It lets me know he’s thinking about me when we’re apart.

We leave the dining room and head up to the second floor, where guest rooms and the library are. It’s where I’ve been learning orcish while Axum is off working and doesn’t need a scribe.

He pulls me into the library and leads me towards the back of the room where there are tables set up in front of the windows. When we’re here studying, I like to glance out the window every now and then, still amazed that I live in this beautiful place.

A gasp leaves my lips as he points to one of the tables. Did he leave to go through the portal without telling me? How did he even get this here?

My eyes brim with tears and my hands shake as I reach out towards the typewriter and large stack of paper beside it. “Axum,” I whisper, placing my hand over my mouth. “How did you get this? Where did you get this?”

“A human that came through the portal about fifty years ago went back shortly after he was claimed and retrieved it, along with a few reams of paper. He and his mate just cleaned their attic and he found it in a case, forgetting that it was there. They

were going to dispose of it, but Olog heard them discussing it and mentioned it to me. You cannot use human electricity here, but that does not hold true for this machine. It works here. So if you would like to write your books, you can use this. It is not?—”

I don't give him time to finish his sentence; I throw myself into his arms, kissing him long and deep. It's one of the most thoughtful things anyone has ever done for me. I've told Axum a few times how much I miss writing and crafting stories, but that my books would be too long to write by hand. The books here are dictated by some sort of spell that I can't use, so Axum was unable to help me on that front. But he went out of his way to find an answer to my problem.

Since he sank his teeth into my neck, imprinting himself not just on my skin, but in my soul, Axum has been thoughtful and caring, helping me in ways I didn't know I needed help. This is one such example. I was content to only take notes and maybe breaking down to handwrite a book. I never thought he would find an alternative.

Fuck, I really love him.

“Thank you,” I whisper against his lips, laughing as I wipe tears from my eyes. “This means the world to me.”

“As I told you, sweet Rainn, I would do anything to make you happy and make your life as easy as possible. I see how your eyes light up when you talk about your books. I always want to see that light. Now you can write your books and share them with my world if you would like. I can have my other scribes translate them to orcish and my— our —kingdom can see just how talented you are.”

I laugh, shaking my head. “Yeah, I'd rather they not know about me writing about humans taking fairy dicks in their ass while they suck off an orc.”

Axum narrows his eyes and in a teasing tone, he asks, “Have you been thinking about fucking a fairy?”

My laughter is loud, bouncing around the library. “God, no. You are more than enough. I only want to be with you.”

“As I only want you, sweet Rainn.” He kisses me gently. “Now, let us greet my brother and his mate. I am sure you’ll enjoy speaking to a human. There are so few here in Daz Vrorhrad.”

I shrug as we walk down the stairs. “There are enough. It’s nice swapping stories with them about where we’re from and how different it is to Belzod. But it will be nice to have a human brother-in-law.”

“It would, at that.” When we reach the landing of the first floor, Axum stops me, turning me to face him. “Would you like to have a proper mating ceremony?”

My breath catches. “Like a wedding?”

“Is that what humans call it? Yes, a wedding.”

“Yes! Yes, please! Oh, my god! Yes! Axum, you make me the happiest man in the world.”

His smile is self-assured. “And I will continue to do so until there is no breath in my lungs.”

In the foyer, forgetting all those around us, our kiss feels like it goes on forever.

When I went hiking, I never thought I’d fall into a mysterious world, and I never thought I’d find the love of my life. But I’m glad I did. Being claimed by my Orc Emperor is a dream come true and I never want to wake up.

THE END