



Guarded by the Yeti (Monster Security Agency)

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Category: Fantasy

Description: A mute girl and a furry beast once got snowed in at the North Pole.

Ysella is a mafia princess. I saved her and her brother when a rival family tried to wipe them out, and now her brother wants me to take her far away, somewhere no one will find her. The farthest place I know is my cabin in Alaska. But is this a good idea? Absolutely not.

I shouldn't have accepted the job in the first place. When my MSA handler insisted, I should've admitted I'm not the right man for it. It's not that I can't protect Ysella from her family's enemies. It's that...

I'm afraid I won't be able to protect her from myself.

You see, as a Yeti, I have one weakness: a woman's pheromones can make me go berserk.

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Chapter One

Kaelthar

My kind has a saying, “You won’t see it coming, you won’t know what hit you, until you’re crawling on the ice, begging for release, for a respite, on your hands and knees, and you only realize you’re in the middle of a lake when the ice breaks beneath you, and you fall... down, down, down... into the dark.” I know, that’s a long saying. The original is probably shorter but call me a poet. I like to distract myself with very descriptive thoughts, especially when I feel like... well, like the ice just broke under my feet, and I’m falling to my doom.

Because her eyes are dark. Two black pits I will lose myself in if I’m not careful.

She’s huddled in a corner, arms wrapped around her knees, shaking like a leaf, staring wildly around her while my team is searching the compound and stray bullets fly downstairs. My men – monsters, if I am to be accurate –are gunning down the last of the Draganetti soldiers who weren’t fast enough to make a run for it. The Draganetti family is one of the two mafia families running this shithole of a city. After tonight, they might be the only mafia family, since they’ve just killed the Carvassi boss and his wife in cold blood, right in front of their daughter’s eyes.

“What took you so long?”

I turn toward the annoying voice buzzing in my ear. It’s been buzzing for a few minutes now – “Where were you? You should’ve been here an hour ago! My father paid you for nothing. You’re too late! How am I supposed to salvage this?” – like an

irate mosquito, and I'm tempted to swat at it with my big, furry paw, but that would mean breaking the Carvassi heir's nose.

Artie Carvassi. I guess he's in charge now, and since my team and I descended "too late", yet just in time to save his sorry ass, it means the Carvassi mafia family isn't yet gone completely. Does he care about his sister, sobbing and shaking in a corner? No. He's in my ear, instead, giving me shit about a job done right, after all.

"You stupid ape," he shrieks. Mercifully, he shakes his head and walks away.

I do not care for humans calling me an ape. Tale as old as time. As old as my species, in fact. I'd hoped that if I came to America, I'd find a world that appreciated me for my skills, that looked past my physical appearance and judged me for what I had to offer. In a world where monsters and humans mingle freely, where the US is the main hub for inclusivity, it seems I'm still viewed as no more than a stupid ape. Not by other monsters. Monsters are fine. But humans. Ooh, boy! The privilege and entitlement of humans!

Call me an ape. It doesn't get a rise out of me. But ignore the tortured creature in the corner, who's just seen her parents get chopped to pieces, and I might just snap.

I approach her carefully. Gently. As gently as I can, given my size. I know I'm not pretty to look at. I stand at six and a half feet tall, a stack of muscles covered in fur as white as snow. I come from the mighty Himalayas, and in the US, I stick out like a sore thumb. I crouch beside her, this frail human with long brown hair and deep dark eyes, and her gaze shifts to mine. She stares at me with tears streaming down her cheeks. Her lips tremble, and she parts them slowly, as if she wants to tell me something, but no words come out. Not even a sound.

"She won't speak." Her brother is buzzing in my ear again. "Not the first time it happens. You see, when you're a Carvassi, you get your fair share of trauma, and

Ysella... she has her own way of dealing with it.”

It’s surprising. I almost don’t believe it, but Artie’s voice takes on a note of compassion. I turn to look at him over my shoulder, and it’s etched into his features, too. After all, he cares about his sister.

“You must take her away,” he continues. “She can’t be here with this war going on. My parents should’ve known better, but they didn’t, and they paid the price. This war has been raging for too long. The Carvassis should’ve ended it before the idea got into the Draganettis’ dumb heads that they could take us down.”

He straightens his back and smooths down his shirt. He’s covered in blood from head to toe. When my team and I broke into the building, we found Artie and Ysella tied to chairs, gagged and dripping with blood. The Draganetti men did a number on Artie, and he has a split lip and a swollen eye. On second thought, the guy doesn’t deserve a broken nose too, no matter how annoying he is. The bastards didn’t touch Ysella. The blood she is covered in isn’t hers. God only knows what they had in store for her, if I hadn’t arrived in time.

“I will end this,” Artie says. “Once and for all.”

“There’s no one left,” I say, pushing to my feet. “Your men are either dead, or they betrayed you.”

A mafia family can only be taken out from the inside. The Carvassi boss was expecting it, and that’s why he hired Monster Security Agency in case things went south. My branch has been on his payroll for a year. Good money, and all we had to do was respond promptly if and when our client pressed the panic button. Which we did. I was appointed team leader, and when I got the call from the MSA, I assembled my men as quickly as I could. Still, I am no miracle worker.

“I’m Artie Carvassi,” he says defiantly. “I will get my army one way or another. Don’t you worry about that. Your job now is to take my sister as far away from here as possible.”

“That is not my job.” I cringe on the inside as I say it, because there’s nothing that I want more than to scoop this gorgeous mafia princess in my furry arms and take her with me, tuck her away forever. “My job here is done.”

I make to leave, but he grabs me by my biceps, and I look down at his dainty hand barely covering a quarter of the circumference. This time, he talks in a low voice, through gritted teeth.

“I am hiring you to guard her. You will not refuse me. I might be down right now, trampled on by those beasts with no honor, but I still have money. Power. Connections. I need you to protect my sister, so I can do my job and save my family and this city.”

Never mind that his family is as of a much a plague to this city as the Draganetti family is. I hum in reply, a non-committal sound that I hope indicates it’s time for him to let go of my arm.

“It’s not my decision to make,” I say. “You’ll have to talk to my handler at the Agency. I’m merely an employee.”

He lets go, finally, and nods. “Where’s my phone?” he yells, as if my men were his lackeys.

I roll my eyes and put some distance between me and the carnage. The windows are wide open – I saw Mason, the golem, march around the room and open them a few minutes ago – but the cold winter air does little to dissipate the stench of blood, guts, and spontaneously emptied bowels. I’m impressed that Ysella hasn’t thrown up. As

vulnerable as she looks, maybe I shouldn't forget who her family is. Or was. As Artie himself said, she's seen her fair share of horrors. He also said she has her own way of dealing with the trauma, and now I'm wondering what that is.

Artie is on the phone, and I can tell he's talking to my handler, Lucia. I pace around for a bit, trying to gather my thoughts. But Ysella is still being ignored in the corner, and that just doesn't sit right with me. I go back to her and crouch to her level again, severely hunching.

"Are you okay?" I ask. What a stupid question. Of course she's not okay, and I want to rip the throats of those who splashed her parents' blood onto her baby blue dress.

She looks at me with so much emotion in her eyes but doesn't answer. I reach my hand toward her – my big, fat, furry paw – and she doesn't flinch, but she doesn't have to. I know it's not appropriate for me to touch her, even if all I want is to squeeze her shoulder and comfort her. I pull away and sigh. I feel the frustration building inside me. My nostrils flare, and underneath the odor of death, I can smell her unique scent. Something fruity. Something luxuriant. I need to turn away, because now I can smell her skin, her hair, the most hidden secrets of her beautiful, strong, young body. Her very fertile body.

I'm an animal, in the end. I won't say an ape, because I don't talk to myself like that, but the truth is the truth. I am an animal, and I have animalistic urges. For years, my kind has been struggling and learning how to contain and control them. If a Yeti gets too close to a female – a female of any species – then that Yeti might just go... berserk.

And that is why I cannot take beautiful Ysella away. I would have to guard her from myself.

Artie taps me on the shoulder, back to his irate mosquito manners. I jump to my feet,

and he waves at me impatiently while still on the phone.

“You’re hired,” he tells me. “For an exorbitant amount of cash but fuck it.”

“What? Give me that.” I swipe the phone from him and press it to my ear. “Lucia?” I walk out of the room. For some reason, I don’t want Ysella to hear me arguing my way out of this assignment.

“Kaelthar! The job was a success, I hear. With some casualties, unfortunately, but I looked at when the alarm went off, and where you and your men were, and given that the tragedy happened so far outside of the city, I don’t think you could’ve had a better response time.”

“Sure, sure,” I grumble. “But what’s this about getting hired to guard Ysella Carvassi?”

“Oh, her brother is willing to pay your fee. I told him you’re one of our most expensive bodyguards, and that he could have his pick from the other men at the scene, but he insisted it must be you.”

“Lucia, don’t make me do this.”

“Why not?”

And this is when I realize she doesn’t know the particularities of my species. Because I never told her. And I never will. My “berserker problem”, triggered by the presence of women, is a weakness. My only weakness. I don’t want to appear weak in front of my handler, but also... it’s not any woman’s problem that I have this biological particularity that I can’t control. At least, Ysella isn’t ovulating, or I would’ve smelled that from outside the building and never gotten in. I even avoid Lucia when I sense that she’s ovulating, and I’m not even attracted to her.

“Pick someone else,” I say, even though I sense I’ve lost this battle already.

“Kaelthar Frost, is there something going on that I should know about?”

Her fierce Costa Rican spirit shines through, and I know I can’t refuse her. Not unless I’m ready to tell her the truth. Which I’m not.

“No, ma’am.”

“Then it’s settled. You’re in charge of Ysella Carvassi’s safety. You are to extract her from there and take her somewhere safe where the Draganettis won’t find her. I don’t need to know, and her brother doesn’t need to know, either. It’s better this way. If the Draganettis catch her brother, or if they force the MSA’s hand somehow, we won’t be able to give away your location. Have your work phone with you. I’ll contact you when this ridiculous war is over.”

“Will do.”

The line goes dead, and I hesitate before re-entering the room of horrors. There’s no point in delaying the inevitable. I have my assignment, and my assignment is the beautiful, innocent woman in there.

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Chapter Two

Kaelthar

The MSA guards on my team are starting to file out. They've done all they could, and it's time to go home, take a shower and unwind, or, knowing them, stop by a bar first. Some of these frightful monsters have wives and kids at home, and I know for a fact they don't want to take the shit that's happened here with them, so they'll drink it away for a few hours. Monsters don't get as intoxicated as humans do, so I'm not concerned. When you can hardly get drunk, alcohol consumption isn't toxic for you or your loved ones.

Artie is talking to his sister in a hushed voice, and I give them space. He's stroking her face with the back of his hand, but she isn't reacting. Earlier, when I approached her, she looked straight into my eyes. She's not looking into Artie's eyes, and that makes me think they aren't as close as Artie is trying to make it look. He hired me to protect her, so at least there's that. He shakes his head, lets out a sigh, and pushes himself to his feet. He's on his phone instantly, texting, and I wonder again where he'll find that army he was talking about. Who will want to fight for Artie Carvassi when it's obvious he's not even half the man his father was?

"I need a helicopter," I tell him.

He shoots me a glance, then he's back on his phone, tapping away. "I'll get you a private plane."

"I don't need a private plane, I need a helicopter."

“You need a private plane. How else are you going to get to the Himalayas?”

That takes me aback. For a second, I don’t know what to say. My eyes widen, and I stare at him like he’s just grown another head. Which, by the looks of his swollen eye, wouldn’t be entirely out of this world. I’m sure there are monsters who can grow a second head. Or a third. Artie Carvassi is not a monster, I remind myself, though he likes to think he is.

“The Himalayas,” I whisper.

“Yes. You’re taking my sister to the Himalayas. That’s where you come from, right? That’s where your home is.”

“My home is here,” I say. “I’m not taking your sister to the Himalayas.”

He looks up from his phone, and he’s trying to look tough, but it doesn’t work on me. Compared to my tall stature, he’s a dwarf. I think his sister is taller than him.

“Then where are you taking her? No, don’t tell me. But let me tell you this: the Draganettis won’t go looking for her at the end of the world. With her gone, I’m no longer weak. My father was weak and look where it got him.” His eyes shift to the mess in the middle of the room. He purses his lips, sniffs loudly, averts his gaze. “I’ll have to call in a cleaning crew. Find a mortician. Someone with experience, someone who can... fix them.” He cringes. “There won’t be any open caskets, but I have to honor them as best as I can in these terrible circumstances.”

I glance at Ysella. She hasn’t moved from her spot. All that’s changed is that she’s lowered her head onto her knees and closed her eyes. She’s trying to isolate from her surroundings. I need to get her out of here. Not just because it’s my job, but because this is no place for a creature like her.

“I’m not taking her to the Himalayas, so I don’t need a private plane. Arrange for a helicopter. I can pilot it myself.”

Artie studies me from head to toe, which is no small feat, seeing how he needs to crane his neck to look at my face. “Fine. You’re her bodyguard. You know best. I’ll make a few calls.”

I nod and let him to deal with that. He’s not my problem anymore. He’s on his own, unless he pays the MSA extra to use his father’s panic button when he fucks up and gets himself strapped to a chair again.

I walk over to Ysella a third time and tap her on the shoulder to draw her attention. It’s the first time I touch her – just a brush of my fingers over her satin-covered skin. She unfolds herself and looks up, and when I offer her my hand, she nods and takes it. She’s heard everything. She knows she has to come with me, and she’s doing it willingly. I wonder what her brother was saying to her when I came in. Probably something that convinced her before a shadow of a doubt. Ysella seems to listen to her brother dutifully, like she probably listened to her parents. They trained her well. Otherwise, I can’t fathom why a woman like her would accept to leave with a monster like me.

Finally on her feet, she tries to walk and stumbles. I catch her and pull her to my side, and her trembling hand comes to rest on my stomach, underneath my heart. She’s tiny next to me, even though I was right – she is taller than her brother.

“Here, I’ll carry you. If that’s okay.”

I wait for her to protest, but she doesn’t. She nods again, and I wonder why she’s not talking to me. Is it because I frighten her? The way she looks into my eyes as I lift her off the ground tells me that’s not it. Once secured in my arms, she rests her head on my chest, and all I can do is try to stay calm. Collected. She’s so close now, her lithe

body pressed to my monstrous one, and my nostrils are full of her. Where she touches me, her skin cells seep into my fur – or so I imagine it – and that makes my heart thrum in my chest so loudly that I’m afraid she’ll feel the vibration. Yetis don’t need to wear clothes. We’re never cold. Up in the Himalayas, we don’t bother with such technicalities. We’re used to being naked, as our fur covers our private parts. But in the human world, I can’t get away without wearing pants, at the very least. I’m fine with it, even though no matter what kind of pants I wear, they always itch. I wanted to live among the civilized, and this is what civilization means.

I stomp down the stairs to the ground floor, where everything is just as messy, but at least there isn’t as much blood. I count three bodies – human males. Draganetti soldiers. I haven’t lost one man, so maybe that’s why Lucia said the operation was a success. Had I lost anyone in this senseless war that wasn’t ours, I would’ve never forgiven myself. Had it been up to me, I wouldn’t have said yes to this assignment, but the higher ups couldn’t refuse the mafia’s money, especially when there was a good chance the Carvassi boss would’ve never even pressed the button.

“Where are you going?” Artie runs after us, gesticulating wildly. He’s pointing at the ceiling. “I got you your helicopter. Stupid ape.”

Right. The rooftop. My bad. To be fair, I’m not thinking straight right now. I’m holding a woman in my arms, and I haven’t held a woman in... too long to remember.

As I climb back up the stairs, Ysella throws her brother a scathing glance, and that warms my heart a little. Artie doesn’t notice. He’s already moving in the opposite direction, yelling into his phone. Two young men burst through the front door, and when he rushes to them, already giving them orders, I conclude they’re his men. Scrawny, if you ask me. Even if he gathers a few more, how is he going to avenge his parents with an army of scrawny men?

Not my problem. How does the saying go? Not my circus, not my... apes?

We emerge onto the rooftop, and the helicopter is waiting already. Ysella pats me on the chest, and my heart skips a beat. That's my first reaction. Then I realize she wants me to put her down, so I do, but make sure to keep my big paw on the small of her back, barely touching her, gently guiding her toward our ride out of this nightmare. She's a bit steadier on her feet. The helicopter blades are still going, and the strong air currents lift her brown hair. It whips behind her, and I think she's the most amazing creature I've ever seen. With her dress torn in places and stained with blood, she looks like a warrior princess.

The pilot throws me the keys and leaves us to it. One thing Artie Carvassi wasn't lying about: he still has money, power, and connections. His parents' empire is in shambles, but as much as I dislike the guy, maybe I should give him the benefit of the doubt. For Ysella's sake, at least. He's the only family she's got left. And at some point, when all this is over, I'll have to return her to him. Now I catch myself hoping he will, in fact, prevail, because I'd like to have someone to return Ysella to.

I help her into the helicopter, in the back, and I know this is temporary. I will protect her for as long as she needs, but it won't be forever.

I climb in the front and put on my headset. I've given her one, and when I look at her over my shoulder, she has it on. I give her a thumbs up – such a human gesture – but she looks at me like she isn't sure how she's supposed to respond.

“Are you okay back there? Ready?”

No reaction. Only her dark, bottomless eyes staring into mine. I raise my eyebrows, thick and bushy as they are, hoping I don't look like a cartoon. Lucia once told me that when I make this face, I look like a cartoon. If anything, maybe it will make Ysella smile. It doesn't.

“I want you to know that you are safe with me,” I say.

She doesn't seem worried or flighty. She's in shock. Yes, that must be it. My heart aches, because I should've realized this sooner. She is stunned about what happened right in front of her, about what she was forced to witness, and here I am, making her promises.

"It might not look like it, but I have a plan. This place I'm taking you to... Those barbarians will never find you there."

She doesn't ask where it is. Her haunting, relentless gaze is starting to unnerve me. What if I don't know how to take care of this creature? I know how to guard and protect. That's my job, and I'm damn good at it. But Ysella needs more than that. She needs me to take care of her. How will I do it right if she doesn't talk to me?

I give up and turn to the controls. I've flown helicopters before, much like this one. Back home, a lot of places are only accessible by helicopter, and my brothers and I used to run errands for the Yetis in our community. Good times, I'm not going to lie. But I wanted more.

"That's our Kael," my mother used to say. "He always wants more. Never enough. Nothing is ever enough for this one."

God bless her. I hope she's well in her old age. I hope my brothers are taking good care of her. As I pull up into the sky, I think about home. I can't help it. Artie Carvassi brought it up, and now all I can think about are the snowy peaks of the Himalayas. And Ysella. I'm thinking about my charge, too.

Alaska isn't the Himalayas, but it's far enough, isolated enough. There are a few Yeti communities, scattered close to the North Pole, and I have a cabin between the unmarked borders of two such communities, tucked away in the mountains, far from prying eyes.

What Ysella doesn't know is that I have to protect her threefold: from the Draganettis, from myself, and from the Yeti males that might catch her scent.

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Chapter Three

Kaelthar

The cabin is in good shape. It was summer the last time I was here, so all the blinds are down. The polar night took over in late September, and it's December now. Right before Christmas. What a way to spend the holidays. And I'm talking about Ysella; I was never a big fan of Christmas and the like. I wonder how long we'll have to hide here, near the North Pole, because even if I'm used to not seeing the sun for months on end, I don't think Ysella has ever experienced a polar night before.

Maybe I should've taken her home, in the Himalayas.

No. Those mountains are filled with Yetis. My kind is everywhere, community next to community. Taking a human female there would be dumb of me. A Yeti female can handle a Yeti male at his worst, but a human female would be prey. Meat. If I as much as lost sight of her and we were surrounded by Yetis, she would be gone in an instant. And I can fight two Yetis for her. Maybe three. Okay, four if I go into berserker mode. But it wouldn't guarantee her integrity or survival.

This is better. The two Yeti communities around these parts are small, and no one knows about my cabin. It's a place I built for myself a few years ago, wanting to have somewhere I could isolate and relax when life got particularly hard. Somewhere that reminded me of home. Now I hope this humble lair of mine is good enough for the mafia princess. Surely, her family bathed her in luxuries. As rotten as they were, she was their little girl.

I lead Ysella inside and close the door. It's freezing, and it's dark, and I don't know what to do first. I turn on the light, and she blinks and covers her eyes with her arm.

"Sorry," I say.

I move around her, figuring the priority is getting a fire going. Then she steps into the living room, and I notice her dress once more. Ruined. Her hair is disheveled, and her face is dirty from all the blood, and grime, and tears. I need to run her a bath. No, fire first. She can't take a bath in this freezing cold.

"Make yourself comfortable." I motion at the simple sofa and the two armchairs. They're a bit beaten up, but what can I do? "I'll go bring some firewood. I'll be right outside. There's nothing to be afraid of, okay? They can't get to you here, trust me. No one knows about this place."

She looks at me just like before, on the helicopter, and it makes me feel uncomfortable. She sits down, finally, and I let out a breath of relief. She is strange.

No, I shouldn't judge her. She's just gone through something unspeakable. The sort of trauma that will never heal, no matter how many years she might spend in therapy when she goes back to her world.

"Here," I say, grabbing a blanket and draping it over her shoulders.

She hugs it close to her body, wrapping herself in it, and I quickly step away, because I can't believe this exquisite creature is perusing something of mine. I go outside to grab some firewood from the shed in the back, and now that there's some distance between me and her, my brain is starting to function again.

What am I doing here? Why have I brought her here? She doesn't even have any clothes, except the dress on her back, which I'll have to wash while she's taking a

bath, and then hope I can dry by the fire in time. Which won't happen, because... physics. What will she wear, then? I have no human clothes. Just a couple of very old, very big T-shirts. At least they're not really worn. I got them all from my colleagues at Monster Security Agency, and one of them has the MSA logo on it. It's their inside joke – gifting me T-shirts, hoping one day they'll shame me into wearing them.

Food! There's some in the pantry, but it's boring, bland stuff. I can cook. Oh, who am I kidding? Most times, not even I can eat the food I cook.

I let out a groan and drop the firewood. I curl within myself and cover my face with my paws, letting out a string of whispered curses. This was a bad idea. And I knew it was a bad idea! I tried to get out of it, but neither Artie, nor Lucia would have it!

And what am I going to do when Ysella, naturally, starts ovulating? My nose isn't trained enough to tell me what stage of her cycle she's in. I know that Yetis – mated Yetis – can tell with their wives. I've just met Ysella, and I don't know how her body functions.

Is it realistic to hope her brother will win the war before that happens? Probably not.

I should've said no. I mean I should've said no more firmly. Drawn boundaries and stuck to them. But who the hell can say no to Lucia Arrieta? She's very good at her job, and I respect her too much. So much, that I can't tell her I go berserk from time to time. That once in a while, the rage I was born with bubbles up to the surface, spills over, and I see red. When a female is involved, that rage mingles with passion and a lust like no other, and all I want is to mate. My brain shuts off. There's no rationalizing it. I need to be inside that woman, and I need to fill her with my seed.

This is insane. They've entrusted Ysella to the wrong monster.

I pull myself together. This is not the time for a breakdown. Ysella is waiting for me, wrapped in my blanket, shaking from the cold. It's dark out here. I don't need to switch on the light in the shed, as I see perfectly in the dark. I pick up the firewood and walk into the crisp air. I can see lights in the distance, to my right and to my left – the two Yeti villages I hope will not give me grief. As long as the males don't know about Ysella's existence and don't catch a whiff of her, we should be fine.

I hurry back to the cabin and shake the snow off my boots before going in. She is right where I left her, looking around her with curious eyes. She doesn't seem to be bothered by the simple furniture and lack of decorations. But what do I know? I have no clue what this woman is thinking. She hasn't said a word since I met her. I'm starting to wonder if she can talk at all.

No. Wait. For real. Can she talk?

I leave my boots in the tiny entry hall and cross the living room under her watchful gaze. Should I ask her? But what if it's a sensitive topic? How do you ask someone if they're mute or not? I have zero experience with such things. Better focus on making the fire, or she'll freeze to death, and then her not talking to me – or at all – will be the least of my worries.

"I will make you something to eat," I say, once the fire gets going. "But I was thinking you might want to take a bath first. I'll heat up some water. There's a tub, and if it's big enough for me, then it's big enough for you." I give her a tentative smile, hoping my bad joke will lighten the mood. She regards me with her signature mix of fixation and curiosity, and I swallow heavily and nod like an idiot. "Right. I will... get to doing that."

In the bathroom, I make a second fire in the small stove that's attached to the tub. I turn on the faucet, let the cold water fill the tub, and the fire slowly heats it up. I have running water and electricity, but heat and hot water have to be achieved through an

old-fashioned fire. It's a bit cumbersome, as I myself have gotten used to the luxuries of the civilized world, but it's not like I use this cabin a lot. Coming here twice a year and doing everything by hand is almost romantic.

I test the water, and it seems fine to me, but again, my skin is definitely thicker than Ysella's porcelain skin, so I might be wrong. I fetch her from the living room, and as she walks behind me, I can tell she's regained some of her composure. She's still in shock, but she doesn't need my hand on her lower back to support her anymore. Her bare feet pad softly on the carpeted floor, and I can't help but stare at her perfect, tiny toes.

Oh, the little things about her that make my stupid heart hammer in my furry chest.

"I will... um..." My own voice sounds weird to me, so I clear my throat. "I'll leave you to it. If you leave your dress just outside the door, I'll wash it for you. And I'll go look for something you can wear."

She doesn't say anything, so I step out and slowly close the door. I'm tempted to tell her to call out if she needs anything, or if something goes wrong, but the issue of her not having spoken a word so far holds me back. How do I navigate this? What even is... this?

I retreat into the kitchen, quickly ransack the pantry, and turn on the stove. At least for this one, I have a gas tank that I refill regularly. Now, what can I make that won't be embarrassingly inedible? I can cook pretty decent pasta... Pasta it is.

While the water is boiling, I go check if she's left her dress by the door. She has, so I snatch it and find a basin that I can fill with cold water. I know for a fact that cold water works better than hot water at removing blood stains. It's science or something, but I know from experience. And experience is better than science. Or are they the same?

Okay, I'm going in circles again. It's imperative to distract myself from the fact that there's a naked Ysella bathing in my rudimentary bathroom. At least the cabin is clean. I always clean it before returning to the city. Washing her dress and making pasta at the same time does the trick. The effort of multitasking is great enough that I don't hear her when she steps into the kitchen.

I hear the chair she knocks over, though, when she trips on a bump in the carpet. I look up, and there she is, wearing only a towel. My jaw drops. The towel is big enough to cover her from underneath her armpits to her ankles, but my stupid brain knows she's naked under it.

"I'm sorry," I mumble. "I forgot... I forgot to bring you something to wear."

Damn it. Males really can't multitask. I hurry past her, scrambling out of the room, trying to ignore the scent of her clean skin and luscious hair. The stench of death is gone, and all that's left is... her. Beautiful and pure. And so sweet that I could easily sink my teeth into her as I...

Stop. Stop it, Kaelthar!

Good God, this was a huge mistake, I think to myself as I rummage through the only dresser in the only bedroom. She'll have the bedroom, of course, with the Yeti-sized bed. I'll sleep on the couch.

Or more like, I'll dream about her on the couch as I try to ignore the stiffest, most engorged, painful erection I've had in my life.

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Chapter Four

Kaelthar

It takes me an hour or more to fall asleep. The fire is crackling softly in the fireplace, the cabin is toasty, and Ysella never allowed me to close the bedroom door. So, I'm lying here, on the sofa, trying not to make a sound as I'm struggling to ignore the hardness in my pants. The pants are a bother when I don't have an erection. When my cock is so stiff that it's ready to burst, they become more than a bother. The fabric rubbing on my sensitive skin is torture.

My mind is full of her. It's no wonder that as soon as I doze off, I see her in my dreams, wrapped in that oversized towel, looking at me with her deep, dark eyes. She's beckoning to me. A smile curves her lips, and she starts unwrapping the towel, unwrapping herself like she's a gift come from above.

My cock is like a steel rod, pushing against the buttons of my pants. I turn on my other side, facing the back of the couch, and I get some friction there, right where I need it. Involuntarily, I start rubbing myself on the couch, moving my hips slowly, picking up the pace as I grow hornier by the second. It's not enough.

In my dream, Ysella's towel pools around her tiny, perfect feet, and she's barely covering her breasts and pelvis with her delicate hands. I reach my own hand into my pants and grip my painful cock. I let out a sigh as I pump myself, no longer knowing if this is a dream or reality, if I'm jerking off in my dream, or this is really happening while Ysella's door is wide open, and she might catch a glimpse of me at any moment. Who's to say she can sleep after all that's happened?

Something tickles my nape, then my shoulder. I freeze, and again, my brain is confused. Dream or reality? The ticklish sensation intensifies, and I squeeze my eyes shut, feeling myself come back to my senses. Now I want back in the dream. I feel a slight pressure on my shoulder, and my instincts kick in. I'm wide awake in a second, shooting upright, looking around me frantically.

Ysella is on the floor, next to the sofa, looking at me with frightened eyes. My reaction must've made her pull away. Her hair falls around her face in waves, and I squint at her, not quite comprehending what I'm seeing.

Is her hair...?

No, that's not possible.

In the orange light of the fire, her brown hair looks... white. I rub my eyes, thinking I must surely be still asleep. Dreams can be weird.

"Ysella?" I whisper softly, testing my voice.

She scrambles closer and half climbs onto the couch. That makes me pull away. This is real. Not a dream. How do I know? Because her hand grabs mine, as if she's looking for comfort.

"Ysella, what happened?"

She stares at me for a moment, then shakes her head. She doesn't know what I'm talking about.

"Your hair," I say. "What happened to your hair?"

She looks down at the locks covering her chest. She has long hair, down to her waist,

straight and perfect. Her eyes widen when she notices the change in color. Just a few hours ago, it was deep brown, and now, it's completely white. Not a trace of the original color in it. She covers her mouth with her hand, even though no sound comes out. Now more than ever, I'm convinced that Ysella is mute.

She shakes her head more vigorously, and tears bloom in her eyes.

"No, it's okay," I say, reaching for her and drawing her fully onto the sofa, next to me. I don't know what I'm doing. "It's okay. You're as beautiful as always."

She clings to me, burying her head in my chest. I wrap one arm around her, holding her close. At the same time, I'm trying to angle my body away from her. The erection isn't going down. Worse, my cock twitches when I feel her tiny hands digging into my fur, viciously holding on. She's pulling at the roots, not realizing the effect she has on me. A feel pre-cum seep out of my engorged head, and within seconds, the front of my pants is completely damp.

"It's alright." Now I'm trying to gently push her away, but she isn't having it. "I've heard about this happening. People's hair going grey overnight after they experience tremendous stress or trauma. What you went through... It's unspeakable. This is just your body reacting."

She shakes her head again, climbs half on top of me, and buries her face in the crook of my neck. I can't help letting out a deep, husky groan.

"Ysella, this isn't appropriate," I say. "I'm here for you, but we need to respect each other's boundaries. I'm your bodyguard, and I'm sure your brother wouldn't approve..."

She cuts me off by taking my face in her hands and pressing her lips to mine. I sit still. Everything inside me is screaming. This beautiful creature is all over me,

showing me that she wants me. She can't speak, but she surely knows how to express herself through body language.

I'm not an idiot, though. I understand that the mental state she's in is pushing her to do this. She needs someone to comfort her, to tell her that she's safe, reassure her that she's wanted. That she's still desirable despite all that has happened to her. I know all this, and I'm a decent guy, or so I consider myself to be. I won't take advantage of her at her weakest and most vulnerable.

I push her away, a little more roughly than before. She looks at me, confused.

"No. We can't do this," I say. I'm holding her at arm's length, when all I want is to push her down and insert myself into her trembling body. I can smell her arousal. "You're sad, Ysella. That's all this is. You probably can barely make sense of the tragedy that befell your family, and now you're here, in a strange place, alone with me, a stranger. That's what I am to you, Ysella. A stranger."

She shakes her head and tries to jump into my arms again, but I hold her firmly. She doesn't stand a chance against my physical strength.

"Did you sleep at all?" I ask. "You're exhausted. I'll make you a cup of hot tea, and it will help clear your head."

I don't wait for her reaction. I stand up quickly and head for the kitchen, leaving her on the sofa with my blanket. I pray that she doesn't follow, because I need a minute to collect myself and adjust the hardness in my pants.

In the kitchen, I turn on the stove and put the kettle on. I steal a glance through the open door, and I see Ysella where I left her. She's pulled the blanket over herself and is staring into the fire. From time to time, she smooths down her white hair. I let out a sigh of relief, turn away, and discreetly adjust the situation below my waist. I need to

burst so badly. Maybe later, when she's busy sipping her tea, I'll sneak into the bathroom and take care of the problem. Or maybe I should go get more firewood, and the cold will fix it for me.

It's selfish of me, I realize, to be thinking of my carnal needs when this woman is suffering in the other room. She's my client, for fuck's sake! I shouldn't be thinking about her like this in the first place! I've never had female clients before, and for good reason. I knew to avoid situations where I'd have to spend too much time in the presence of a woman, regardless of her species. Yetis are carnal creatures. We're filled with lust. There aren't many Yeti females in the US, as my species prefers to stay put in the Himalayas, where we were born. We don't like change. Everyone in my community back home thinks I'm a weirdo for emigrating.

The tea is ready, so I bring it to Ysella, my hands shaking as I carry the tray. I hope she doesn't notice the massive bulge in my pants. I lean over the coffee table to pour her a cup, and she immediately reaches for me. I nearly jump out of my skin. She looks at me questioningly, and I realize how rude my reaction was.

"Sorry." I clear my throat. "We need more firewood. You stay here and enjoy your tea. Stay warm."

Would it be ridiculous to jerk off in the shed? I decide I won't do it. It's pathetic that I can't restrain myself around her. I'm pathetic. I put on my boots, and before I walk out of the cabin, I make sure to grab my satellite phone.

I start walking and don't stop until I'm sure I'm out of Ysella's line of sight if she decides to watch me through the window. I punch in the number that I haven't called in three months. I was so proud of myself, too. Oscar picks up on the fourth ring.

"Hello?"

“Oscar, sorry...” I realize I have no idea what time it is.

“Kaelthar? Is everything okay?”

I let out a frustrated groan. “No. You were right, Oscar. I shouldn’t have interrupted our sessions. I thought I was better, I thought I was past this, but... I need your help.”

My therapist’s voice softens. “I’m glad you called. Tell me everything, and I’ll try to help as best as I can.”

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Chapter Five

Kaelthar

Oscar is a Sasquatch, or a Sassie, as everyone calls his kind. All the Yetis I know that have left the Himalayas have a Sassie sponsor, or therapist. We have trouble integrating in a society that is so different from ours, and especially the Yetis that are not mated have a harder time. Like me. Sassies understand humans, and a lot of them have hybrid families, so they're hybrids themselves.

Oscar is half Sassie and half human. You wouldn't be able to tell if you saw him, as he's a beast of a monster, almost as tall as I am, covered in brown fur from head to toe, but his personality is so human that sometimes it's even hard for me to relate to him. Decades ago, Sassies used to have the same "ailment" as Yetis: going berserk around ovulating females. They've conquered their nature, and that's what Yetis strive to learn from them.

Oscar has been my therapist since I moved to the US, and three months ago, I was convinced I was fine, better than ever, and that I could deal with my issue on my own. It turns out I was wrong. Now I'm pacing in the snow, phone pressed to my ear. It's embarrassing to admit that Ysella is making me doubt I ever made any progress.

"Slow down, Kaelthar. Stop blaming yourself. Take a deep breath, and let's try to get to the root of the problem."

I do as he says. I take three deep breaths and push the air out slowly. My breath turns to mist. Focusing on my surrounding helps. I ground myself in the here and now, take

in the serene landscape, and tell myself that it's okay. I've got this. I'm in my element. I almost lost it a few minutes ago, but instead, I called my therapist. I'm not a beast that goes insane around a woman. I'm a rational creature that can fight this and win.

"What do we know? That you don't do well around women."

I can hear him moving around. If I had to guess, he's going into his kitchen to make himself a cup of coffee. Oscar is addicted to coffee. He drinks at least ten cups a day. Monsters like us need to consume extra if we want to feel the slightest effect.

"Still, you accepted this job," he continues. "Why?"

"I couldn't get out of it. Lucia insisted. And you know me... I can't say no to Lucia."

"I know that you're a bit of a people pleaser, Kaelthar." It's like I can hear the smile in his voice. "Especially when it comes to a lady who asks nicely."

"Or not so nicely," I grumble. "Doesn't matter. I can't say no."

"I have a theory. Do you want to hear it?"

I sigh loudly. "I don't know..." I scratch behind my ear.

"It has nothing to do with your being a people pleaser."

"No?"

"No. I believe that if you truly thought you're a danger to this woman you're protecting, you would've told your handler and refused the job." I don't say anything, so he goes on. "Knowing you'd have to be so close to your client, sharing such a

small place, you wouldn't have risked it. You're a good man, Kaelthar, despite the challenges your biology is throwing at you. I believe you accepted the job because you need companionship. And because the pledge of celibacy you made a year ago isn't working out for you."

I grit my teeth. It's true. A year ago, I pledged to be celibate. For life. Because my desire to mate – triggered by any woman during ovulation – makes it impossible for me to determine if the women I'm attracted to are good potential mates. I've noticed myself too many times wanting to ravage a woman, only for the sentiment to go away completely the next day, whether the ravaging had happened or not. A few times, I even thought Lucia was perfect for me.

"What does this mean?" I ask. "I don't get what you're saying."

"What I'm saying, Kaelthar, is that you saw this woman, and you felt something."

"Yes, I felt that I should protect her. She's gone through the sort of trauma not even you, with your psychology degree, would understand."

"I think it's more than that. You've been alone for so long, you need companionship. And when her brother asked you to take her away, you saw an opportunity to be with this beautiful creature, just the two of you, together, at the end of the world. There's nothing wrong with that. Look at you, you're protecting her honor. You're not taking advantage of her, even though she nearly jumped your bones a few minutes ago. You gently rejected her and went out for a walk. You're doing great!"

I take a few more deep breaths and release them into the frigid air. I'm feeling better. Oscar's words are soothing, reassuring. He's right. It might feel like I'm failing because I desire her so much, but in fact, I'm handling it well. I don't even have an erection anymore. I've been talking to Oscar for the past half hour, so it would be weird to still have a hard-on.

“Thank you,” I say. “I think you’re right. I don’t want to hurt her. I don’t want to take advantage of her.”

“Good. Are you feeling better?”

“Yes.” I grin. “Much better.”

“Are you ready to go back inside and behave like a proper gentleman?”

“I think so, yeah.”

We say our goodbyes, and Oscar makes me promise to call him whenever I need another pep talk. Well, I guess this means I’m back in therapy.

I return to the cabin and remember at the last moment that I was supposed to bring in firewood. I circle the house, go into the shed, and fill my arms. The freezing winter air has cleared my head and cooled my body. It’s as dark as when we arrived, and while I’m used to it, I hope it won’t bring Ysella’s spirits down even more. I know that humans can have a hard time near the North Pole. They don’t deal well with not seeing the face of the sun.

When I enter the living room, I find Ysella on her knees in front of the fireplace, stoking the fire. I decide it’s fine to sit next to her. Nothing will happen. I won’t lose it.

She turns to me and gives me a questioning look, as if to ask why I’ve been gone so long.

“I went for a walk.” No reason to lie. “I needed to clear my head.” I throw two logs into the fire. “Listen... about before. It won’t happen again. It can’t. You are my client, and I am your bodyguard. I will keep you here, safe, until your brother lets the

MSA know that we can return, and then we won't even see each other again."

My heart aches as I say the last words. Is that what I want? To finish this job and never see her again? With all the other women, it was only lust. Ysella is different. Just the fact that I want to fight my lust so badly tells me she's different.

"This is for the best. Don't you agree?"

She shakes her head.

I sigh. "I think it's for the best."

I look at her white hair. So close to the fire, it shines in warm tones. I want to reach out and touch it, but of course I don't. I will suppress this urge like I'm going to suppress all of them. It's like she reads my mind, because she reaches over to touch my long beard. I pull back a little, and her fingers linger in the air. She looks disappointed.

"This isn't because I don't like you," I say. "You're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. And your hair suits you even better now." I chuckle awkwardly, and she gives me a smile. "We can go for a walk tomorrow, if you want. You'll blend in with the landscape." Now she laughs a silent laugh. It reminds me that she can't talk. At least, that's my conclusion. "You know what? I have a notebook around here somewhere. I should have a pen, too. What if I bring them to you, and then you can write down what you want to do?" She nods. "Yes?" I smile, relieved. "Be right back."

It takes me a few minutes of rummaging through various drawers to find what I need. I'm not the type who uses pen and paper. Finally, I find an old, yellowed notebook and a pencil that's been sharpened too many times. I don't even know where I got it. Then I remember it's a leftover from when I built my cabin and had to take

measurements. I bring them to Ysella, and she reaches for them greedily. She scribbles something and shows it to me.

“I want to play the piano,” the note says.

“Piano.”

She gives me a broad smile, straightens her back and starts playing on an imaginary keyboard.

“Right. I assume it helps take your mind off...” The terrible things she’s seen. Her parents being chopped into pieces in front of her. “Playing the piano is your escape.”

She nods, and that seals it. I can’t say no to her. I don’t have a piano, and I don’t know where to get a piano, but those are just details.

“Okay. I’ll take care of it tomorrow.”

She throws her arms around me, and I’m too slow to pull away. Correction: I don’t pull away because I don’t want to. She clings to my neck, and I let her.

I can’t deny I’d love to hear her play.

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Chapter Six

Kaelthar

I have the helicopter, but that isn't going to help me bring Ysella a piano, so I dust off, so to speak, the old snowmobile. I use it to stock my pantry and it's big enough, made for a big guy like me. I figure I'll drive to the nearest Yeti community, buy supplies, and ask around. My chances are slim, and I know I might have to look further, drive south to one of the human establishments. Fingers crossed, like humans say. You never know.

I make sure Ysella has everything she needs, I bring in enough firewood, so she doesn't have to leave the cabin, and when she clings to me at the door, I don't reject her. I'm getting used to her seeking me, wanting to be close to me. It's dangerous, but I can't help it. I wonder... what if there's something there, and it isn't just the trauma she's gone through? Can I dare to hope?

Uh-oh. I might have to call Oscar again.

"Stay inside," I tell her. "And keep the blinds down."

The lights are on everywhere in the cabin because that's how she likes it, so I make sure to keep the windows covered, so it's not immediately obvious someone lives here. I feel a bit panicky that I'm leaving her for a few hours, but I have no other choice. She wants a piano, and a piano is what she's going to get.

My first stop is Icefang, a Yeti community with tradition created by some of the first

Yetis that moved here from the Himalayas. It's the closest one, and the biggest. There's a market that usually has everything I need, and the Yetis know me.

"Kaelthar Frost! Back so early?"

I always buy my frozen meats from Bralgor. He's an old Yeti, and he spends so much time behind his expansive stall at the market that he knows everything that moves. Apparently, he knows my yearly schedule, too. We chat for a while, and I mention the piano. I try to be vague, leading him to believe that I want it for myself. He's silent for a minute and studies me with some skepticism, but then he shrugs, as if it's not his business.

"I don't know anyone in Icefang selling a piano. The Yetis aren't exactly known for our artistic talents." He laughs, and I join him. "But I heard there's a family in Shiverpoint who were trying to introduce their children to more human-like things, you know. Some parents lean toward integration with the humans' culture more than us old farts." He waves his hand dismissively. "What do I know? So, ask around in Shiverpoint. Last I heard, they failed miserably, and now they're stuck with a bunch of things they bought for their children. Maybe they're selling the piano."

That's all I needed to hear. I thank him, load my food supplies into the snowmobile, and start toward Shiverpoint. It's a little more to the south, and I hate that it takes me farther away from Ysella, but if I move quickly, it won't be more than four more hours, and then I can hear her play the piano.

Shiverpoint is smaller than Icefang. I don't know the Yetis here as well, but when I ask at the market, I get an address. I feel awkward knocking on this family's front door, but I do it anyway. I'd do anything for Ysella, I realize. Even make a fool of myself, letting everyone believe I'm into the human arts. Not that Yetis don't have respect for the humans' culture, but we generally think it's not for us.

A Yeti male answers the door. He's young and broad, and when I introduce myself and tell him what I'm here for, he lets me in and calls Ishkala, saying she's his aunt. The Yeti female appears from the kitchen, wiping her hands on a kitchen towel.

"I heard you have a piano that you'd like to sell," I say.

"You heard right. I bought it for my two boys, but they want nothing to do with it. All day, they're outside causing trouble. I paid a fortune for the thing, and now it's gathering dust in a corner."

"I would like to buy it."

"Music to my ears," she laughs. "It's not a real piano, mind you. It's one of those electronic ones. What do humans call it? An electronic keyboard."

I know nothing about pianos, so I just nod. I hope it's good enough for Ysella.

"It was cheaper, you see," she explains, leading me into the living room. It's cozy, with a fire dancing in the fireplace. Her nephew sits at a table, tinkering with something. "My sons have barely used it."

"I understand. I can pay the full price."

"Are you sure? I can give you a discount. It's only fair."

"No need."

I look around the house, and I can tell a big family lives here. It's crowded, with things strewn everywhere, and the female, Ishkala, looks exhausted, like she's the only one taking care of the house while the males are out there, doing God knows what. At least her nephew seems to be repairing some kitchen appliance. I feel like

she deserves to get the full price she's paid for the piano.

"Okay, then," she says, shrugging. "I won't lie I need the money."

The transaction is made, and her nephew helps me pack up the electronic keyboard, along with its furniture and the little chair. We secure everything onto my snowmobile, then we shake hands.

"Are you from Icefang?" he asks.

"Not exactly. I'm from around here, though."

"Oh, you're what they call a hermit."

"I'm a bit of a hermit, yeah, you could say that."

"And you want to spend the holidays learning how to play the piano?"

I shrug. "Beats getting bored."

He watches me as I get into the snowmobile. There's something in his eyes, like he's suspicious of me. I better get out of here before he asks too many questions. I wave at him, wish him a good day, and peel off, heading north, back toward Icefang. I avoid the community this time, drive around it, and as I'm getting closer to the cabin, knowing that Ysella is waiting for me, all my worries vanish. Today was a good day. I can hardly believe my luck.

She welcomes me with open arms. When she sees the piano, she jumps up and down, clapping her hands. I don't even have time to take the food supplies to the kitchen, because she's clinging to me, pulling at the fur on my arms, urging me to install the musical instrument. It takes me a while, and she's impatient, pacing and trying to

help me, getting into my space, making it really hard to focus.

I don't shoo her away. I'm glad she's happy. She's gathered her long, white hair in a loose bun, and she's still wearing my humongous T-shirt, even if her dress has dried. She's barefoot, and I make a note to throw more logs into the fire, keep it toasty for her. But first, the piano, because it seems she can't contain herself.

When it's done, she sits on the little stool and starts playing. Eyes closed, hands dancing over the keys, one foot on the pedal, she plays a slow, haunting song, and it seems to tear through all my barriers. The few barriers I still had, that is. I need to force myself to go back to sorting and storing the food supplies I got in Icefang, because all I want to do is sit here and watch her play.

The music follows me into the kitchen, and I hum softly as I get to work. When it's always dark outside, time becomes relative, but I'm pretty sure we need dinner. I'll cook us something nice. A feast. While she gets lost in her music, I can get lost in cooking for her.

One hour later, the food is on the table, and Ysella stops playing. She joins me and sits close to me, our arms touching. Then, under the table, she presses her leg to mine, and a shiver runs through my body. I have to fight back a groan. It's hard to resist her. I lean in and inhale the scent of her. She's not ovulating yet, but something tells me it's going to happen soon. Will I be able to fight my urges then?

I must. I'm more than my "condition", as I started calling it in therapy. Oscar doesn't agree. He didn't agree when I decided to become celibate, either, saying that suppressing my natural, biological needs won't lead to anything good. I'd say I'm doing fine, given the circumstances. I have a beautiful woman sitting by my side, and instead of throwing her on her back and inserting myself between her legs, I'm piling food onto her plate. My desire to take care of Ysella is stronger than my lust for her body.

She has a healthy appetite, and I'm glad she doesn't seem as affected as she was yesterday. She drinks half a bottle of wine by herself, which I'm not sure about but... who am I to stop her? Her cheeks are rosy, and her eyes twinkle. I can tell that she's tipsy. When she reaches for her notebook, she struggles to write, and I don't think it's because the pencil needs sharpening.

"Thank you," she writes down. "It was delicious. No more. I'm full."

"You're welcome. Oh, no more? No dessert?" At the last minute, I bought a pie at the market in Icefang. But we can eat it tomorrow.

She shakes her head and rubs her belly. She taps her empty glass, and I hesitate before rolling my eyes and pouring her the last of the wine. She takes the glass to the living room and collapses on the couch. She motions for me to sit beside her.

"I have to clean up," I say.

She shakes her head at me, furrows her brows, and beckons for me again. It seems I can't refuse her. She won't take no for an answer.

"Fine. I guess I can do it later."

I sit down at a respectable distance, but she abandons her wine glass on the coffee table and snuggles close to me. Her hair smells like soap, and her breath smells like wine, and I don't mind it one bit. Her body fits perfectly in my arms, so I pull her close. Then I feel her hands starting to explore, and I tense up. She rubs her palms over my chest first, then lower, over my abs, until she reaches down and runs a hand over my thigh.

"Ysella... This is a bad idea. I told you, we can't do this."

She ignores me and continues rubbing my inner thigh, moving closer and closer to my engorged cock. It's straining against my pants, and it would be ridiculous to try to hide it. My words mean nothing when my actions are telling her the opposite: I like what she's doing to me. I want her.

"Ysella," I try again.

She frowns and sits up, closing the distance between us. Her lips press to mine, and I instantly melt. I can't pull away. I was a stronger man yesterday. Today, after I heard her play the piano like a literal goddess, and after we enjoyed a good meal and too much wine, I can't fight this battle and win.

She climbs on top of me and straddles my lap. The T-shirt rides up, and I can see her pale, smooth thighs. She takes my hands and places them on that perfect, warm skin, and this time, she doesn't have to initiate the kiss, because I'm the first to lean in.

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Chapter Seven

Ysella

With him, I can be myself. I can let go. He doesn't know who I am, what I've truly been through, and I want to delay telling him for as long as I can. There are no expectations this way, no prejudices. For the first time in my life, I can relax.

He kisses me deeply, passionately, and I slip my tongue into his mouth, encouraging him to go on, to throw caution to the wind. I grind my hips against his cock, and my pussy gushes at the hardness pressing into me. I want him badly. I want him to fill me, even though I know it might hurt.

I haven't been with a man in years. Because of my family, I had to isolate myself, spend my days playing the piano, reading books, gossiping with my shallow friends – girls who thought choosing the right pair of shoes was a matter of life and death. It's been hard being a Carvassi. Getting too close to someone, falling in love... Because of who my family is – was – every boy I liked was in danger. After a while, I gave up trying to have a boyfriend, a real relationship. It was better this way. For everyone involved. Of course, my brother lived by different rules.

I don't want to get into all that now. I just want to enjoy this moment. Look at me, at the end of the world, about to get ravaged by a beast.

I never thought I'd be into monsters. But why not? Kaelthar is better than any human man I've ever met. He cares about me. He protects me, cooks for me, he even went out and bought me a piano. And, sure, he's being paid to do some of that, but isn't

getting paid to do the rest, to go the extra mile. He's the first man who's actually treating me right, and I could see it the second I met him. In that room of horrors, I sensed he was the only one I could trust.

He lets out a groan, and I drink the sound greedily. My breathing speeds up, and I'm practically staining the front of his pants with my juices. I caress the sides of his big, round face, then sink my fingers into the rich fur on his head. He has a long, soft beard, and he kind of looks like Santa Claus. I giggle internally as the thought crosses my mind. I wouldn't mind seeing him in a red suit. On his forehead, he has three short, pointy horns, which I gently trace with the tips of my fingers. He lets out a heated breath, and I feel his cock twitch under me.

I want to whisper in his ear that I want him. I can't. Soon.

He bites my lower lip, and I smile, filled with pleasure. His hands roam all over my body, caressing me, kneading me. He weighs my breasts into his palms and cups them gently. His hands are so big... I love it! He traces my sides, then my back, going lower and lower, until he grips my ass and pulls me closer, increasing the friction between our bodies.

"Ysella... are you sure?"

I nod quickly. I haven't been so sure of anything in my life. Well, on second thought... There's one other thing I was really, really sure about not very long ago. Story for another time. His presence fills my space, my mind, my heart. I need him to possess me, to squash my lingering past with his big, furry paws, and hold me in the present. Hold me tight and never let me go.

His hands firmly on my ass, he lifts me, then places me on the floor, on my back. The carpet is soft, and the fire warms my skin. He hovers over me for a minute, taking me in, studying me from head to toe.

“You’re so precious,” he says.

I blush. When was the last time someone had something nice to say to me? A nice adjective to describe me? I reach for the buttons of his pants, wanting to show him how much I appreciate his praise. He gently secures my wrists and pushes my hands above my head.

“No. Let me see you. Tonight isn’t about me.”

Something ignites in my belly. It’s like the whole area around my pelvis is on fire. I go limp, and Kaelthar nods and starts removing my T-shirt. Well, his T-shirt, which practically looks like an oversized dress on my small frame. I’ve lost weight in the past few years. I didn’t use to be this skinny. I barely have any boobs left, but as he unravels them, Kaelthar’s pupils dilate, and I can see that he doesn’t care. In his eyes, I’m perfect.

Once the T-shirt is out of the way and my nipples harden, he peels off my panties. They’re soaked anyway. I doubt they can be saved. I’m lying before him, naked, and I don’t feel vulnerable at all. I feel powerful, because I can see the look in his eyes. He worships me.

He doesn’t even know me, and he worships me.

He lowers his head and starts tracing kisses from my collarbone to my right breast. He takes my nipple between his lips, then my whole breast. I open my mouth and throw my head back, eyes wide. It feels amazing. I’m trying really hard to not sink my hands into his fur. His mouth moves to my left breast, and he does the same thing. Then he starts moving downward, leaving my breasts slick with his saliva. It cools in the air, and my nipples become two hard pebbles, so hard that they almost hurt. As he kisses his way down between my legs, he pinches them with his fingers, and that sends shocks of electricity through my body.

“We have to take things slowly,” he says, and I notice his voice sounds different. Deeper. Rougher. “You have no idea what this is doing to me, Ysella. I must... I must...” He’s breathing hard, as if he’s not simply kissing me and exploring my body but running a marathon. “I must protect you even as I...” He inhales and lets out a groan that almost sounds like he’s in pain. “Your scent drives me ber...” He hesitates, and I don’t know what he’s trying to say. “Mad,” he finishes.

I’m pretty sure that isn’t what he wanted to say, but his tongue connects with my clitoris, and my eyes roll back in my head. He licks me slowly, from my entrance to my clit, then down to my entrance again. He dips his tongue inside me and moves it around, and I nearly yelp when he brushes against a spot that’s particularly sensitive. His tongue is long and thick, and so strong that he almost pushes me over the edge. I’m seeing weird lights already. He pulls out and gives me a second to collect myself, then descends onto my clit again, more firmly this time.

His fingers are playing with my nipples, and his mouth latches onto me, licking me, sucking me, massaging me, and I spread my legs wide to give him better access. It doesn’t take long. The orgasm hits me like a wave. I dig my hands into my own hair, and I pull at the roots. I arch my back and curl my toes, my body starts shaking, and there’s nothing I can do about it. After the first wave, a second one hits, and I come again. It’s fast, it’s strong, and my thoughts plunge into nothingness. It’s like the darkness outside has slipped into my head, and it’s pure bliss.

He licks me lazily until I come down from my high, then climbs up my body as I lay limp, unable to move, barely breathing.

“You’re delicious,” he says.

I look into his eyes, and he frowns and touches my cheeks with his soft fingertips.

“What’s wrong? Did I hurt you? Are you in pain?”

That's when I realize tears are streaming down my face. I shake my head and try to wipe them with the back of my hand, but he wipes them for me. Then he caresses me for a few long minutes, running his hand over my face, my eyelids, my hair. He does this until I stop silently crying and relax. I cover his hand with mine and hold it there, pressed to my cheek.

"I'm sorry," he says.

I shake my head again. He sits up, and I cling to him, not wanting him to let go. I notice that he's impossibly hard, the head of his cock poking out of his pants. My eyes widen at the size of it. I can only see the tip, the slit oozing with his juices.

He grunts apologetically and tries to adjust himself, but it's too late. I've seen it, and I want it. I latch my fingers into the hem of his pants and pull. Between my pulling and his cock's pushing out of its confines, the buttons don't stand a chance. They simply pop, and then his erection is free, his massive length landing onto my belly. It's long, thick, and heavy, and the best way to describe it is... a veritable piece of meat. My pussy throbs, hungry to milk it.

"No, we can't..."

He tries to push my hands away. His attempts are feeble, and I manage to run my palms over the beautiful length. His pre-cum spills onto my belly, making me salivate. I wrap my hands around the length and move them up and down, and that's when Kaelthar growls and grabs my wrists. He's not gentle this time. His grip is so firm that it's bruising my skin. I wince, but he doesn't let go.

"No, Ysella. Trust me, we can't do this. I'm too big for you. It won't fit."

I look at him, eyes wide. Well, I can't say he's lying. Still, I can't help but want him inside me. Maybe I could take just the tip...

As if he's reading my mind, he shakes his head. "If we try it, I won't be able to hold back."

What does that mean?

"I will hurt you. I don't want to hurt you, but I will. It's who I am."

Now I'm even more confused. He doesn't elaborate.

I struggle in his grip, not taking no for an answer. A single glance at my wrists makes him gasp and let go. Sure enough, there are red marks on my skin. I don't care. I've had worse. I take advantage of my sudden freedom and wrap my hands around his cock again, pumping him fast, spreading his pre-cum all over his length, running my thumbs over the mushroom head. He tries to protest, but instead of words, he manages a grunt and another growl. I love it when he's growling. His entire chest rumbles.

"No... No... Yes..."

Oh, good. We're making progress. Soon, he only says yes, and I jerk him off sloppily. I'd love to do a better job, but he's so big that I'm not sure how to handle him right.

He also seems to think I'm being sloppy and inefficient, because he sits up, which makes my hands slip away from his cock. He grips the base of it with his own hand, right above his heavy testicles, and squeezes hard.

"Do you want my seed?"

I nod vigorously and lie back. Yes, I want it all over me. Seeing how big his balls are, I figure they're full of it. He's going to bathe me in it.

He shakes his head. “The things you make me do...”

He starts pumping his cock fast. His hand runs up and down, up and down, and I can't help but stare. I can't have enough of it. The sight is so erotic that my pussy contracts. I open my legs wide and slip a hand between my folds, teasing myself. He notices, and now he can't look away from my fingers working, dipping into my pussy, two at once. I'm so wet, there's a damp spot on the carpet beneath me.

“Fuck...”

He pumps harder, and before I know it, semen spurts out of his cock. It travels in an arch and hits my stomach.

“Fuuuuuck...”

He comes hard, shooting string after string of cum, until it starts dripping down my sides. It drips between my legs, and I take some of it and guide it to my pussy. I know I shouldn't be doing this. I'm not on the pill. But I want his fluids inside me. I'm pushing as much cum as I can into my pussy and pump my fingers harder, in and out, until I'm coming undone.

Kaelthar watches me in awe. I guess he didn't expect this. I wonder what he thinks of me. That I'm this perfect princess who was shielded all her life? If only he knew the truth...

Mesmerized, he reaches out and runs his fingers over my stomach, up to my breasts, spreading his semen as he goes. He circles my nipples and coats them, and I bite my lip and arch my back into his touch. It's so sinful, so delicious... This is the best experience I've had with a man, and Kaelthar hasn't even properly fucked me.

He travels back down, guiding more cum between my folds. He presses on my clit

lightly, spreads me apart, then dips a coated finger into my pussy. I wrap my hand around his and push his finger deep inside me. I'm spent. I'm not going to orgasm again, but the sensation is nice. He fingers me for a minute, then pulls out and massages my sex until I'm redder and more engorged than ever. Now I'm properly covered in his cum.

"This is better than in my dreams..."

I cock an eyebrow. So... he's been dreaming of me? I grin, and he grins back, then removes his hand and slaps my thigh playfully.

"I'll run you a bath."

I let out a sigh and close my eyes. I can get used to him doing everything for me. Now, if he would also fuck me thoroughly next time, my own dreams would come true.

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Chapter Eight

Kaelthar

She's wrapped like a burrito in the softest blanket I own, lying on top of me, her white hair spread over my chest. She didn't want to sleep alone tonight. I hold her gently, and it's easy to doze off after today's adventures. Last night, it was hard. Impossible. Now she's in my arms, she's mine, and I fall into a deep, restful sleep as I listen to her steady breathing. Her heart beats next to mine. We're in sync. I can't imagine a more perfect moment.

It's stormy tonight. The wind started howling as I gave Ysella a bath. It took her a while to get used to it beating against the windows and the side of the house. I made sure to bring in plenty of firewood, knowing we'd most likely wake up in the morning and realize we're snowed in.

My dreams are of her. Of what we did on the floor, in front of the fireplace. Her scent fills my nostrils, and I involuntarily squeeze her body closer to mine.

There's a bang outside, and I furrow my brows in my sleep, but don't wake up. Storms are terrible up here in the north. Ysella stirs, and I cradle her gently. She turns on her other side, pressing her left cheek to my chest. Another bang, more noise, and I grunt and stir myself, annoyed at the loud weather.

Then I feel a tiny hand on my cheek. I smile and murmur something. Maybe her name. The hand moves down to my chin and tugs at my beard. Once. Twice. She tugs harder, and this time, I open my eyes. She's hovering over me, eyes wide. The lights

are on, as always, and I read fear in her dark gaze.

“What’s wrong?”

A third bang outside, louder this time. It seems to be coming from the front door.

“It’s just the storm,” I say.

She shakes her head and tugs at my beard again. I let out an “ouch!”. I’m a tough guy, but if there’s one part of my body that’s more sensitive than the rest...

I take her hand in mine and gently tuck it back into her blanket.

“Shh... it’s okay.”

I get up, though. She rolls off me and sits up in the middle of the giant bed as I find my pants and go into the living room to throw another log on the fire.

“I’ll check,” I say. “Just to show you that it’s nothing.”

I head to the front door, and it bursts open before I reach it. I take a step back. Snow tumbles in. I hear the howl of the wind and the ominous crunch of snow under heavy boots. I don’t have time to get my bearings, because there’s a bang, and another... Three, four, five...

And I realize someone is shooting at me. I can feel the bullets hit my chest and my arms. The pain is blinding, even though the projectiles don’t penetrate my skin. They remain embedded halfway, and when the shooting stops, I start plucking the bullets out, one by one. Blood stains my white fur, and the wounds sting, but that’s about all the damage human guns can cause someone like me.

“Where is she?”

Men pour in through the front door, led by Artie Carvassi. My first instinct is to crush them all, but I stop in my tracks, because I don’t understand what’s happening.

“How did you find this place?”

Artie doesn’t answer, and he doesn’t need to, because I can see the two Yeti males behind his small army of men. I recognize the Yeti from whose aunt I bought the piano yesterday. He must have followed me here or asked questions in Shiverpoint and Icefang until he figured out the location of my cabin. I don’t know who the other Yeti is, and I don’t care.

“I’ll ask one more time, then I’m bringing out the big guns,” Artie says.

I cock an eyebrow. His men don’t look convinced, so I’m not sure what “big guns” he’s referring to. It seems to me these are the only guns they have, and they’re laughably inefficient in a fight with a Yeti.

I look around me, assessing the situation, trying to make sense of what’s happening. He’s clearly looking for his sister, but why? I notice Ysella has closed the door to the bedroom. That won’t keep these mad people out. But I will. If I have to.

“I don’t understand,” I say. “She’s safe. Isn’t that what you wanted?”

Where’s my satellite phone? Did it ring, and I didn’t hear it? Did Lucia try to get in contact with me and I was too wrapped up into... well... Ysella?

Artie advances toward me and taps my chest with his gun. For such a short guy, he’s got balls.

“She did it,” he says. “Officially, your job is done. Over. Get out of my way.”

“She did what?” But I don’t care, really. I square my shoulders and push him back when he tries to get past me. “Ysella is under my protection.”

“Didn’t you hear me, stupid ape? Not anymore.”

He points the gun at me, and I sigh. “It’s not going to work,” I tell him. At this point, I’m struggling to hold back. I’m boiling with rage, and I don’t like how his men have invaded my cabin – my home – stomping the rugs with their dirty boots.

“What if I shoot you right between your ugly eyes? Will it work then?”

I don’t think, I act. In one swift motion, I disarm him, the gun flying to the floor. I kick it, and it slides under the couch. His soldiers shoot at me once more, and this time, they’re aiming for the head. I raise my arm to protect myself, and with the other, I swipe at them, my sharp claws digging into warm flesh, the side of my arm connecting and breaking ribs. It’s chaos, and two men jump on top of me, trying to overpower me. I throw them off, and one of them slams into the coffee table, loses his balance, breaks the piece of furniture and collapses in a heap of tactical gear and wood splinters. A few more well-aimed blows, and all of Artie’s men are disarmed and groaning and moaning on the floor.

At this point, I’m thoroughly pissed off, but still willing to accept a reasonable explanation.

“She’s running,” I hear one of the Yetis outside yell.

They disappear from view, rounding the cabin, and Artie goes after them. My heart hammers in my chest. Running? Where? Why? I storm into the bedroom and find the window wide open. Ysella has discarded the blanket and my T-shirt, put on her dress

and shoes, and I can see her running into the night. The two Yetis are after her, and once again, I don't think. I jump over the windowsill, right into the snow. It comes up to my ankles. I don't have my boots on, but I was made for this weather. The skin on my feet is rough and I can barely feel the bite of the cold.

They catch her before I get to them. Artie is somewhere behind us, I can hear him. The two Yetis hold Ysella between them as she's struggling.

"Let her go! You're hurting her!"

They don't seem to care. They stare down at her, mesmerized, and that stops me in my tracks. I was expecting them to immediately take her to her brother, but they're behaving like they haven't seen a human female before.

And then I catch it. A whiff of her. Of her scent. It's changed. The wind blows just so that Ysella's smell slides right into my nostrils. I inhale deeply – inhale her – and I can almost imagine my eyes going red. My chest expands, my cock hardens, and blood rushes through my veins at twice the speed, almost making them pop. My Ysella... My delicious woman... Is ovulating.

They can smell it, too. That's why they're looking at her like that. Then they exchange a look over her head, and I can see that they both want her and they're not willing to share. One of them pulls her toward him, and the other bares his teeth at him and pulls Ysella back. She screams.

It's the first time I hear her make a sound. The fact that it's a scream only serves to increase my rage.

"Let her go! She's mine! I've claimed her!"

I take a step toward them, but they pay me no mind. All they can see is the woman,

fertile and ripe, and my words don't even penetrate the fog in their brains.

I have to be careful. My breath turns to steam in the freezing air as I huff and puff, doing my best to contain myself. They have Ysella, and she is fragile. One wrong move, and they will tear her apart. The last thing that will help her is if I grab onto her too or grab them. Between three Yetis fighting over her, she has no chance of making it out alive.

"Bring her to me!" Artie has caught up. He walks past me as if I don't even matter, gun pointed at his sister. "Bring that bitch to me."

The Yetis aren't listening to him. He's not in control anymore. I hear the engine of a snowmobile in the distance and realize his men are abandoning him. They've seen what I can do, and they're out. How do you fight a monster you can't shoot?

The Yetis look at him with menace in their eyes. One of them growls at Artie, and he takes a step back. I can see the confusion on his face. All the therapy sessions with Oscar are paying off, because normally, I would've lost my marbles, too.

"What are you doing? I said, bring her to me! I'll take care of her. It's my right, after what she's done to my family."

He starts shooting, and one of the Yetis moves in front of Ysella. At least the beasts are protecting her. For now. They need her alive. Artie keeps shooting, then he's out of bullets and needs to recharge. The Yeti jumps him, and they tumble into the snow. I don't care who wins. This is my chance to save Ysella from her other captor.

I charge, and the Yeti throws Ysella to the side and meets me halfway. We are locked in a death match, pushing, pulling, and scratching, throwing punches, rolling in the snow. I get the upper hand and punch his face to a pulp. I'm bigger and stronger than him. Older, too. This is Ishkala's nephew, and I feel bad for disfiguring him, because

she's obviously a nice woman, but I have no choice. It's me or him. I hit him until I'm certain he's unconscious and not getting up anytime soon.

As I stand, the other Yeti grabs me and throws me into the snow. He's bigger, this one, but he's found his match in me. He's covered in blood, his white fur red, and I don't even want to look at what he's done to Artie. I jump to my feet, not letting him have the upper hand. He punches me in the face, and I stagger back. He lands another punch into my stomach, and I double over and spit out blood. I wipe my mouth with the back of my hand, grin at him, and when he lunges at me again, I step to the side and hit him over the head. I don't give him time to recover. I grab him from behind, arm locked around his throat and pull him to the ground. I'm on my knees, and he's leaning into me, trying to fight my grip. He tears at the fur and skin on my arms, but I don't let go. I barely flinch. Before long, he's going limp. I hold him there a few minutes longer, for good measure, then release him. He slumps over, and I'm the last one standing.

I get up and look around me. Where Artie has fallen, there's just a pool of blood slowly seeping into the snow. The two Yetis are unconscious. They will come back to their senses at some point, and hopefully, they will accept defeat and crawl back home. On second thought, I'll give them a hand.

Ysella is huddled in the snow, knees hugged to her chest. She's rocking back and forth, looking at me with wide eyes. She's terrified, and that makes me back down. I want to take her into my arms and promise her she's safe, but I realize she might be scared of me, now that she's seen what I can do.

And her scent... Oh, her scent! If I come any closer, I will rip her clothes off right on the spot and insert myself inside her.

I need to clear my head. And I need to clean up.

“I’ll be back,” I say. “Go inside. Can you walk?”

She stares at me and nods tentatively.

My hands turn to fists at my sides. I want to carry her inside, but in the state I’m in, it’s not safe to touch her.

She stands up slowly, and the wind blows through her hair, once again sending her scent toward me. I hold my breath and turn away, grabbing the first Yeti by the ankle, and then the other one. I drag them through the snow to the side of the shed, then go inside and start the snowmobile. Once outside, I pile the two Yetis in the back and drive south.

The wind whips around me, making my ears twitch. It helps cool my body, and little by little, I start thinking straight again.

What just happened?!

Artie Carvassi came to find his sister to kill her. He enlisted the help of two Yetis, not knowing they would turn against him. He’s dead behind my cabin, and I just told Ysella to get herself inside, not even thinking about what the sight of his mangled body might do to her. In the span of two days – or has it been three? – she’s seen all the members of her family murdered right in front of her. And I, for one, am no closer to understanding what the fuck is happening.

I drive to the edge of Icefang, and not even turning off the engine, I get off, grab the two idiot Yetis who dared to threaten my woman, and dump them in the snow. They’ll either wake up on their own in a few hours, or someone will find them in the morning. Hopefully, they will feel humiliated enough to not step foot near my cabin again.

I hop back on and speed toward the cabin. It's stopped snowing, and the sky is clearing. It's as dark as ever, and I'm starting to worry about Ysella. I hope she's okay inside, by the fire, and not crying over her brother's body in the snow. He tried to kill her! Logic says she won't be shedding tears on account of his demise.

As soon as I get home, I barge through the door. Ysella is kneeling by the fire, using the poker to stoke it gently. She's changed back into my oversized T-shirt and wrapped herself into the blanket, and she looks... fine.

More than fine. She looks serene.

She turns to me, and it's like her scent envelops me. It's everywhere. The lust I feel for her is ten times greater than a few hours ago, when I had her spread out under me, naked and wet.

I open my mouth to say something, but nothing comes out. I have questions. I need answers. But my brain fogs up, my heart picks up the pace, and all I can think about is how I want to fill her with my seed. I take a step toward her, and she stands up. The blanket falls off her shoulders.

"Ysella, I can't hold back. I want to, but I can't." My chest rises and falls. The more I try to tell her what's happening to me... The more I try to warn her... My thoughts splinter. "I will take you. I have to. I won't be gentle. I'm sorry."

She lifts her chin and her eyes flicker with determination.

"So, then... take me. And don't be sorry."

I blink, confused. She can speak. She's not mute! What the hell?!

She takes off her T-shirt and throws it on the floor. She stands before me naked and

perfect.

Who cares?

Now that I know she can speak, I'll make her scream my name.

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Chapter Nine

Ysella

He grabs me by the waist, throws me over his shoulder, and takes me into the bedroom, then slams me onto the mattress. He's rough. He's unhinged. I love it.

I don't know what he means when he says he can't hold back. I know he's strong. He's beaten two monsters his size to a pulp. He's covered in their blood and his. I can see the bullet wounds like deep scratches. Where my brother's men shot him, his fur is stained and patchy. As he climbs on top of me, I touch the wounds on his chest, and he doesn't even flinch. Fresh blood pours through my fingers, but he doesn't seem to notice. Maybe the adrenaline makes him not feel pain.

He runs his hand from my throat to my pelvis. He pushes my legs open, rips off his pants, and his cock bounces free. Am I losing my mind, or is it larger than before? He grips the base with one hand, holds me in place with the other, and guides the engorged head to my entrance.

I'm dripping wet. I want him. I don't know how I'll take him, how he'll fit... he might as well split me in two, but that won't stop me from wanting him.

He beat out the shit of my brother's soldiers for me. He sent them running. He took bullets for me. I know this monster will protect me with his life. He called me his back there, in the snow, when the two other Yetis were fighting over me. He will not let me go, no matter what. He will accept me just as I am, he will not judge me, and finally, I will be able to be myself, to live an honest life and not have to tiptoe around

fragile men, afraid they'll snap if I don't do as they say.

He changes his mind and buries his head between my thighs. I arch my back when he licks me from my entrance to my clit. He doesn't focus on my clit, though. He wants to get me nice and wet, as wet as possible. He spits on me, pushes his tongue inside my pussy, and when he thinks I'm ready, he moves up my body and once again presses the tip to my entrance. He stares into my eyes as he enters me quickly.

The mushroom head is in, stretching me impossibly. It burns, but it's not too bad. I push my hips down, encouraging him. He thrusts one more time, and maybe I take half of his length, maybe less, but it's too much already. I'm filled to my limit. The head of his cock pushes into my cervix, and my vision goes white. I scream and plant my hands on his chest, firmly. He thrusts again, and to stop him, I dig my fingers into his wounds. That gets his attention.

He blinks at me, confused, then slowly, it seems he's starting to understand that he's hurting me.

"Sorry... I'm sorry," he says through gritted teeth. He doesn't pull out, though. "Ysella... I can't... I have to..."

I nod as I breathe fast, trying to calm myself. I try to relax.

"Okay," I say. "But this is all I can take."

He looks down between us, and I follow his gaze. He only got a quarter of his cock in. There's no way I'll be able to fit all of him. I want to, but it's just not possible.

"I can't stop," he says.

"I don't want you to stop."

He thinks for a second, and I feel his cock pulsating inside me. The pain is fading, and I'm starting to feel pleasure. I've never been so full in my life. I need him to move, but I also need him to do it in a way that doesn't break me.

He runs his hand down my stomach soothingly. I relax. He presses onto my belly, and a jolt of electricity snaps through me. My pussy gushes, coating his cock with my juices.

"Do that again," I say.

He presses down on my belly again, and it's like he's massaging his own cock through my stomach. Lust explodes in my core.

"Move."

He does, pulling out gently, and pushing back in. He hits my cervix again, and I let out a moan. I'm pretty sure he fit in one more inch, but I'm not going to complain. His hand moves from my stomach to his cock, and he grips his length to make sure that when he thrusts again, he won't accidentally bury himself to the hilt at the expense of my reproductive organs. With this rudimentary safety measure in place, he starts fucking me fast and hard, and I scramble to hold on to something. I grip the headboard tightly. He doesn't give me time to think or adjust. He plunges into me again and again, until my brain feels like mush.

Tension grows in my core. Pain mixes with pleasure, creating a cocktail that sends me over the edge fast. Faster than I expected. The orgasm is sinful, delicious. It rattles my bones and makes my eyes roll in my head. I let out a cry. Kaelthar doesn't stop. I'm wetter now, and he slides in and out easily.

I stare at this monster that's practically drenched in blood. His wounds drip all over me, and I'm slick with my sweat and his blood. It turns me on even more, and I know

it's wrong. Sick. But I can't help it. I'm a Carvassi, after all. The only Carvassi left alive. I'm not innocent by any means. I don't think I ever was. Maybe Kaelthar thought I was innocent, but when this is over, when he empties himself inside me and hopefully can think straight again, I will tell him the truth. Will he reject me? Not a chance. Not after what we've been through. Now I know the sight of blood makes both of us want to fuck. We were made for each other.

Before I realize what's happening, he flips me onto my belly, grabs my hips, and enters me from behind. He still has his fist in place. I hold onto the sheets, and my breasts bounce as he fucks me hard, seemingly losing control.

"I'll fill your pussy with my seed," he says in a low, growly voice. He doesn't sound like himself. He sounds like a dark – really dark – version of him has taken over. "I'll fill your belly... You'll take all of it."

"Mm... yes..."

He seems satisfied by my answer. He pushes inside me one more time, lets out an animalistic howl, and I feel him burst. He literally explodes, and his cum is hot and rich, it warms my belly and my entire body. I come a second time, burying my head in the pillow. My pussy throbs around him, clenching and unclenching, milking him to the last bit. He comes and comes. I can feel the tip of his cock twitch as he pours more and more inside me. My body is shaking, I'm slick with sweat, and my knees are jelly.

Kaelthar holds me in place until he's done. Then he slips out, and I feel his cum follow. I squeeze my walls, but I can't hold it in; it's simply too much. I collapse on my stomach, but Kaelthar wants to see my face, so he flips me onto my back. He stares into my eyes as he slowly massages his cum into my skin. My folds and my clit are sensitive. When he circles my clit a few times, I have a tiny orgasm that rips a yelp out of me.

“So, you can talk,” he says.

I nod.

“Care to explain yourself?”

He inserts a finger into my pussy as he says that, and I bite my lower lip and grin at him.

“You’re not the princess I thought you were.”

“If by princess you mean someone weak...”

“I never thought you were weak.”

His voice is back to normal, and there’s a gentleness in his gaze. He removes his finger and rolls onto his side. He places his hand on my waist, and I roll into him, pressing my naked, sweaty body to his.

“Tell me what happened,” he says. “What really happened.”

I shake my head. I’m silent for a minute, because I don’t know where to begin.

“It’s not a happy story.”

“Considering how it ended for your family... I figured.”

“First of all, I need you to know that I didn’t lie to you. You thought I was mute, and I let you believe that, but not because I wanted to lie to you. It’s just... It’s my way of coping. I know it might sound silly, but when someone dies...” I shake my head again and avert my gaze. This is hard for me. “When someone I love dies, I mourn them by

not talking for three days. I don't know why I do it. It started when I was twelve."

His eyes widened. "Twelve?! You were twelve when someone you loved died?"

"I was twelve when my best friend died. My only friend. She gossiped about me, and like a fool, I went and complained to my father. He killed her and her family. I didn't know how to react. I was in shock. My father told me he did it for me. He said that no one talks shit about his daughter and lives to do it again. And I didn't... I didn't know what to say. I kept opening my mouth, nothing would come out, so I stopped trying. I didn't speak for three days."

"Ysella..." He caresses my hair gently. My white hair.

"It happened again when I was eighteen. I was dating this guy, and he cheated on me. This time, I told my brother. I was hurting, and I thought I could trust Artie. But Artie told my father, and... you guessed it. My father killed my cheating boyfriend and his entire family. Then I... I just stopped making friends, stopped dating, stopped living. Because something would go wrong at some point, and someone would die."

He leans in and kisses my forehead. "I'm so sorry. You didn't deserve any of it."

"I know." My voice turns cold. "That's why I don't regret what I did."

"What did you do?"

I'm pretty sure he knows what I'm going to confess. It doesn't make the confession any easier.

Chapter Ten

Ysella

Some might think I was privileged to be born in a family that gave me everything. I was a spoiled child. More spoiled than my brother, who was three years older than me. I was daddy's little princess and mommy's precious flower. Since the moment I was brought from the hospital – a fussy bundle of joy – my brother was like, “Touch my sister and die.” From the moment I could talk, anything I wanted, I got. I didn't have to ask twice. Then I went to kindergarten, and later school, and noticed that the teachers were afraid of me. They never lectured me if I forgot to do my homework, and I always got a pass when I wasn't prepared. From top to bottom, it was all As. When I got a B in History, my father spoke to the principal, and the next day, the history teacher amended the grade.

Spoiled rotten. No wonder everyone walked on eggshells around me, all smiles and compliments, and hated my guts behind my back. I never had any real friends. Until Ginny. We met in fifth grade. She was the daughter of a real estate mogul and just as spoiled as I was. We hit it off right away and were inseparable. We told each other everything. Or so she thought. By that time, I was starting to have a mild understanding of what my father did and why my family was so respected, but mostly feared. I witnessed things no fifth grader should witness, and I couldn't tell Ginny because I was afraid I would lose her. While I was beginning to think the Carvassi family was bad – really bad... evil incarnate – I needed my best friend to see me in a good light. I kept up the facade as best as I could, but Ginny was maturing too, starting to think for herself. She could tell that while we were both rich and spoiled, we were not the same.

When I heard from other girls that Ginny was gossiping behind my back, telling people that I was a fake, and that her father thought about my father that he was scum, and that we, the Carvassis, were all parasites, it broke my heart. Ginny was the only one I trusted, and she'd betrayed me. What's a twelve-year-old to do? I went and told my father.

The news came the next week. There had been a fire, and Ginny and her family – even her grandmother, who was living with them – had burned to a crisp. No survivors. I was devastated. It was a tragedy that could've happened to anyone, though, so I didn't blame myself for having had a fight with Ginny a few days before. But then my father knocked on my bedroom door and triumphantly announced that my silly friend wasn't going to bother me anymore. He took care of it. He said it in a cryptic way and winked at me, and that was the first time my world collapsed. It was going to collapse a few more times after, but I remember clearly that was the moment when I realized who my family was. And who I was.

Ysella Carvassi. If someone as much as looked at me wrong, they were dead.

I hated it. I didn't want to be like them – evil incarnate. From a spoiled princess, I turned into a recluse. No friends, no more going to school – I asked to be homeschooled. After my father told me what he did to Ginny and her family, I didn't speak for three days. At first, it was because I couldn't. The shock rendered me mute. But then, it was because I didn't know what to say, and no one in my family would've been willing to listen. I felt like not speaking at all for three days was the least I could do in memory of my best friend.

I occupied my time with books. When kids my age went out and had fun, hooked up and tried alcohol for the first time, I was learning how to play the piano. Music was my escape. Practicing for hours on end until I got a piece right saved me from having to think about how wrong my life was. But I craved companionship.

Artie introduced me to my first boyfriend. Victor and I were both eighteen. He was charming and easy-going, and he was friends with my brother, so I thought it would be fine. Safe. I could let go and care about someone again. Except... after so many years of voluntary isolation, I fell in love hard. Victor became my world. I could already see us married with a baby on the way, living in a big house with a pool, somewhere far away from my family, preferably. Not that my parents were ever going to let me go. I was naïve. With my blind love, I ended up smothering Victor, and he escaped in another woman's arms. He cheated on me.

I knew not to go to my father, but I had no friends, and I needed to talk to someone. I thought I could trust my brother, especially since he was the one who'd introduced me to Victor. Artie saw red. He didn't even need proof. My word was enough, and even as I begged him to keep it between us, he said to me that no one made a fool of his sister and lived to tell the tale. I thought he was exaggerating. Artie got angry fast but was mostly harmless. I regretted telling him, but it was too late.

A week later, there had been – what else? – a fire. Victor, his parents, his two brothers and his dog – all dead. The girl he'd cheated with mysteriously disappeared, too. I didn't speak for three days.

"I couldn't live like that anymore," I tell Kaelthar. "I thought of running away, but knew they would find me. And whoever helped me would've died. I was done bringing people death just because they got involved with me and weren't perfect. No one's perfect. I'm not perfect, so of course people will gossip behind my back, betray me, cheat on me... That's normal. It's human. It doesn't mean they have to die."

He brushes my cheek with the tips of his fingers, and I lean into his touch. He's listening to me patiently, and I can see it in his eyes that he isn't judging me. He feels sorry for me, and that's okay. Right now, I feel sorry for myself.

"I was the one who went to the Draganetti family and told them when to strike and

how to do it.” Tears fill my eyes. “I had no choice. But of course, they’re mafia, too. They weren’t going to do it nice and clean. Starting a fire wasn’t their MO. They were more into chopping and butchering. They assured me their soldiers weren’t going to touch me, even if they’ll have to make it look like I wasn’t involved. Anyway, there’s no point in giving you the details. You saw what happened. Artie was supposed to die. They were taking their time with him. But then you and your team swept in and saved him.”

“You didn’t know your father had hired the MSA?”

“No. Had I known about the panic button, I would’ve gotten rid of it. That was my only mistake. I thought I knew everything my father did, but I didn’t know this one thing. He was paranoid, but he’d always been that way. I didn’t think he would hire outside security.”

We look at each other for a few long minutes. I’ve told him everything, and now I don’t know what else to say. I’m not sorry for what I did.

“Why not speak for three days if you’re the one who got them killed?” he asks.

“My mother. Despite everything, I loved her. I hated her for not putting a stop to it, for allowing my father and my brother to kill all those people, but I loved her. She was my mother, after all. We weren’t exactly friends. We didn’t share our secrets. Come to think of it, I barely knew her. She was distant and kept her thoughts to herself. I don’t think she was ever happy. I wanted to ask the Draganettis to spare her life, and maybe they would have, but then I thought better of it and realized she was part of the problem. Parasites. They had to all go so I could start a new life. Reinvent myself. I was selfish, I know. I am selfish. But, good God, one day I realized I was twenty-three years old and couldn’t live the rest of my life like that. I had to do something. So, I did.”

“I don’t blame you.”

“You don’t?”

Even if I knew he wouldn’t, I still feel relieved.

He pulls me close, and I bury my face in his soft beard. He wraps his arms around me, and I feel safe. Protected. I feel like, finally, it’s over.

“What your family did to you is horrible. Nothing excuses their actions. So what if they gave you everything you wanted? Material things can’t heal the emotional trauma they caused you. They weren’t good people, Ysella. I’m sorry about your mother.”

I nod, crying softly. I’m exhausted. After not speaking for three days, my voice is hoarse and my throat hurts.

“I will keep your secret,” he says. Then he tilts my chin up and looks me in the eye. “Who else knows you were your family’s undoing?”

I bite my lip. “Well, the Draganetti family.”

He nods and draws me back into his arms. He doesn’t say more than that, but I think I know why he asked.

“From now on, promise me you won’t worry about a thing,” he says, kissing the top of my head. “I want you to stop worrying, because I’ll take care of everything. I’ll take care of you. I want you to be yourself, Ysella. Be who you want to be and be sure that I love you just the way you are.”

My heart skips a beat. He just said he loves me. What do I do? I haven’t been in love

since Victor, and now... Can I afford to open my heart again? Can I afford to feel?

My family is no more. They can't dictate my life, my thoughts, my emotions. It's time to start getting used to being free.

"I love you, Kaelthar."

He squeezes me to his chest. "I love you, Ysella. More than anything in the world. You can count on me."

I fall asleep in his arms, and for the first time in years, there are no nightmares.

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Source Creation Date: August 6, 2025, 6:52 am

Epilogue

Kaelthar

It's Christmas Eve, and I have so much to do. This morning, I brought the tree inside, and Ysella is busy decorating it. I got the tree in Icefang, along with two boxes of decorations. Another thing I took care of in Icefang was to spread the word about my mate. The Yetis need to know that Ysella is my woman. That will keep the males away.

I wasn't surprised when Bralgor was reluctant to speak to me. I'd beaten two of my kind to a pulp and left them at the edge of town. But then I explained why I had to do it, and we were friends again. Like all Yeti males, he understands it is my right to protect my mate no matter who might get a broken nose or limb. No one will step foot near the cabin ever again, and if they do, they will make sure to respect Ysella.

So, I'm not that worried when I have to leave her alone once more. I kiss her goodbye and make her promise she won't wait up for me. I might get back home well after midnight, but I'll be here in the morning to open the presents under the tree with her. I take the helicopter, and as soon as I'm in the air, my mind becomes fully focused on the job I need to do.

It's time for karma to catch up with the Draganetti family, like it caught up with the Carvassis. Another name for karma is Ysella. I smile as I think about her. She's gone through so much, suffered so much at the hands of the people who should've loved her unconditionally, but she refused to be their victim. She bid her time, learned all she could about her father's business and routines, and when the time was right, she

made a decision. It didn't go quite as planned, but in the end, she won.

Today, I will make sure her past will never interfere with her future.

It only takes me a few hours. I don't need much of a strategy, because I have physical strength on my side. I'm in and out. Their soldiers don't impress me. It sucks I'm once again covered in blood and tiny bullet wounds that sting like a bitch, but it's a small price to pay. Behind me, a blazing fire as I casually make my way back to the helicopter. I pull out my phone and call Lucia, my handler at Monster Security Agency.

"Merry Christmas," I say.

"Merry... Christmas? Where are you, Kaelthar? Is everything okay?"

"Yes. Why wouldn't it be?"

"Artie Carvassi called me a few days ago and asked me about his sister's location. I told him I had no idea where you took her. He sounded angry. Normally, I would've called you, but I held back and did some digging. Something wasn't right. He called again and threatened me, told me to get in touch with you. I had a feeling he wanted to cause trouble, and that if I tried to contact you, he would trace the call. So, I stood my ground."

"You did good. Your instincts are on point, Lucia."

"What happened? Is Ysella okay?"

"She's great. Decorating the Christmas tree, actually."

"And her brother?"

“He won’t be a problem.”

“So, he was after her.”

“Yes. Don’t worry, I’m good at my job.”

She’s quiet for a minute, then lets out a sigh. “Well, if Ysella is safe and there are no more threats, your job is done.”

“True. Listen, I wanted to ask if I could take a few days off. I know I don’t usually take a vacation around the holidays, but...”

“Oh, sure. It’s only fair.”

“I’ll be back to work next week.”

She chuckles. “You can take two weeks if you want, Kaelthar. Enjoy Christmas and New Year’s for once.”

I grin. “Thank you.”

I hop into the helicopter and start the engine. I head north. Before I get home to my soulmate, I might make another stop. I bought her a few things in Icefang, wrapped them nicely and put them under the tree, but the gifts aren’t much. A pink wool blanket, a cute mug, and a stuffed Yeti toy. I’m sure she’ll enjoy them, and the Yeti might get a laugh out of her, but...

I can do better.

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Short of wrapping myself in gift wrap and sleeping under the Christmas tree for Kaelthar to find me in the morning, I don't know what to do. I'm in the middle of nowhere, and I have nothing with me. All my personal belongings were left behind, in my parents' house. I wonder if I'll ever get them back. I would've loved to give Kaelthar one of my paintings. I would love to paint something for him right now, but I have no painting supplies.

The tree is beautiful, the cabin is warm, and I've just had a nice cup of tea. My eyes are heavy. He told me not to wait for him, but I don't want to go to bed alone. Eventually, I have to, because I'm falling asleep on the couch. I drag myself into the bedroom and slip under the soft blankets. I'm out in minutes. These past few days have been insane. No wonder I crash whenever I'm given the chance.

At some point during the night, I hear the front door open and close. I sit up in bed, eyes wide, listening carefully. There's no commotion, nothing to indicate I might be in danger. The lights are on everywhere. I haven't told Kaelthar because I don't want to upset him, but it's a little unnerving that it's always dark outside. I miss the sun. I hear him in the living room, fumbling with something, then his massive frame appears in the doorway. I smile at him, and he smiles back.

"Sorry I woke you," he says.

"I don't sleep well without you." I motion for him to join me.

He considers it for a second, then shakes his head and says he needs to take a shower first. That's when I notice the blood stains on his fur. He's tried to wipe them off but hasn't done a great job. I don't say anything, just nod, and he slips into the bathroom.

By the time he's done and joins me in bed, I'm half asleep. He pulls me close, and I let his big body warm me up. I sleep like a baby, until the late hours of the morning. I don't even notice when he wakes up and sneaks out of the bedroom.

"Merry Christmas, sleepyhead," he greets me later, in the kitchen, with a hot cup of coffee.

"Merry Christmas." I yawn, and he makes a face, like he thinks I'm cute.

"When do you want to unwrap presents?"

I cover my eyes with my hands and groan. "I'm sorry, I didn't get you anything."

He laughs. "What do you mean?"

I shoot him a look. "I'll make it up to you, I promise. As soon as we get back to civilization."

He pouts, then walks over to me, lifts me up, and carries me into the living room. He grabs a bow from the tree and places it right atop my head.

"Hey!"

"Again, what do you mean? My Christmas present is right here. You just forgot to wrap it."

The bow falls off, and I laugh. "I did think about that, not gonna lie. But I didn't have enough wrapping paper. You used it all."

"Come on." He puts me down. "Let's see what Santa got you."

I roll my eyes. "Santa..."

He sits on the floor, and I sit in his lap. He really needs a red costume. Next year, I'm buying him one. I start unwrapping the presents. I don't know what to expect, and I notice how excited that makes me. I've gotten Christmas presents all my life. Every year, too many to count. But they were always predictable – the latest fashion, gold jewelry, expensive knick-knacks. For the first time in years, I'm truly curious about what these boxes contain.

I open the first gift, and it's the softest wool blanket I've ever touched. It's bright pink, and that instantly lifts my mood. I kiss Kaelthar on the cheek and wrap the blanket around my shoulders. The second gift is a handmade mug that says, "Have a Merry Yeti Christmas!", and it's hilarious. I set it aside and reach for the third gift. As I unwrap it, I can feel it's something squishy.

"A stuffed bear?" I ask.

"Close, but not quite."

I reveal a snow-white stuffed animal that looks exactly like...

I burst out laughing. I'm laughing so hard that I roll off Kaelthar's lap and onto the floor. He laughs with me and follows me onto the floor. We lie together in front of the fire. The smell of pine needles and burning firewood fills my nostrils, and I suddenly feel happier than I've ever felt.

"I need to call him something," I say, waving the stuffed Yeti in his face. "What should I call him? What are some good Yeti names?"

"Oh, so many options... But wait, there's a fourth present."

I'm pretty sure I haven't seen a fourth box under the tree. I sit up and check. Nope, no fourth gift.

When I turn to Kaelthar, he's on his knees, holding a tiny box. I stand up, taken aback, and we're eye to eye. I can see that he's unsure of himself. Or not of himself, but... of me. I know what's in the box.

"You don't have to say anything," he says quickly. "I just thought... I wanted... Well, I wanted to surprise you, I guess. And I wanted to get you something special."

The lid pops open, and it's a platinum ring with the biggest diamond I've ever seen.

"I hope platinum is okay," he says. "Maybe you're a yellow gold kind of girl, I don't know. I just thought it would go well with your hair."

"This is beautiful, Kaelthar."

He takes the ring out, and I hold my hand out. He slips it onto my finger. The stone is heavy. This is the kind of ring I've always dreamed the right man would propose with.

"Yes," I say.

He beams at me. "Yes?"

"Yes."

He jumps to his feet and grabs me by the waist, spins me around. I laugh and try to hold on to him. He sneaks one arm under my butt and lifts me with ease. I wrap my own arms around his neck and press my lips to his. He's warm, and he smells like winter and firewood, and I love him. I love him so much.

"But on one condition," I say.

He looks concerned for a moment.

I slap him playfully. “We can’t live here, at the North Pole. The weather is kind of a bummer.”

He laughs. “Of course not. This is just a holiday cabin. We can move wherever you want. Name a place, and I’ll buy us a home there.”

I smile. “I’ll have to think about it. You don’t mind, do you? I just want to make the right decision.”

“Take as long as you need.”

We kiss again, then we roll back onto the floor, he’s on top of me, and as he’s removing the oversized T-shirt that’s now mine, I stare at the diamond on my finger.

Merry Christmas, indeed.

THE END