



Mated (A Beastly Romance #1)

Author: *Jenika Snow*

Category: Fantasy

Description: I was born a princess, a bargaining chip in a kingdom desperate to survive.

Across the twenty realms—ten ruled by humans, ten by monsters—alliances were rare, fragile things.

When my father promised me to the monster king of one of the savage realms, I knew it wasn't a love match they bargained me for.

It was to forge a powerful alliance.

I told myself I could endure it—that it was for my kingdom and people. I'd sacrifice myself for the hope it helped others.

I could stand proud and bold at my monster husband's side, untouched by the darkness that surrounded him. But the moment I met him, all my carefully built walls crumbled.

He was brutal, clever, and dangerous. He didn't want a queen to parade in front of the realms.

He wanted a mate to own. Possess.

My monster husband took me, claimed me, and shattered everything I thought I knew about my life and the world.

And somewhere between the bruising kisses and the cruel tenderness only I ever saw, I knew the truth.

I could never tame him.

And the secret I'd never admit to anyone else?

I didn't want to.

Total Pages (Source): 12

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 2:32 pm

PROLOGUE

PRINCESS ELOWEN

The wedding bells chiming didn't sound like a celebration.

They sounded like a funeral. The end of days. The end of times.

My death.

My gown was too tight around my skin, as if I were suffocating from the outside in.

I stood on the balcony that overlooked the grand hall. The room was decorated in my family colors. Red and golds that bespoke of wealth and bloodshed. The tight, gold threading bit into my ribs like a set of teeth, and I picked at the material trying to loosen it.

I could see nobles of the court whispering and sipping from jeweled goblets. My father's men stood sentry on either side of the large, wooden doors of the room, guards to keep anyone in who thought of escaping.

I couldn't breathe. Not with the weight of what was to come.

And then I felt him come up from behind. Prince Gavin. My betrothed.

He had this air around him of a man who'd already won at life and still wanted more.

I turned and faced him, not wanting my back to this living, breathing human monster who I'd be forced to call my husband. He was draped in his house colors of sapphire and silver. And his broad shoulders blocked out everything behind him. I couldn't help but notice the way he cracked his knuckles, his hands screaming they held enough power to break my neck as easily as if it were a twig.

Nothing about Prince Gavin was kind. He may have been handsome in the traditional sense, but the cracks in his facade revealed everything he truly was.

Pure evil.

And he was just like my father.

"You're beautiful," he said in an icy voice as he stepped closer. We were alone on the balcony, and it terrified me to be so isolated with this man. I'd have to get used to it, though. I'd be forced to share the same home—the same bed—with him.

His voice was like oil, all thick and slick. It felt like it was coating me in a slimy sheen.

"You'll give me strong, beautiful heirs."

My stomach roiled at the thought of him climbing on top and forcing me to be his childbearing vessel. I flinched as he reached for me.

"Don't," I said, that single word coming out of me before I could stop myself.

The anger on his face was tangible and instantaneous. He gripped my waist, his fingers digging hard into the silk of my dress as he pulled me flush against him. Instinctively, I flinched and pushed him away.

“We could skip the ceremony,” he murmured, his lips dragging along my jaw until I felt the urge to vomit rise. “No one would care if I sampled what’s already mine.”

I knew he spoke the truth. No one would care. I shoved at his chest. “I’ll never be yours.” Even if I was married to Gavin, I’d never truly be his.

He pulled back and his expression was cruel. He gripped my chin between his fingers so tightly I cried out and tried to pull away.

“You foolish, fucking girl. You are mine, Elowen. Bought, paid for, and bartered like a prize to do with as I will. And tonight,” his squeeze on my chin hard enough tears rolled down my cheeks from the pain. “Tonight, I’ll breed you like the bitch you are.”

I slapped him. The sound cracked across the balcony like lightning, his head cocking to the side. He laughed and ground out through his teeth, “Oh, you’ll be fun to break.” And then he licked me, his wet, disgusting tongue dragging up the side of my face from my jaw to the outer corner of my eye, his saliva laying like a poison on my skin.

I trembled—not with fear but with fury. I’d spent my entire life surrounded by men like him. Men like my father who saw me as nothing but flesh and the bearer of future heirs. Not a woman. Not a person. Just a body to control.

I couldn't do it any longer. I couldn't be a slave to any more men.

Gavin suddenly moved away from me, smoothing his hand down his wedding outfit, and said in a hard, impersonal voice, “Get your ass down there for the ceremony, Elowen. Don’t make me come back to fetch you.”

My heart beat faster, louder, until it drowned out the distant murmur of guests filling the room below.

He turned and left me alone, and I whispered to myself, “I’d rather die than be yours.” My female rage was loud and proud inside of me.

I didn't think about anything else. I didn't grab any clothes or items to help me escape.

I ran .

But I had to be careful. I couldn't get caught. I left through a side corridor, lifted my skirts, and sprinted down the marble halls, the sound of my jeweled ballet flats echoing all around me.

But my escape was short-lived when I heard men shouting in the near distance. But I didn't stop.

I burst through the back entrance, none of the staff stopping me. I ran through the gardens, my father's guards mainly stationed at the front of the manor and inside as guests arrived.

After a few minutes, I was in the forest surrounding the property. Thorns tore at my gown, slicing open my skin. I didn't care. I ran harder and faster, my shoes getting destroyed from the rough underbrush.

Faster, Elowen. Don't look back.

The gates at the edge of the property were old, and the family crypt lay just at the edge. I squeezed through the cracks of the ancient tombs, spiders and webs, dust, and the stench of old death surrounded me.

I didn't scream. I didn't let it affect me. I welcomed the dark and unknown because it was better than what was behind me. There was a massive crack in the ancient tomb,

and I squeezed through it, jagged rock tearing through my gown and into my flesh. The moment I emerged from the other side of the wall, I didn't stop.

I'd thought of doing just this so many times before, but fear held me back. Guards kept me a prisoner.

The wilderness spread before me like the gates of hell. And I welcomed it. The sky was black with no moon letting in silvery light, and the trees twisted around me like they were trying to reach out and take hold of me.

But I stepped into the night anyway.

I had no friends to aid me. And I certainly didn't have a plan.

But I'd take my chance out here and any monsters that were hiding in the shadows.

They had always said there were twenty realms in our world—ten ruled by men, ten by monsters.

My father was one who ruled one of those realms. The human realm of Bone Ash.

But if the stories about the monster kings were true, I had no idea. Not until now.

Being sequestered away in my father's castle had been my life. It was a beautiful prison of wealth and submission, but it couldn't hide or dim the stories I heard were from hushed servants gossiping around every stone wall.

The human kings wanted everyone to believe they sat alone and controlled the thrones of power. But they didn't. They couldn't control the darkest parts of their realms.

And that's where the monster kings ruled.

And if everyone whispered enough about these monster kingdoms within our own realms, surely they had to be true? That's what I thought... that's what I wondered. Until I'd been taken.

I came face-to-face with the monster king of the Dark Realm of Bone Ash.

And he was a knight in twisted, blackened armor.

And the further I ran, the deeper I went into the woods. I realized skeleton trees were all around me. Blood red leaves covered finger-like limbs, and the creek parallel to me ran darker than the night.

My scream caught in my throat and the sky cracked open with lightning the color of deep red blood. I felt the shift in the air, like the world itself had been cracked open and I was flailing into another one. Nothing looked the same. Nothing smelled familiar.

There was something wilder, Crueler, that walked close, hidden in the shadows. Watching me like the predator it was. One second, I was in the center of this monstrous forest. And the next, the ground really was cracking open, and I was swallowed whole. I fell faster than I could breathe, screams wrenching from my open mouth as horror and fear consumed me.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 2:32 pm

1

PRINCESS ELOWEN

My body connected with hard ground, everything aching but nothing broken. I was alive despite the vast fall. It was unbelievable. Almost magical.

I lay on black dirt and stared at my hands, curling my nails into earth so strange it was fantastical. Turning my head to the side, I saw unfamiliar land with charred earth, and skies painted in blues and purples. Like the color of the bruises no doubt now littering my body.

How was there a sky above me? I'd fall into the earth, the world consuming me whole like a starving beast.

I searched for the gaping hole I'd fallen through, but all I saw were rust-colored clouds and a shimmery dust that whipped around me.

After pushing myself to my feet, I wrapped my arms around my middle and took in my surroundings, spinning around in a circle as I stared at everything and noting all in the same breath.

In the far distance stood a castle carved out of stone, and even from my vantage point, I could see skulls wedged into that stone, used as a type of mortar to keep the savage structure solid.

His lair .

Those two words whispered through my mind.

Go there. Go to him.

A whispered taunt, a harsh demand, filtered through me, and I obeyed although I didn't know why I did so as easily as I was.

I walked for miles, it seemed. The air was thick with the scent of rotting eggs, and this oppressive heat weighed down on me the closer I got to the castle. I was choking and alive all at once.

And when I was close enough to the castle, I realized why the heat was so intense. Why the scent was so suffocating. Surrounding the stone was a fiery river, flames exploding out of the surface before finding their home back into liquid lava.

I stood at the bottom of the massive steps that led up to the entrance, trying to gain my composure, trying to catch my breath. Everything in me said this was wrong, dangerous, and I was about to die. And when I took a step back, retreating, not sure where to even go, something huge and dark flew above me.

The huge wooden doors opened inward slowly, creaking as they allowed the massive, dark shape to be revealed on the other side. And then it stalked closer, its clawed feet striking the ground like thunder. I stumbled backward several steps until I fell on my ass, my feet tangling with each other as fear took control.

My silk dress was shredded by my escape, and thick ash that swirled around me, tangling around my legs and keeping me prisoner. My heart beating a terrified rhythm against my ribs as I stared up at the creature.

I should have been sobbing. Begging. Fighting for my life because surely this creature wanted to devour me. But something deep inside me said to be quiet. To

watch. Listen... learn what it wanted.

I stayed perfectly still as the creature descended the stone and bone steps until it loomed above me, the ground trembling under the sheer weight of him.

He was massive. Towering. His body was covered in jagged, black scales that shimmered like polished obsidian in the hellish firelight. A thick tail, barbed, armored and spiked, swept across the ground, leaving deep gouges in the dirt.

And his face—gods, his face.

It was a strange, dragon-like visage, demonic and cruelly etched supernaturally. It had twisted horns that sprang from his thick skull. He snarled, his mouth lined with brutal, sharp teeth. And his eyes... his eyes were molten gold, burning into me like the fire that surrounded his castle.

I let my gaze lower and felt my eyes widen. This was a male. Not human, but clearly male, as something huge protruded from the leather that shielded his crotch. Although he was covered, I could see his massive, alien-lizard looking dick swinging behind the material between his scaly, tree-trunk sized thighs. I could tell he wasn't hard, but gods... he was huge even still. And although he wasn't human, I wondered if his dick was similar to human male anatomy.

I knew without him having to say a word. This was the monster king of Bone Ash.

A deep, rumbling growl vibrated from his chest as he crouched so we were at eye level, studying me. Another low and possessive sound came from him. I tried to scuttle backward, but my dress clung to me like chains making my movements slow and clumsy.

He chuckled deeply and moved closer. The heat from his body was oppressive,

suffocating. He brought his massive, four-finger clawed hand forward, and with a gentleness that shocked me, he wrapped it around my waist and lifted me as if I weighed nothing.

I gasped, my hands flying up to press against the thick scales of his forearm, feeling the strength and burning heat beneath them.

He held me close to his chest, eye-level with him now, and so close I could see the tiny fractures in his horns. They were battle scars, the same ones etched into every inch of his scaled, thickly muscled body.

“Little human,” he rumbled, his voice dark and ancient. “You have crossed into my kingdom, and I’m keeping you.”

PRINCESS ELOWEN

I couldn't breathe. I couldn't think.

But some small, defiant spark raged within me—the one my father had tried so hard to extinguish—flared to life.

“Let me go,” I demanded, but my voice shook. He laughed and ascended the stairs. “I’m not afraid of you.” I struggled, but he had an iron-like grasp on me.

A harsh sound escaped him, something between a laugh and a snarl. “Little human, you should be.”

He pulled me closer until our faces were a breath apart. I could see myself reflected in the molten depths of his frightening gaze. “Even though I can smell your fear, I like that you’re strong enough to tell me you’re not afraid,” he said, his lips curving back in something dangerously close to a smile, showcasing his sharp fangs.

I should have fought harder. I should have screamed.

I was afraid, yes, but even as terror raced through my veins, a deeper, darker thrill twinned right alongside it.

He entered his castle, the heavy iron doors slamming shut behind us with a deafening finality, sealing me inside his domain.

I watched him through lowered lashes, feeling my heart hammering against my ribs and blood thrumming through my veins.

I knew nothing about this beast, but I knew something down to my soul.

He was pure dominance, wrapped in monstrous flesh.

He finally released me, setting me on my feet. I retreated several steps. He just watched me, and I felt my defenses lower just enough so I took in my surroundings.

Massive tapestries lined the walls, heavy with gold thread, depicting battles between winged and monstrous beasts.

A fireplace the size of a carriage was in the room to my right, roaring to life almost violently. The fire cast everything it touched in a molten, flickering glow.

The warmth of this barbaric castle was surprising... almost comforting. But I had a chill deep in my bones, regardless. I wrapped my arms around my waist to chase it away.

The more I took in the castle, the more I was surprised by the unexpected touches of wild beauty. Although the outside of this world was barren of life and filled with fire, dirt, and stone, vines crept through the cracks in the castle walls, blooming with strange, iridescent flowers.

The furniture was massive, built for this scaled and shelled creature, yet there were touches of luxury. Black and red velvet covered the stained glass windows, the stories etched in that glass of beasts and war and blood. So much blood.

This place felt like it was carved from a twisted nightmare. It was brutal but beautiful with a black heartbeat in the middle of a fiery inferno. And in the middle of this

beautifully crafted nightmare, I could feel the beast watching me.

I focused on him again and watched as he circled me slowly, his three-toed, clawed feet landing heavy on the cracked stone floor, his tail dragging behind him like a living weapon. I stayed perfectly still, survival telling me not to move, not to even breathe. My torn and filthy silk dress was my lifeline, my anchor, as I clutched it between my fingers.

And still, I didn't dare move. Didn't dare speak. I was afraid. Without a doubt. But on the heels of that... a dark part of me was intrigued by this place. Intrigued by him.

"You came onto my land, my world, little human," he said, his voice a low growl as he continued to circle me, caging me in with that beastly, immense body. "I am the king of these lands, the maker of the law, the judge and executioner. I am the supreme leader of the Dark Realm of Bone Ash. And I've decided I'm not letting you leave. You are mine."

My stubborn streak rose when he stopped in front of me, eyeing me down with those glowing, molten eyes. "You mean to keep me prisoner?" I was proud my voice didn't shake, but when his gaze looked at where I clutched my dress, I knew he was very aware of my anxiety.

He loomed over me, magnificent in the most terrifying way. And when he leaned down until we were nearly nose-to-nose, I could feel the heat of his breath and smell this cinnamon and spice scent against my lips.

"Prisoner?" He grinned, or some semblance of a smile a monster like him could give. It was a terrifying visage of sharp teeth that seemed to go on for miles. "No, little, human female." His voice was wicked. "I mean to mate with you. I intend to make you the queen of the Dark Realm of Blood Ash."

I was shocked, like lightning struck me where I stood. My mouth parted, and a soft, stunned sound left me.

I stared at this monster king, so massive and commanding, and when he inhaled deeply, a low hiss leaving him, I knew he meant every word he snarled out. With an animalistic huff, he moved toward his throne, every bit majestic, bigger, and more formidable than anything I'd ever seen.

He sat atop this monstrous seat of power, one built entirely of bones and skulls, stained blood splattered on the ivory color. His clawed hands rested easily on the armrests, his claws clacking against the bone, and his tail methodically swishing along the smooth floor.

“You’ll be my queen,” he said again, as if he wanted to make sure I knew he meant those words. “And you will wear my mark,” he said, voice thick with dark promise.

Before I could comprehend what he meant by mark, he crooked a claw at me. “Come to me.”

I shook my head, but I knew it was fruitless.

He chuckled and leaned back. “You can fight, but all that does is turn me on. I love a good hunt, little human.”

My heart nearly stopped.

My feet moved before I could stop them, before I knew I was even obeying. And when I stood right before him, having climbed the stone steps to the altar of his throne, the air left my lungs in a whoosh.

Gently—reverently—he took my wrist in his huge hand, his claws careful not to

pierce my skin. I was transfixed at the sight of him, couldn't stop from staring into his eyes, feeling them pull me into his dark, fiery embrace.

I wasn't aware he'd brought my wrist to his teeth until I felt him pierce my tender flesh. I gasped and tried to pull my arm away, but he held me tightly and sank his fangs into me even more.

The pain was intense, insurmountable. Tears streamed down my cheeks as I stared at where he was latched. That pain was like liquid fire in my blood, spreading through my veins until it consumed all of me.

When he let go of me, I snatched my arm away, wrist to my chest, and looked down at where he'd bit me. Astounded, I saw flames licking over the wound before dimming—but not vanishing--as if fate wanted me to know he'd marked me.

I knew he'd put a piece of himself in me. Something that would stay with me forever.

"There," he said roughly, his voice almost tender. "Now all will know who you belong to." He grinned again. "You wear the mark of the king of Bone Ash's Dark Realm."

The wound was sealed, healing magically, but I still felt that fire burning through me. It wasn't painful, and dare I even say... pleasurable. He'd given me his possessive symbol of ownership, and something inside of me shattered and reformed all at once.

I belonged to him.

He rose, reaching for me when I would have retreated, his massive hand cradling the back of my head. He tilted it up, so I was forced to meet his lava-like gaze.

"You'll rule beside me, little one," he growled, ordered. The king's voice was thick

with possessiveness. “And as my queen, you’ll wear a crown of ribs. You’ll have the monsters of my realm at your feet to do your bidding.”

He leaned closer, and I held my breath, his body big, his texture, a strange sensation against my fragile, sensitive skin.

“Submit to me, rule beside me, and I promise you’ll be my everything.”

A shudder wracked through me, not from fear but from how right it felt hearing him say the words... feeling him next to me.

“What say you, little human? How much will you give of yourself to me?”

I pressed trembling fingers to my lips knowing that survival demanded I fight him, but something else twisted in me. Sensitive tendrils of forbidden desire consumed me. I was terrified of what I felt. I’d been a prisoner of my father and his gilded cage my entire life.

I didn't want to be shackled again.

“I don’t just offer you a crown,” he growled out, maybe reading my mind or seeing my hesitation, “but also your freedom. This will be your domain. Your realm. All I ask is that you give yourself to me.”

I was breathing heavily, taking in his words, letting them sink in. I didn't know this demon, but for some strange reason, I knew he spoke the truth. Here, I could be free. Here, I could be my own ruler.

No, a ruler of everything and everyone in this kingdom. And that's when I felt it.

Acceptance. Hunger. And devotion to this monstrous king.

“Okay. I’ll be your queen,” I whispered.

As if my words broke through an invisible wall, the ground trembled beneath us as if the very realm had been waiting for this bond, this union, to be forged.

A low, pleased purr rumbled from his chest while his tail thumped a drum beat on the floor and before I could brace myself, he claimed my mouth with a kiss that was brutally consuming, possessive, and tasted like the fire that surrounded this fortress.

I’d just made a deal with the devil.

PRINCESS ELOWEN

He told me he was called Draxus as he gripped my wrist in one of his massive, clawed hands while he led me down a long, twisting hall.

The castle was alive with strange sounds, the stone walls groaning as if the castle itself breathed and yearned to stay alive.

The heavy doors at the end of the corridor swung open as we approached, creaking on rusted hinges that sounded like the moans of the living dead.

We entered what was clearly the dining hall, and instantly, I noticed how the shadows clung to the cracked black stone, and molten veins of lava pulsed through the fissures like blood. The entire sight was eerie with this living glow.

It was terrifying. It was beautiful.

And it was now my home.

The dining hall was vast, and I tipped my head back to look at the ceiling to take in the massive chandelier made entirely of skulls—some human in appearance, others of creatures I could never name let alone envision.

The onyx colored stone walls flickered with the fiery light of a massive hearth at the far end of the room where a roaring fire danced and spat embers that licked over logs

almost violently.

My eyes were drawn once again to the molten lava veins that twisted through the walls and floors, glowing brighter the closer they slithered toward the fire.

This room was alive... breathing.

Draxus pulled out a high-backed chair, and I sat, turning my head and staring down the long dining table that was carved from dark bone and stone. It was polished to a shine bright enough I could see my reflection on its top.

In my peripheral vision, I saw movement and glanced to the left where I saw dark, cloaked figures moving closer to us, their bodies shrouded in material, their hands covered by oversized sleeves. No part of their bodies could be seen.

One servant walked closer, their sleeve shifting slightly so I got a view of elongated limbs and clawed fingers. One of them was close enough that I could see into the hood clearly. I held in my gasp at the sight of jagged teeth, black holes where noses should be, peeling, dying flesh, and red glowing eyes.

They were ghouls. The living dead.

They carried trays of food that looked both fascinating and horrifying. Fruits I'd never seen before and breads that had an ashy tint but surprisingly smelled delicious. Then there was the meat, which far outnumbered all the items being set on the table.

Our chalices were filled with red wine, and then the servants melted into the shadows. We were once again alone.

Draxus sat beside me in a massive, throne-style chair, his back to the roaring fire, his focus squarely on me. His tail occasionally flexing as he curiously watches me, the

barb on the end casually tapping the stone floor. I smoothed my hands over my thighs, feeling the silk of my ruined dress. In this grand, savage-like space, I felt small.

He sat quietly beside me, his tail thumping repeatedly against the stone floor. “Eat, my little queen,” Draxus rumbled, his inhuman eyes glowing in the firelight.

I stared at the spread, my stomach twisting with uncertainty at what exactly was in front of me, but my hunger won out. I knew I’d eat what was given. Carefully, I picked up a piece of something that resembled roasted meat. It smelled delicious, but whatever it was was too red, the texture strange.

Not wanting to look at Draxus, I took a cautious bite. The flavor exploded on my tongue, and I blinked in surprise. The flavor was rich and smoky, the meat tender and juicy. It had a strange, gamey flavor but was sweeter than meat should be.

Unusual, for sure, but it was delicious, and I kept eating.

As I chewed, my gaze wandered toward the large twin doors to my side, and I stared out the hall again, taking in the dark beauty of the architecture. And then there were the fissures of lava that pulsed like a heartbeat beneath our feet. I felt it humming, sending vibrations up my legs and settling right between my thighs.

I clenched my legs, willing my breathing to relax so Draxus wouldn’t know how I felt myself becoming aroused and primed. I swallowed and wiped my mouth delicately with the black napkin then glanced at Draxus.

“Will you,” I whispered and caught my breath, “explain to me what all this means?” He didn’t answer right away, and I exhaled slowly. “To be your queen.” That last word caught in my throat.

Draxus set down his chalice with a heavy thud, his focus still intensely trained on me. His attention made my skin prickle. “You know what it means, but I’ll spell it out, sweet beauty. It means you rule the Dark Realm of Blood Ash at my side.”

There was a stirring of the servants still hidden in the shadows. But I felt them.

“You will command the monsters the humans fear, my queen.”

I shivered from fear but also from something far more dangerous... excitement.

Draxus leaned closer, his massive body radiating heat, his huge forearms taking up the space between us. The firelight carved harsh shadows across his scaled features, but I still found a strange, beastly beauty in them.

He reached out, brushing a single claw along the length of my bare arm. When he got to my wrist, he traced the healed mark—his scar—branded on my flesh. My heart thudded against my ribs when he rubbed the pad of one lizard-like finger along my skin.

“You wear my mark,” he announced with pride. “And because of your acceptance, because of this brand, you are forever bound to me and the minions who serve this realm.” He smiled then, sharp and wicked. “You will make this kingdom more powerful. More feared, my sweetness.”

And it was after his words that the lava beneath and surrounding us pulsed brighter.

There was no going back.

“Say it,” he demanded, his voice slithering around me.

I stared into his eyes, took a deep breath, and said what he wanted to hear. “I’m the

queen of Blood Ash. I'm your mate." I leaned in until our faces were close together.
"And together we'll rule."

I'd never be a prisoner again. I'd never have a man control over me again.

I was the one who ruled now.

4

PRINCESS ELOWEN

The entire castle thrummed after Draxus spoke those words., the energy shifting all around me.

A deep, resonating vibration moved through the stone walls and the floors, rising my legs until I braced my hands on the edge of the table to steady myself.

The flames in the hearth blazed into a frenzy, and the lava veins glowed so bright I had to close my eyes from the flare.

I gasped and snapped my eyes open when my wrist felt hot and painful and looked down at the mark on my wrist. The brand seemed to glow like the rest of the room, reminding me why I was here and who I belonged to.

Draxus's tail wrapped around the leg of my chair and pulled me close to him. He leaned closer, his nostrils flaring, his inhuman pupils dilating into thin, dangerous slits, reminiscent of a lizard's.

And then he inhaled deeply, taking in scent and purring in approval.

"My queen," he rumbled, his voice thick and primal, "how pleased you make me."

I should've been afraid. I should have looked at his unusual, inhuman being and only seen something grotesque. Perhaps a part of me was . But a bigger part—the one

buried deep, hidden away—was turned on by the darkness.

It made me feel powerful.

Draxus rose slowly to his terrifying height, towering over me, eclipsing the firelight with his muscular body and powerful shell covering his back.

His massive, clawed hand came to the back of my hair. He gripped a fistful of the strands and forced me to look up at him.

Before I could speak, Draxus lifted me effortlessly from the chair and cradled me against his massive chest. I clutched at him instinctively, feeling the rough, scaled texture of his body through the thin remains of my ruined dress and against my fingertips.

I let my hand run along his cold, hard, yet surprisingly smooth shell that covered his back.

“Now,” he seemed to purr like a feline instead of the lizard-like creature he appeared to be, “it’s time to get cleaned up.”

I felt my body stiffen because I knew where he was taking me. He carried me across the dining hall, his gait powerful, unstoppable.

The ghoulish servants melted out of the shadows again, bowing low until their grotesque bodies were parallel with the floor so close they could kiss the stone.

Before long, we were moving down a long, barren hallway, his claws scraping along the stone, seeming to make this situation even more ominous.

Finally, we stopped in front of a set of heavy, twin doors. As if he mentally willed

them, they swung open inward with a groaning screech. I held my breath as I took in the room before us.

Just inside the chamber, shrouded in shadow and a frightening chill, was his bedroom. I knew it without the words being said. The only light came from a large pit in the center of the room, the steel basin filled with... lava. Veins of it forked outward from the center, creeping toward a massive bed before it.

I involuntarily inhaled when he stepped inside, the doors shutting on their own, sealing us in. The room smelled of incense, a musky and smoky aroma that wasn't unpleasant.

Draxus set me on my feet but didn't release me entirely. One massive, clawed hand stayed firmly at my waist, his possessiveness grounding me.

"My sweet queen," his voice rumbled in my ear. "How much will you submit?"

I started breathing rapid, short pants. "This is the life I decided upon." I felt his smile, as if it were a living entity touching me.

"Face me," he growled, almost reverently.

For a second, I was frozen in place, but then my legs moved before I thought more about it. I faced Draxus, my head cocked back as I looked into his lizard eyes.

He just watched me for long seconds before saying softly, "Such a strange but utterly enthralling creature you are, my little human queen."

He turned and disappeared behind me, but I stayed put, facing the double doors, not afraid but unsure.

I heard the scrape of the metal against metal, and a moment later, he was tracing a clawed finger down the side of my throat, sending a violent shiver through me.

“You will wear this crown like you were born to,” Draxus said, his voice low and dangerous and rumbling throughout my entire body.

He was in front of me once more, and I tilted my chin up, gazing at Draxus through my lashes. “I want this,” I whispered.

A wicked smile stretched his mouth, his fangs flashing in the dim light. He lowered the crown until it hovered over my head. I could feel the power and weight thrumming from it.

As the crown settled onto my head, a rush of heat coursed through me so fierce and strong it stole the breath from my lungs, and I shivered. The weight was substantial, but the size was perfect. Like it had been made just for me.

I could feel Draxus’s unrelenting gaze on me.

And then, surprising me, Draxus dropped to his knees, his body so tall and big we were still eye level.

“My queen,” he growled.

A jolt of heat and need raced through me. The weight of the crown was both heavy and felt so incredibly right .

I heard whispers all around me like this castle was a living, breathing entity and approved of this union, singing dark songs of acceptance. The lava flared brighter as if it wanted me to know I was right in my assumption of it.

Draxus rose after a long second and pressed his body close to mine, his clawed hand trailing up my side and stopping just beneath my breast. His touch was possessive and claiming. And I wanted more of it. I wanted to forget about everything, to ignore the fact he wasn't human. I was no longer in my realm and that I accepted this so easily scared me

“We need to complete this union, sweet queen. And in order to bind us,” he said, his breath hot against my ear, “I must take you the way a male claims his female.”

I shivered—and not from fear.

I knew what he meant. There was only one thing left to seal this union. And God help me, I wanted it.

I met his gaze, feeling strangely strong and powerful.

“First, we'll bathe,” he growled.

I nodded. “Then you'll take me to bed, Draxus. Show me how a king of the Dark Realm of Blood Ash claims his queen.”

DRAXUS

The air was thick with steam, the scent of minerals and heat wrapping around us like a second skin. The bathing chamber had an ever-running natural spring, heated by the lava that ran beneath the surface of this world.

“Come,” I said, my voice low and commanding as I stepped into the bathing chamber. She took a few hesitant steps forward, and I pulled her in further, closing the door behind us, sealing us in. I kept the leather that shielded my cock, not wanting to overwhelm her any more than she probably was.

Her wide eyes took in the rustic grandeur of the space—lava rock walls, jagged and glistening with condensation from the hot spring.

The floor was smooth, black stone, slick underfoot, reflecting the dim fiery glow of the small fire in the corner. The pool on the far wall bubbled with warm water, the surface rippling and beckoning.

Elowen hesitated at the edge of the bath chamber, her fingers nervously clutching the tattered fabric of her gown. I could see the pulse in her neck, feel the tension radiating from her. She is hesitant. Cautious. Good. She needs to be living in this underworld.

But then I smelled something coating the air, tilting my head back to get a better sniff. It was slight at first, but the longer we stared at each other, the more it ripened.

Her arousal.

“You’re safe here,” I murmured, some primal and unfamiliar part of me wanting to reassure her. I stepped closer until my chest nearly brushed her tiny body. I rested my scaled, clawed hands on her shoulders and felt the slight shiver that ran through her at my touch. “Let me take care of you. Let me show you how a king treats his queen.”

Her breath hitched as I ran a sharp claw down the front of her gown, easily tearing it from her body, the dirty and torn fabric pooling at her feet. I took a step back to take in her curvy form. Her skin was pale in the flickering firelight. And her body... her body trembled for me as her arousal bloomed even more in the air. I smelled how wet their little cunt was.

I let my gaze roam over her, taking in the curve of her hips, the soft swell of her breasts, and the way her nipples hardened and deepened in color as the seconds moved past. Elowen looked every bit a queen, naked, beautiful, regal, with her crown sitting atop her head.

Such perfection.

I forced myself to step away. I moved to the pool and looked at her, holding out a hand, gesturing her closer.

When she took a shuddering breath, I stepped into the pool first, the spring water warm against my scales. I waited patiently for her. She hesitated for a moment longer then placed her hand in mine. I pulled her in gently, the rock below our feet slightly coarse for traction.

The water was higher than what she was probably used to, the depth needing to be substantial for my size. I held onto her so she kept her balance and pulled her toward me, her flesh warm despite her shivering.

Her eyes closed when I wrapped my arms around her, and the humid heat enveloped us. I felt something warm move through my chest when she let out a soft sigh from her lips. The fact she was relaxing pleased me.

I reached for the sprig of floral leaves that had been harvested from the very outskirts of my kingdom, the scent sweet. I grabbed a leather cloth, rubbed the sprigs on the hide until the floral scent exploded around us, and then washed my female.

I had to be gentle with her, my fingers thick and clawed. I gently moved over her shoulders, kneading the tension from her muscles. Elowen leaned into my touch, her body easing further under the fall of water from the top of the rock outcropping.

I worked my way down her arms, my hands slow and deliberate, savoring the feel of her warm, water-slick skin beneath my palms.

When I reached her back, I pressed closer, my chest brushing against her as my four fingered hands slid over her spine. Her breath came faster now, her body arching subtly into mine. I could feel the shift in her—the way her uncertainty gave way to something else.

Something primal.

I let my hands drift lower, skimming over the curve of her hips, and I felt her tense for a moment before relaxing again. I traced the dip of her waist, the soft swell of her ass, and marveled at how tiny she was, how soft and warm and... mine .

She tipped her head back and looked at me. Her pupils were dilated, the scent of her arousal coating the small cavern despite the smell of fresh water all around us. Lifting Elowen out of the water and setting her on the rocky edge, she tilted her head back and looked at me. Her pupils were dilated, the scent of her arousal coating the air in the small cavern.

Her eyes were dark from her need for me, and she parted her lips the longer we watched each other.

I cupped her face in my hands, her cheeks so tiny in my monstrous hands. I had to be gentle as I brushed my claws over her cheeks. “You’re mine tonight,” I finally said, my voice a low growl as my primal need rose to consuming depths.

Elowen’s breath hitched, and I could see the way her body reacted to my words and touch. Letting my gaze dip to her breasts, I growled at the way her nipples hardened further despite the heat surrounding us.

“Touch me, Draxus,” she finally whispered, and I snarled as I gave her what she needed... what we both needed.

I lowered my hands to her breasts, my touch firm but gentle as I washed and caressed her. I was meticulous and gentle as I bathed my queen. Her skin was slick with water, and the scent of the floral sprigs exploded around us.

Her curvy body trembled as I circled the fleshy part of my thumbs around her nipples, then carefully dragged a claw over the pebbled, erect tips. Her breath came in short, shallow gasps, and she gripped my biceps for support. I leaned in, my lips brushing against her ear as I growled in my very inhuman voice, “Do you like that, little queen?” My voice was thick with desire.

She nodded, a soft whimper escaping her lips.

I continued to wash her, my big paws moving lower now. I touched her slightly rounded stomach then moved to her hips and over her thighs. Her legs parted slightly on their own, a silent invitation for more. It was then I got a potent scent of her pussy and moaned.

The way her body was begging for more told me she was almost ready for me.

I knelt, now up close to her beautiful and perfectly formed cunt. I let my hands slide over her thighs as I positioned myself between her legs. Her breath caught as I leaned in, my pointed tongue brushing against the sensitive skin of her inner thigh.

“Draxus,” she whispered my name in pleasure. Her hands tangled around my horns at the same time her hips arched toward me as I tasted her.

I had to have her flavor on my tongue. I needed to swallow her pussy juices. I dragged my forked tongue over the top of her pussy, then used my thumbs to pull her lips open, slowly and deliberately, before teasing her exposed clit. I savored the taste of her, loving that she held my horns, stroking them like I needed her to do to my cock.

She gasped, her body trembling as I licked her again and again. Her hands tightened around my horns, pulling me closer, urging me on.

“Draxus...” she moaned, her voice low and desperate. I looked at her face, my eyes locking with hers as I continued to lick her, letting her see her lizard king eating her out. She shivered as I teased my tongue over her clit. Her head fell back, the long fall of her hair dangling behind her.

I could feel her getting wetter, slicker. Her body trembled, and when I shoved the top part of my forked tongue along her clit, and used the bottom part to tease her pussy hole. I shoved the lower tip inside of her and felt her pussy walls tighten around me, drawing the muscle in further.

I reached up, my fingers finding her nipples and pinching hard enough she cried out. Elowen begged for more, her hips rocking against my face as I gave her what she needed.

And when I growled around her clit, she came undone. Her screams of pleasure echoed off the walls, the lava lines pulsing with bright white light and the pool ledge beneath her quivering with energy.

Her breath came in ragged gasps as she rode out the pleasure, and the entire time, I fucked her hole with my tongue and pinched her nipples hard. After long seconds of her getting lost in her ecstasy, she sagged against me, still using my horns to stabilize herself.

I stood, the water cascading off the massive shell covering my back. My body was an inferno, burning synapses through my bloodstream, and my cock demanded fucking, vibrations and fire running up and down my huge length causing my balls to fill with cum. I couldn't stand it any longer. I pulled Elowen into my arms, her flushed body still trembling with aftershocks.

I pushed her back until she was pressed against the polished black stone wall of the pool, my body pinning hers in a cage of muscle and scales as I dragged my tongue over her face, marking her.

Her hands gripped my shoulders, her body arching into mine as she gave into me.

“You’re mine,” I growled against her lips, my hands gripping her hips as I ground my cock, now extended, outrageously hard and more than ready, against her. “And tonight, my sweet queen, I’m going to make our bond irrevocable.”

QUEEN ELOWEN

The air was thick with heat, the kind that clung to my skin and made every breath feel like swallowing fire. I felt precipitation covering my flesh, and it had nothing to do with the flames in the fire seeming to grow higher and hotter the closer I moved toward the massive bed.

The veins of molten lava cast an eerie amber glow over the room. The fire pit in the center roared when we got to the bed, its flames licking hungrily at the air.

Draxus had carried me out of the bathing chamber and dried me until my skin was sensitive and pink, heated and... ready.

I stood by his massive bed, feeling impossibly small next to him, the stone floor warm from the lava that flowed underneath. Draxus loomed before me, his massive frame towering over my human body, his nostrils flaring as he no doubt scented my wet pussy getting even more drenched.

His scales glistened in the firelight, each one dark with an iridescent bluish-black hue to them. And his eyes—they burned as he stared at me. They were the eyes of a predator. One who knew where his prey was and what he'd do to it.

Draxus took a step closer, crowding me as he leaned in and dragged that forked tongue over my lips. I shivered at how good it felt. The contact was surprisingly soft despite the sharpness of his teeth and his sheer size.

But he was careful with me, his movements deliberate yet tender, as if he knew his entire body could crush me without a second thought. And when his tongue flicked out, teasing my lower lip before sliding into my mouth, I opened and relaxed, letting him do what he wanted.

The kiss was slow as he claimed me without urgency, and his breath was hot against my skin, as hot as the lava that flowed all around us. I moaned softly, my hands gripping his shoulders as he deepened the kiss, my fingers scraping against his scales that were like polished stone under my touch.

When he pulled away, his eyes burned with a hunger that made my stomach flutter. He took a step back, his hand trailing down my body until it rested between my legs, until he was cupping me with that huge paw of his. I gasped as the heat of his touch sent a jolt through me.

“I need...” I didn't know how to say it, how to voice what I wanted.

“I know what you need, my queen.” He gripped me easily and set me on the bed, using his body to push me back until I was under him. He positioned himself over me, his massive frame casting a shadow over my body. My eyes widened as he shifted, and I looked down to actually see his beastly cock.

It was unlike anything I'd ever seen. Thick and ridged now that it was fully extended and hard, the length was long and shimmered faintly in that same blackish-blue iridescent hue.

You see how hard and long it is for you?” he growled. “It will only ever get like this for you, sweet Elowen.”

I gasped as I watched the length retract, disappearing into his body in some kind of protective sheath. And when he came out once more, glowing fiery colored semen

covered the tip.

“All for you.” He gripped the base, and I saw veins of glowing lava light tracing its length, shining brighter with every stroke of his four-fingered, clawed hand over it.

When he let go, it retracted slightly, the tip disappearing into its sheath before sliding back out, the motion slow and deliberate, as if his arousal were too much to contain. God, why does the sight of that turn me on so much?

My breath caught in my throat as I watched, mesmerized by the way his cock pulsed with heat and power.

“Do you see what you do to me, Elowen?” he growled, his voice rough with desire. “You make me burn.” He bared those sharp teeth and ordered, “Touch me.”

I couldn’t look away, my fingers trembling as I reached out to touch him. The heat of his cock was nearly unbearable, but I couldn’t stop myself. I wrapped my hand around him, feeling the ridges and the veins of lava beneath his skin growing harder and hotter because of my touch.

He groaned, the sound deep and primal, and I felt a thrill of power knowing I could evoke such a response from this beast.

His cock wasn’t like a human male’s in many ways. There was no defined head, but very defined balls beneath the shaft. It was a long tubular shaft with circular ridges lining the girth, and those fissures of glowing lava-like light coming through.

His tongue returned to my lips, the licking gentler this time, though no less demanding. He was careful with his teeth, his tongue exploring my mouth with a controlled ferocity.

I clung to him, my body arching into his, my breasts rubbing along his scales and making my pussy leak. It seemed impossible, but God, I was drenched. His erection was thick and long and so very hot. His arousal seared into my skin.

When he pulled back, my gaze immediately went to his cock again. His length was unlike anything I'd ever seen—thick, massive, and ridged with veins of molten light that I swore pulsed with every beat of my heart.

He was impossibly large. Far larger than I even thought would fit comfortably. I knew his girth would stretch me to the point of pain, but I wanted that discomfort.

The heat radiating from him was overwhelming, and that searing intensity made my skin tingle and my blood boil. As I watched, his cock retracted slightly, the tip disappearing into its sheath before sliding back out. The motion was slow and deliberate, like Draxus wanted me to see how his body was made.

Each time it emerged, the length seemed even larger, the ridges now more pronounced, the veins of amber light glowing brighter.

My breath hitched as I noticed the tip was slick with glowing pre-cum, a pearly bead of it glistening in the firelight. It oozed slowly, a testament to his arousal, and I felt a strange mix of awe and desire.

This beast, this monster, was now my king. I was his queen, and he was going to claim my virginity in what would no doubt be a brutal manner.

The sight of his dick leaking was intoxicating, a visceral reminder of just how much he wanted me. I reached out of my own accord, my fingers trembling as I brushed against the slickness. His semen was hot to the touch, and I knew when it was inside of me that it would feel incredible.

He groaned , the sound deep and primal. I couldn't help but gasp as I felt how impossibly thick and heavy he was in my hand and how slick and unusual his dick felt and looked.

“Do you see what you do to me, Elowen?” he growled, his voice rough with need. “You make me burn. You make me ache.”

The sheer size and power of Draxus was overwhelming. His cock twitched in my hand and throbbed as another thick bead of glowing, hot pre-cum welled up at the tip. I felt a thrill of desire course through me.

His burning, predatory gaze was fixed on me with an intensity that made my body weak with need.

“Elowen,” he rumbled. “You chose me .”

I swallowed hard, my throat dry as I nodded. “I did,” I whispered, my voice trembling. God help me and what may come, but I picked Draxus, and I didn't regret it. Life inside of these burning wells wasn't nearly as terrifying as the life I lived outside of them.

The heat radiating from his body was suffocating, but it wasn't just the warmth of the room—it was him . His presence was overwhelming, primal, and it stirred something deep inside me. Something I hadn't known existed.

“Do you know what you do to me, my little queen?” he growled, his voice thick with lust. “Do you know how much I want you?”

I nodded, my breath coming in short, shallow gasps. “Yes,” I whispered. “I want you, too.” And I meant every word.

He leaned down, his mouth brushing against my neck. His tongue flicked out, tasting my skin, and I shuddered at the sensation. His teeth grazed my collarbone, and I moaned, my body arching into his touch. When he broke the skin, I gasped. I wanted more, loved the pain and pleasure that came from it.

When he trailed kisses down my chest, I looked at the marks he left, at the way he dragged that forked tongue over the wounds and lapped up the blood. I gasped at how arousing that looked. My core spasmed with need, my cream dripping from between my folds.

His enormous hands roamed over my body, exploring every curve, every inch of me.

With his glowing eyes locked on mine, he grabbed his cock and notched the tip at my opening. There was no soft penetration. He thrust into me swiftly, the heat of him overwhelming as he stretched my pussy to its limit, the ridges of his length expanding and contracting, wanting friction against my cunt walls.

I cried out, my nails digging into his scales, his biceps massive as I held on. Draxus paused when he was fully inside of me, giving me a moment to adjust, his gaze always locked with mine.

“You’re mine, Elowen,” he growled, his voice low and guttural as he slid out and pushed back inside. He pulled out again, gripped the base of his cock, and I felt my eyes widen as spurts of glowing semen spurted out of the tip and splashed onto my pussy.

The fluid was hot to the touch, but not painfully so. He jerked himself off over me, spraying more of that glowing cum on my pussy until I was soaked in it. And then he notched the head back at my opening and thrust in hard and deep.

Draxus began to move, his hips rolling with a slow, deliberate rhythm, his hands

gouged into the bed on either side of my head, his claws tearing up the material. The heat of him was everywhere—on me, covering me, inside me... consuming me.

I moaned, my body arching into his as he thrust deeper, his scales smooth like the softest fabric against my bared breasts. Each movement sent waves of pleasure through me, and I clung to my demon lizard king. His barbed tail slammed against the bed behind him with a whack, whack, whack, the barbed end destroying the mattress.

His claws suddenly gripped my hips, digging into my flesh, breaking the skin but causing this incredible pleasure to fill me. He kept me in place as he drove into me, his size and strength overwhelming.

The heat was unbearable inside of me as he spurted his cum deep in my pussy and womb. And I wanted more. I wanted all of him. My body trembled, my hips rolling to meet his, as if my body had a mind of its own. I was no longer in control.

He groaned, the sound sending a primal thrill through me. My demon king leaned down, his tongue capturing mine in another searing kiss, claiming me as completely.

“Draxus,” I moaned, his name spilling from me on a tremble as I surrendered... submitted.

He growled, leaned back, stared down at where he was lodged deep within me, and slammed his hips into mine with increasing force. The bed shook, and the sound of our bodies colliding filled the room. I heard myself crying out, begging for more, and I could feel the heat of this monster burning me from the inside out.

My pleasure coiled tighter until I knew I’d break.

“Elowen,” he gritted, his voice rough, unnatural, and filled with beastly desire. “My

queen.”

He roared as he thrust into me one last time, his body shuddering as he came, spilling that liquid fire inside of me until I screamed and felt it touch every part of me.

The sounds coming from him were barbaric, a savage chorus of dominance and pleasure over my submission.

He collapsed forward but kept his weight off me with his clawed hands on either side of my head once more. His massive frame dwarfed mine. His breathing was ragged, his chest rising and falling with each labored breath, his glowing eyes seeming almost... soft and gentle, although it seemed to go against his very DNA.

My body still trembled with the aftershocks of pleasure, and I clung to him. After long seconds, Draxus pulled back and gently brushed the hair from my face, the sound now leaving him reminiscent of a purr.

“ Mine ,” he growled, his voice low and possessive.

I nodded, my voice barely a whisper. “I am yours. And you are mine.”

“And I will never let you go.”

And in that moment, without thinking about anything else, I didn’t want him to.

7

QUEEN ELOWEN

The room still pulsed with heat and darkness.

I lay on the bed spent and exhausted, the scent of Draxus clinging to my skin. My body hummed—sated, marked, and claimed in every way that mattered.

And I didn't regret a single second of it.

Draxus's essence lingered deep inside me, and every little shift I made had his cum spilling out of my body. It had to have been a massive load.

I closed my eyes and exhaled, knowing what we'd just done, what he'd put in me—on me—was as permanent as anything I'd ever experienced.

My demon-lizard king lay beside me, and I shifted so I was draped over him. He wrapped a thickly scaled arm over my waist, his clawed hand splayed across my belly, covering the entire expanse.

I tilted my head slightly and watched him with half-lidded eyes. His scales shimmered faintly in the dim, flickering firelight, and I found it so otherworldly beautiful.

I took just a second to take him all in. His small but thick and powerful horns curved out from his head, and the harshness of his features didn't scare me anymore.

He made me ache.

How strange and... wonderful it felt to accept this life and not worry about what my future held.

I was no longer just a princess bound to be a cruel man's breeding vessel. I was the queen of the dark realm of Blood Ash.

Ruled by no one... except him .

Draxus stared at me, the glow bright, molten and locked onto me like a predator scenting his mark on his forever prey.

He owned me and I him.

"You're quiet," he rumbled, his demonic voice raw and laced with his recent pleasure. "Regret?"

I thought about his question even though I knew the answer already. I smiled lazily, stretching against him so my bare, delicate skin felt every hard, defined inch of his scales, muscular body.

"No. Just thinking. Just... adjusting."

He stayed silent, but he had this almost curious look on his face, as if silently asking what I meant.

"A dusting to no longer being a vicinity of a cruel world. Adjusting to... being seen as someone who is important and valued." I lifted my hand, feeling bold and brash. I brushed my fingers down his jaw, where the scales gave way to smoother, warm skin. "For the first time in my life, I feel like I'm real . Not just someone to be bartered off

or spoken for.”

“Those who didn’t see your worth are fools. Those who didn’t see how important you are deserve death at the end of a rusty, dull blade.”

I’d never heard anything so... romantic before.

He growled, his barbed tail wrapping around my ankle, anchoring me close to him. “You were always meant for this throne. For this kingdom and... for me.”

A shiver of pleasure and acceptance ran through me.

I turned into him, draping a leg over his big body, pressing my chest to his side. I was keenly aware of how tiny I was in comparison, and I loved it. It turned me on.

His heartbeat was slow and steady, but heavy and strong.

Before I could speak, Draxus ran his tongue along my cheek in what I felt was an endearing sort of kiss, and rose in one fluid motion. I lay there nude for long seconds as he looked his fill with his strangely silted eyes.

Then, he helped me up and lifted me instantly before carrying me to the arched doorway I hadn’t noticed until now.

A stone balcony loomed before us as he stepped into the hot, smoke scented air.

The night air was thick with ash and darkness, the sky a churning mix of dark clouds and glowing red embers from the crackling and bubbling lava below. I could see a skeleton shaped forest in the distance, and onyx and jagged mountains beyond that.

The underworld of Blood Ash stretched far and wide—wastelands of darkness that

we'd rule together.

And all of it was ours.

He set me down, but kept me close with his arm curled protecting around my waist. The dry and warm wind tugged at my hair.

"This world will know who you are. They'll know you rule and now at your feet," Draxus said beside me, his voice low and reverent, and so very proud. "And they will fear you, Elowen. They'll understand you hold their lives in your little hands."

"I'm ready," I said after a moment of letting his words sink in.

He let out a growl of approval, pulling me to his side even more firmly. His tail flicked behind him like a banner, the barbed end thumping hard on the stone floor.

"Tomorrow we celebrate you. Everyone in the kingdom will gather," he said, his voice already slipping into that tone of command. "They will know Queen Elowen rules beside me."

He turned to me then, gripped my jaw with one clawed hand, and stared deep into my soul.

This was such a heavy moment, and it didn't scare me on a survival level. A part of me said run. This was too much. Too fast. But my feet were frozen in place.

I wasn't going anywhere.

"My queen," he growled.

I leaned into him, felt his paw curl around the back of my head, and while we stood

there silently, while my king held me, I stared at everything the fire and darkness touched.

My kingdom.

QUEEN ELOWEN

I stood beside Draxus in the throne room, the area cast in candlelight from the massive skull chandelier hanging from the ceiling, and bone sconces lining the walls.

The lava lines in the black stone walls flared and dimmed, the shadows stretching long and deep, snaking out and curling around everything it touched like demons reaching out to claim a victim.

Right now it was just Draxus and I in the room, with servants stationed around the room in wait of who was coming.

My heart thundered, and my body pleasantly ached, Draxus's cum seeping out of my pussy reminding me rather vividly what we just did and will do again. And again. My cream mixed with the cum dripping from my folds. Draxus growled periodically, his hand moving down my back, over my ass, and sliding it between my thighs to push his seed back into me.

I stood at the top of the dais, the jagged throne of skulls and black stone behind me, intimidating and ominous. And then I heard them. Draxus stiffened beside me, massive and unmoving, his gaze fixed on the doors that hadn't opened yet. His tail was swishing back and forth, the tension radiating out of him.

The air was thick with heat and power and something else that made the hair on my arms stand on end. That heavy feeling clung to my skin like sweat, and with every

passing second, I felt that weird feeling weigh heavier on me.

“You look every bit of my queen, Elowen.”

The pride that filled me from his praise was instant.

I heard heavy footsteps on the other side of the throne room doors, and looked down at the gown Draxus gave me for this evening to keep my focus clear.

The dress was black, with an overlay of black lace and silk, and delicate glowing threads throughout it like the lava that surrounded us. I stared at the mark on my wrist, the branding glowing faintly on my flesh. Draxus said when we were together the mark would be brighter, feel hotter.

The crown sat heavy atop my head, a reminder that I held the power.

Draxus curled his hand around my waist, pulling me close to him just as the doors opened and our guests ended. “They will see you, and they will kneel before you, showing their respect.”

“And those who won’t kneel?”

He chuckled. “The ones who feel brave... we’ll bathe in their blood.”

The first to enter was a hulking beast draped in blood red robes. I couldn’t see much because of his hooded cape, but I could see wicked looking hairy antlers that curved outward from the material and arched inches above its head.

He lumbered forward on hooved feet, that marrow clacking on the black stone floor.

He was introduced as a Lord Velgrack, one that resided in the skeleton forest.

Without having to be told, the lord knelt, bowing to us and showing respect without having said a word.

I swallowed in trepidation, the situation, at how terrifying this was, but didn't let my expression change.

More entered, each one more monstrous and beastly than the next.

A serpent-bodied female slithered in next, undulating across the floor, totally nude aside from the crown on her head and a transparent cloak over her body.

When she stopped in front of us, she slowly smiled, jewels in her fangs, her silted eyes trained right on me.

“My Queen,” she said and bowed, her words slurring slightly because of her forked tongue.

A couple came in next—the first pair I'd seen so far—and I was shocked to see a beastly lord with a tiny human woman close to his side. The way he held her possessively told me whoever this female was, she meant something special to him.

I wanted to talk to the woman, to hear her story, but right now I had to play this part. If this was going to be my life now, I had to try .

The room filled with beings, but then there was this heavy silence that suddenly filled the space.

A massively built humanoid male with pale gray skin covered in distressed leather came into the hall. People parted for him as he came to a stop in front of us.

His black eyes gleamed with a clear hatred as he stared at Draxus. Long black hair

fell down his back, plaits on either side of his temples, and pieces of clear spine weaved between them.

This male didn't bow. He didn't speak. He just glared at Draxus before moving his slimy gaze to me. That had Draxus growling and pulling me closer and slightly behind his back in a protective manner.

And then the beast grinned at me, his humanoid face terrifying me. I realized that although Draxus didn't resemble a human at all, I found him handsome in a savage and brutal way.

"Pretty new queen," the monster growled at me.

Before I knew what was happening, Draxus roared and launched himself from the dais, slamming his big body into the creature.

The males crashed onto the floor with enough force the stone cracked under the onslaught.

The other guests stayed silent, but retreated, giving the fighters room. I covered my mouth with a hand, watching the brutality of what was happening. A part of me wanted to try and stop it, but common sense said I'd only end up getting hurt, or worse.

I was a mere human that would get crushed.

"You dare talk to the Queen in such a way. A way?" Draxus growled and bit the other male in the throat, black blood gushing out. Draxus was pushed off, but he was right back on the other male, using his barbed tail to slam into the creature repeatedly.

The other male bared sharp teeth but then chuckled, "I just took note she is a pretty

little thing.”

Gasps echoed through the chamber, and I realized these creatures, these guests, were appalled that anyone was speaking to Draxus—their king—in such a way.

With a roar that shook the walls, Draxus lunged again, this time slamming into the other male, taking him back to the floor hard enough that shards of stone cracked around them. The creature beneath him writhed, black blood pouring from several cuts, bites, and open wounds.

Draxus reared back and drove a fist into his jaw. The room vibrated with his rage. And then he lifted the barbed tip of his tail, poised to strike, but this time aimed for the creature’s heart.

“Draxus,” I said, my voice steady despite the shaking in my bones. “Please,” it’s all I said. I didn’t want to see anymore, didn’t want to witness any death. My king... my mate froze.

The chamber went still.

He turned his head slowly and looked at me, his chest heaving, his claws, and face bloodstained. The male beneath him was alive, but unmoving. I finally stepped forward, my heart pounding.

“No more,” I whispered and reached for his hand, not caring that it was covered in blood.

Draxus looked back at the male beneath him and bared his teeth, nostrils flaring,. I knew he was having a hard time stopping himself. Draxus took a step back and I knew it was hard as hell for him to do. The other male coughed, rolled to his side, and dragged himself back with the little dignity he had left.

Draxus stood tall once more, looming over the room like the god of death himself.

I moved to his side, the train of my dark gown dragging through a puddle of blood I didn't flinch to step through. No one moved. No one spoke.

Then, slowly, one by one... they knelt... for me and Draxus.

Draxus turned to me, and in that moment, I saw something in his eyes I hadn't before—not just pride. Not just deep and dark need. Devotion.

He stepped before me, his towering form shadowing mine, his voice low in my ear as he said, “You’ve never been more beautiful than you are now... taming your beast.”

This kingdom was no longer just his. It was ours .

QUEEN ELOWEN

As the evening waned, the court started to disperse and find pockets of conversation between each other. But the tension still coiled through the hall, thick enough you could have cut it with a knife.

Draxus kept me close to his side as we made our way around the room, but my gaze was locked on her .

The human woman I had seen earlier.

The only other one like me in this dark, dangerous yet utterly beautiful underworld.

She was smaller than me with light strawberry blonde hair twisted in chignon, and soft curls framing her face. Her dress was a soft blue with floral applique details, and she wore delicate flowers in her hair, ones that I knew hadn't come from this dark underworld.

She stood tucked to the side of the corridor, near one of the pillars, the beast who had accompanied her earlier just a foot from her. I noticed he kept checking on her, but her body language told me she wasn't afraid or uncomfortable being here or around him.

I stepped away from Draxus, but he reached out and gently curled his claws around my wrist. "I'm going over there to talk to the woman." His pupils dilated and

constricted as he looked at where I was talking about, and he must have felt it was safe enough because he let go, leaned down, and dragged his tongue along the side of my face.

Marking me and staking his claim in front of everyone.

I blushed as I walked away and toward the woman.

One of the guards moved as if to follow me, but I held up a hand. “If Draxus deems it safe for me to go alone, I’m safe enough to do so.”

The cloaked guard paused then nodded and retreated.

I approached her slowly, and when she saw me coming, she looked a bit surprised but smiled in welcome.

When I stood before her, she straightened and gave a nervous curtsy, eyes wide. “My queen,” she said, her voice soft but steady. She went to curtsy again, but I stopped her.

“Please don’t,” I said softly, warmly. “You don’t need to bow to me,” I said, stopping in front of her. “This is all... new to me.” I smiled again. “What’s your name?”

She visibly relaxed before answering. “Katrina.”

“Katrina,” I repeated gently then lowered my voice and glanced at the monster she was with. I took in his appearance with more of a critical eye this time. Massive with curling horns and deep gray skin. He towered over many in the hall, and his black claws were sharpened to deadly points. “He never lets you out of his sight,” I said, motioning toward the gray beast. “Is he your mate?”

Her eyes widened again, and she looked down, twisting her hands together. “No,” she whispered. “We aren't mates. He hasn't... claimed me. Not like that.”

I tilted my head, noticing her blush moving across the tops of her cheeks and her neck. “But he protects you like you're his.” It wasn't a question. It was obvious by the way he never let her out of his sight.

She gave the smallest smile. “He saved me.”

Silence hung between us, and it was then I noticed the bruising on her arms. “Those are—”

“Not from Blaylock. Never from him.”

Emotion neither of us wanted to voice aloud hung heavy and thick between us. I knew all too well the pain landmarks from the men around me.

“Blaylock found me,” she said, her voice distant now, like she was pulling the memory out and reliving it. “I'd been taken as a flesh slave. He'd been passing through when he saw the auction.” Her throat worked as she swallowed. “I thought he was just another buyer. Just another monster who would use me horribly. But he tore the others apart before they could lay a hand on me. And he took me away from all of that to his kingdom.”

I reached for her hand without thinking. She let me take it, and together, we held each other as we stayed silent.

“Blaylock has never touched me, not like that. Not once. He gives me every creature comfort I could ever need or want, but I see the way he looks at me—”

“And you hate it?” I was willing to help this woman escape if she needed to.

“No. On the contrary, I... like it.” She looked at her monster and smiled. “For as frightening as he looks, I’ve never had anyone be so kind to me.”

She looked back at me and gave me an almost sad smile. “It’s strange, really, that the monster you’re supposed to fear is the one who saved you.”

I pulled her in gently, wrapping my arms around her. She tensed at first then melted against me. We stood there, two human women in a world ruled by beasts but finding that this was where we... belonged.

10

QUEEN ELOWEN

The night had ended, and the moment the heavy double doors of the grand hall closed behind the last guest, I felt something shift in the air.

I sat on my throne, feeling Draxus's presence surround me. And although it should have been suffocating, all I felt was intoxication. He came up to me, his towering figure looming. The heat radiated off his body, and I felt his molten gaze bore into me as he held out his hand. I slipped mine into his rough palm and let him help me up.

We left the hall and walked down the shadowed corridor to our bedchamber. I was exhausted from the evening, but I felt good—so good, so comfortable. And I felt crazy for it, because I'd never felt that way before.

My gown shimmered as we walked silently, Draxus's arm around me. With each step, my body heated further. Because I knew what would happen once we were in our room.

I'd felt so powerful standing before all those creatures and monsters. How strange to feel at peace in such an unfamiliar place.

"You played your part well, my sweet Queen Elowen," Draxus rumbled, his voice deep and wrapping around me. He tightened his arm around my waist as we neared the room, his tone approving. I felt pride in myself.

We stopped at the door, and I glanced up at him, my breath catching as I caught the glint in his fiery eyes—burning for me with pleasure. So much anticipation thrummed through my veins.

The shadows of the corridor seemed to bend around us, caging us in an intimate setting. He lifted his hand—massive, clawed, and impossibly warm—and reached out. I leaned into his touch.

His fingers brushed my cheek, and the heat of him sent a shiver down my spine.

“You’re trembling,” he observed, his voice dangerously soft.

“I’m... ready for you,” I admitted. I was burning up—from his nearness, from his gaze that stripped me bare, from the way he always watched me.

His stare was possessive. Primal.

He moved his hand down to my neck, his thumb pressing gently against my pulse.

“Your heart is racing, sweet girl,” he growled.

I swallowed hard, my heart hammering. “Take me to bed, my king,” I whispered, submitting fully.

His mouth curled into a smirk, revealing his sharp, gleaming teeth. “I’m going to devour you, sweetness.” He leaned in and inhaled at the crown of my head. “You were magnificent tonight. Every eye was on you. Every beast in that hall saw the power that simmers beneath your skin. They know you’ll soon feel how strong you are. And once you do... they’ll heed you in all ways.” His thumb pressed harder against my throat, and a thrill of dark electricity shot through me.

I couldn't speak until my body leaned into him on instinct. "I'm yours, Draxus. Always. Take me to bed, please," I pleaded.

His thick, barbed tail thumped behind him like an anvil. My gaze dropped to it. I'd never touched it before—but tonight, I needed to.

He lifted me into his arms before I could gasp, carried me into our room, and shut the door behind us. Still cradled in his arms, I reached around, my fingers brushing the smooth, thick plates of his shell, his scutes hard, but smooth in the same breath. Heat under my touch made my arousal spike.

Draxus stiffened, a growl slipping from his throat.

"What are you doing?" he asked, voice gruff with barely restrained desire.

"I love touching you," I whispered, then wiggled until he put me down. Moving the elegant cloth that separated me from my destination, I got on my knees between his giant spread legs and reached through them for his tail, letting my fingers slide down the underside of its spiked length. It was warm, like the rest of him, like lava simmered beneath the surface. I wrapped my hands around what I could of it—thick, muscled. The way his body tensed told me everything I needed to know.

So I kept going.

I pulled the heavy appendage closer, and he gave me what I wanted, wrapping it in a way I could rub the spikes at the bulbous end of his tail until he snarled, the sound sharp and raw.

"Elowen," he warned, voice ragged with lust. But he didn't stop me.

Instead, he bent forward, legs still wide, so he could cage my much smaller body in

with his huge frame, the heat of him burning through my gown.

“Draxus,” I whispered, looking up until I found his reptilian eyes, my thighs slick with need.

Still holding his gaze, I ran my fingers along the ridges of his tail again, feeling the way it pulsed beneath my hand. He gripped the back of my head possessively then, his tail curling around me but somehow feeling comforting, even with its armor and barbs. It’s like my body was perfectly made to fit right in between the rough edges of him and nestle into the soft parts.

And then I saw it—his cock, extending and hardening above my head.

More wetness bloomed beneath my gown. I leaned back, breath caught, as I saw the bulge pressing against the ruby-studded sarong he wore.

“Draxus,” I gasped.

He could see it. Smell it. The evidence of how badly I needed him.

“Do you have any idea what you’re doing to me?” he snarled, voice rough with need. His hand slid down my back, the heat of his touch searing.

With a sharp tug, he ripped my gown from my body, the sound echoing through the room, and before I comprehended he was moving me, I was suddenly on my feet. I stood bare before him—flushed, trembling, my thighs slick, my pussy dripping. His gaze raked over me like a starving beast.

“Draxus, please,” I whimpered, aching for him.

He didn’t need more begging. His hands were everywhere—his tongue hot on my

skin—his tail slamming the floor before curling around my waist and hoisting me up.

He pinned me against the black stone wall, lava veins glowing all around. His heat, his need—it devoured me.

His tail moved to wrap tightly around my thigh, jerking it up so my knee was bent and bound to the wall, and I gasped as the tip of his massive cock pressed at my entrance. My fingers dug into his scaled shoulders as my pussy trembled with anticipation.

“Draxus, I?—”

“Shhh,” he murmured, tongue flicking against my ear. “Let me show you how much I need you.”

Then he pushed into me—thick, blisteringly hot, and stretching me wide. I cried out as he filled me, my body arching against him.

“Yours,” I gasped.

He shoved all the way in, pressing me hard into the wall. His claws dug into my hips, drawing blood. I trembled, lost to the feeling of his tongue dragging down my neck, growling as he claimed me.

“You were perfect tonight,” he rasped. “Every monster in that hall wanted you. It took everything in me not to tear their throats out.”

I whimpered, clutching his shoulders. He fucked me, hot spurts of cum filling me before he even orgasmed. I gasped—nearly overwhelmed—but I didn’t stop him.

I didn’t want him to stop.

“Draxus,” I whispered, reaching down to stroke the part of his tail still wrapped around my thigh as he slammed its barbed tip into the wall beside us. I wrapped my fingers around a spike, and he shuddered.

“Careful, sweetness,” he growled. “You don’t know what you’re playing with.”

But I did. And I wanted to play more.

His claws tightened. His cock pulsed, spurting more of his heat into me.

“Draxus,” I moaned. The heat spread, igniting me.

“You’re mine, Elowen,” he snarled. “Say it again.”

“I’m yours,” I gasped as he drove deeper, my body yielding, the pain and stretch giving way to mind-numbing pleasure.

He kept going—thrusting harder—until I felt myself unraveling.

“Draxus, please,” I begged. “I need?—”

“I know what you need,” he growled. He pulled out, spun me around, and pressed me to the wall.

Then he thrust back in.

I cried out, nails clawing at the stone as he moved, each stroke deeper, more punishing, more perfect.

“Gods, Draxus,” I moaned, surrendering.

He growled and fucked me harder. My walls clamped down, pleasure erupting inside me.

“Come for me, Elowen,” he ordered.

And I did, as if he commanded it. My body convulsed, waves of pleasure crashing over me as I came, my nails scraping down the wall before one hand landed on our connection. I flicked my clit a couple of times before I circled my palm lightly around his cock, feeling the slippery skin pistoning through my fist then into my swollen pussy.

Cum oozed between my fingers. Unable to stop myself, I brought my hand to my lips, sucking my fingers into my mouth. A tingling sensation spread over my tongue and traveled quickly to my pussy.

I groaned with desire, looking over my shoulder at my monster, licking his spicy, cinnamon taste from my lips. Draxus let out a roar, his hips slamming into mine as he followed me over the edge, his hot, glowing seed over-filling me and sliding down my legs, pooling between my feet.

Still, he didn't stop. He kept moving, slower now but just as intense, his cock throbbing with release.

“You're mine,” he said again, voice like gravel and fire. “And I'll never let you go.”

“Yes,” I breathed. “I am.”

EPILOGUE

QUEEN ELOWEN

It had been a year since I became mated to my beast.

The air was thick with the familiar warmth of the castle that had become my home. I loved the molten veins in the black stone—surrounding me above, beneath, all around.

They cast their glow as I wandered the halls, one hand resting on my swollen belly, fingers tracing gentle circles over the taut skin where our child shifted and kicked.

I smiled, feeling the strength of the little life within me—half human, half Draxus.

I paused before the twin tapestries hanging in the grand hall. Their threads caught the firelight, making the scenes appear almost alive.

I stared at the first—my father's sigil. The emblem of the life I left behind. Of cruelty and control. It was torn now, its edges scorched and blackened by flame.

Draxus had ripped it from my father's throne room after his forces burned the castle to the ground. He fought every man who tried to defend their wicked ways.

None survived.

The second tapestry had belonged to the man I was once betrothed to. It too was

shredded, its center marred, threads loose and burned.

They now hung side by side. Trophies. Warnings.

Draxus had brought them to me, eyes blazing with pride and possessiveness. He'd said nothing as they were hung in this hall. We'd stood together and watched.

He hadn't destroyed those kingdoms for power.

He did it for me.

In this dark, twisted world of monsters... I was the most important thing in his universe.

I felt a sharp kick against my ribs and smiled down at my belly. "Our little heir is strong," I whispered. "Just like his father."

I walked on, breathing in the smoky warmth of the only place that ever truly felt like mine.

Draxus ruled the dark realm of Bone Ash with fire and fury. His enemies were dust. His name was whispered in terror.

And he was mine.

Those who hurt me would never touch me again.

As I walked the halls, my crown heavy on my head, our child growing within me, I knew one truth.

I was Queen of Bone Ash.

I was mated to Draxus.

And nothing would ever change that.