



My Blood Is Yours (The Summoning #1)

Author: Chiara Forestieri

Category: Dark Erotica

Description: This novella features explicit *spicy* content and is intended for audiences 18+ only.

“Look at what you do to me, Elowen. No one holds a candle to you. Even in this hellish place, you bring me to heights I’ve never known.”

A glistening bead of sweat trails between the gloriously sculpted plains of his chest as he gifts me a crooked grin.

“You are the embodiment of perfection, Elowen.”

A grin curls my lips as my gaze holds his and my hands wrap around him.

“Such a good boy.”

The Summoning (sum-mon-ning) A pivotal life event experienced by all daemon males or dominants when they and their soulbound come of age. This Summoning urges them—mind, body, and spirit—to unite. Intense side effects may include, but are not limited to: heightened emotions, uncontrollable arousal, dizziness, dream walking, an increase in fluids, and an insatiable thirst and hunger for their soulbound in a variety of intimate ways that cannot be listed here (please reference the book). Some effects may be painful.

Sariel

Born in Hell, I have waited millennia for my soulbound. Now, after crossing realms to find her, the only things standing in my way are a mad doctor, a dungeon cell, and magic-suppressing shackles. Anyone who enters my cell puts their life in my merciless hands.

That is until Elowen—a delicate human female—is assigned to my care. I would know even by scent alone that she belongs to me. The moment I break free of these manacles, I will rightfully claim her as mine.

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:48 am

GLOSSARY

Aether

The place between time and space where we are able to will objects to and fro.

Akash

(ah—kahsh)

The divine essence of the world that births, permeates, and destroys all things.

Archdaemon/Archdaemoness

(arch—demon/arch-demoness)

Essentially, the rulers over daemon-kind

Infernum

(in-fer-noom)

The visible veins of magic running through a daemon's body.

Majori

(mah-jor-ree)

A magic wielder with substantial powers

Mana Siphon

(mah-nah sy-fun)

A magical device used to withdraw and store someone's magic to potentially be harnessed later by another.

Minori

(mih-nor-ree)

A magic wielder with 'lesser' powers

Sanguinati

(sang — gwee—nah—tee)

An immortal being sustained by blood similar to the traditional 'vampire' but is not hindered by sunlight, is not allergic to silver, and will not die by a simple wooden stake to the heart.

Wielder

Any individual or entity capable of wielding magic.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:48 am

PROLOGUE

SARIEL

Vassileo | One Year Ago

Theriel grins wide, fangs gleaming—a rare sight, considering his stoic nature. The blade of my sword grazes the flesh of his abdomen. Black blood weeps, and in my fleeting victory, he takes me by surprise. In the next moment, his body slams into mine. He pins me down with a forearm to my throat, forcing me to drop my sword in favor of preventing a crushed larynx.

“Asshole. I had you.”

His smile stretches wider. “Yes, but then you let your guard down the second you saw my blood.”

My claws dig into the flesh of his forearm as I grind my teeth against his tremendous weight. I am a large male—even by daemon standards—and yet my older brother is even larger, eight feet to my seven and a half.

A bead of sweat drips from his forehead and directly into my mouth. Gagging, my brother gives a gravelly baritone laugh as he fights to keep his mounted position over me.

Twisting my head, I spit out a mouthful of blood, saliva, and his sweat onto the sparring mats. “Gods, you’re disgusting.”

This only makes Theriel's laughter rumble all the harder until his muscles give in to it, and he rolls over. His words are spoken on a wheeze. "You should see your face."

His laughter is contagious. I sit up, propping an arm on one knee, as I cough-laugh, rubbing my bruised throat and spitting another mouthful for good measure, trying to rid myself of the phantom taste of his sweat.

"Hilarious, I'm sure. Maybe I'll get Xera to add a little something special to your dinner tonight. You know she favors me."

Xera is the head cook in my family's palace. A young, buxom daemoness, and as sweet as she is, she's a heavy smoker and seems entirely unconcerned with oral hygiene.

Theriel's laughter ceases, jaw dropping. "You wouldn't dare."

I've always been the more playful of us, quicker to laugh and make light of things. Mischief twinkles in my eyes as I momentarily don a mask of confusion. "Dare to what? You've been working so hard in your archdaemon training. Surely you deserve some modicum of reward. Like a little extra... sauce."

Theriel's mouth curves downward in horror. "You're diabolical."

My laughter rumbles through my feigned indignation. "Brother, I am the very picture of innocence. I am but a lamb—a babe in this barbaric world."

Theriel chuckles, rubbing at his chest in a way that catches my eye. "Ah, right. An innocent babe who put chilli pepper seeds in my hair conditioner when he was only ten."

My head tips back with laughter. "I'd nearly forgotten."

Theriel winces. “I haven’t. Nearly burned my dick off.”

My laughter halts in confusion. “Wait, what?”

My brother shakes his head at me as his laughter wheezes out of him. “Haven’t been able to jerk off with conditioner since.”

My laughter roars out of me. “You never told me that!”

Tears leak from his eyes. “You were ten! How could I?!”

The floor beneath us shudders, waning our laughter. The rumbling beneath us grows in intensity until the walls, weapons racks, and decor tremble.

“Fuck, you think that could be from another riot?”

The riots in Vassileo are a constant threat, and as of late, they’ve grown increasingly worse—ever since the arrival of a female I can only assume is Azrael’s consort, though no one knows for sure.

Theriel’s brows pinch, shaking his head. “A riot can’t cause the whole realm to quake.”

Screams sound in the distance of the palace, setting our feet in motion as we sprint out of the sparring rooms. Tinkling fills the air as the chandeliers and fragile decor dance until they shatter. Paintings crash to the ground as cracks splinter up the walls. We’re both racing towards my father and mother’s study, two floors down, where they spend much of their time.

When we reach the staircase, we see it’s already been cracked in half, and servants are pouring out of the palace for safety. At the base of the broken landing, my father,

Charon, and mother, Monette, collide, both whirling to frantically scan the vicinity for us. A whoosh of relief leaves me as Theriel and I spread our wings to dive towards the front doors the moment our parents do.

The palace staff are already spread across the front gardens, each one doing their own headcount to ensure everyone is here. Though it doesn't look that much safer out here than it does inside. Crevices spiderweb beyond the horizon, growing wider with each passing moment as new ones form.

My mother's voice is breathy both awe and horror as she clutches the front of her dress. "Akash almighty, what is this?"

Theriel steps up to her, checking her hands.

"The mundrapedra. Where is it?"

Mundrapedra. World Stone.

Her jaw drops. It's our most precious family heirloom, invaluable in its worth because it's what enables us to reach our soulbound mates—no matter what realm they're in when we experience the Summoning.

The Summoning is what all daemon males or dominants experience when their soulbound comes of age, which varies—some at twenty years, others at a hundred or more. When soulbounds unite through vow and consummation, their magic strengthens exponentially. Without the mundrapedra, finding one's soulbound becomes far more difficult, often requiring the aid of seers and mages—though success is never guaranteed.

Sometimes, fate allows soulbounds to meet naturally. But when a Summoning goes unfulfilled, a daemon loses part of their soul and mind, becoming one of the broken

who tarnish daemonkind's name. And ultimately, the mundrapedra is likely what secured my family's rule as the archdaemons of Vassileo.

My father's expression hardens as he draws my mother against his chest. "It's in the safe in our closet, as it always is. Leave it. We can search for it in the rubble."

Theriel's expression turns pained as he rubs at the centre of his chest, brows knit together. He shakes his head, tossing his thick horns from side to side.

Gods, has he been Summoned?

My mother steps forward, grasping his shoulders, my father her perpetual shadow. "Darling, please. What good is the mundrapedra if you're dead? Please, just wait until this subsides."

As if to punctuate her words, the soil beneath our feet heaves, sending many of us tumbling to the ground. Fifty feet away, a fissure bursts wide and several palace staff are swallowed by it. My father scoops my mother off the ground and takes flight to hover above it as he barks at the staff to follow suit.

Theriel and I hover in front of our parents, watching in horror as the quaking increases—and what lays beyond the chasms it forms comes into view: clear skies and the lush, verdant forest of another world.

My father can clearly see the determination written all over Theriel's face. "Don't you dare go in there!"

"How else then? How else will I find her? And how else will we maintain the throne?"

My father's expression contorts with fury. "If I have to choose between you and a

throne, I will choose you every fucking time! Don't you dare risk your life for that fucking rock! You can search the?—”

“There won't be any rubble to search!”

Theriel, and our parents look to me—ever the calm middle man in our family arguments. I can feel their determination for me to side, as if my decision will decide the future.

I want the mundrapedra too. I need to be able to find my own mate. It's an easy choice for my parents because they've already found one another, thanks to the priceless heirloom.

My eyes dance between the three of them as the world around us is gradually swallowed, bite by bite, in an apocalypse.

Finally, my eyes settle on Theriel. “I'll go with you.”

Without hesitation, Theriel turns and soars toward the palace, miraculously still standing. I swoop to follow close behind.

We barely make it inside before the palace begins to collapse. Dodging falling walls, pillars, and chandeliers, we reach our parents' bedroom closet, where the safe remains untouched. Theriel quickly works the tumbler until it clicks open, and the thick metal door swings open. He sifts through my family's treasures, pocketing my mother's favorites and tossing others away whilst searching for the mundrapedra.

Seconds tick by, each one lowering the guillotine closer to our necks as the palace gives another shudder and booms with finality. Theriel's voice is sharp.

“Where the fuck is it?”

The world tilts. We slam into a wardrobe as the rest of the safe's contents spill—everything vanishing into a gaping fracture in the floor. Everything except for the mundrapedra, which rolls into a corner. In the gaping fissure, the palace floor and wall are gone, replaced by a jagged opening into another realm. But this one is wholly different from the alluring forest we'd seen in the cracks outside. This is something darker—yet glittering with city lights. In place of a majestic forest, towering metal and glass structures piercing the sky. I can hear the distant rhythmic thumping of music.

The closet door swings open, slamming into the wall as the world turns yet again, and gravity yanks us toward the glittering chasm. My wings beat wildly, slamming against falling wardrobes and drawers. I manage to grab the door handle with one hand, Theriel's wrist with the other. He flaps desperately, but the unseen force drags us down.

Theriel's dark lilac eyes meet mine—wide with an emotion I've never witnessed in him—fear. His grip begins to slip. And so does mine. Realizing this, Theriel's fingers loosen around my wrist. “No, what're you doing?!”

“If I don't let go, we both fall!”

His eyes shift to the corner, where the mundrapedra sits—too far away for either of us to reach.

“You'll find me! I trust you!”

“What?! There are infinite realms! What if I can't?!”

“You will.”

“What if you're wrong?!”

The corner of his mouth tips up in a grin just before he releases his hold on me entirely, and he disappears into the black sky of a world I've never known.

“Little brother, I am never wrong.”

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:48 am

ELOWEN

Magda narrows her crinkled eyes at me from where she sits on the other side of a wood crate draped in a grubby patchwork quilt, cluttered with crystals, incense, and oracle cards. I've known Magda since I was a child. Though we've never been close, we have a shared history of living on the streets of London—until my now-deceased mother managed to get a job as a house servant for a wealthy widow when I was an adolescent.

“You’ve been havin’ reoccurin’ dreams about what now?”

Though we sit alone in Magda’s gypsy tent, I glance around nervously, embarrassment flaming my cheeks. On an exhale, I lower my voice to a whisper.

“You know... like a man with horns and bat-like wings. ”

Her bushy brows leap towards her silvery hairline, though her reply sounds as casual as someone inquiring about a loaf of bread.

“So, a daemon?”

My fingers twist anxiously in the fabric of my plain dress. “He doesn’t feel like a daemon. Certainly not a malevolent one. He’s... tender and loving.”

Magda gives me a knowing look. With lips carved through with smoker’s lines, a saucy grin curls at one corner. Her thick Irish accent further emphasizes the implication of her reply. “Tender, eh?”

I purse my lips, trying to hide my grin. “Quite.”

She waggles her fluffy brows at me.

“Well, then. I’ll need every last detail... for science. ”

My jaw pops open wide enough to tempt a priest, but it only makes Magda grin all the wider.

“That good, eh?”

My jaw slams shut before I manage to splutter a response. “Well, I—I wouldn’t wish to offend you, Lady Magda?—”

Magda gives a hoarse bark of laughter.

“Girl, I can guarantee that whatever offensive acts yer committin’ with bat boy in yer dreams aren’t even half as bad— or as good —as the ones I’ve done in real life.”

I clear my throat, tucking an errant strand of hair behind my ear. “I suppose it can’t hurt to give a few?—”

“Every last one.”

“— details if you think it’ll help discern the root cause of... what’s going on.”

She somehow manages to swiftly roll her own cigarette without even breaking my stare as I gather my thoughts.

“Well, usually, the dreams start out in a palace?—”

Magda chuckles, lighting her cigarette. “Ooooh, fancy pants, are we?”

“—but sometimes end in another, more modest but still beautiful home.”

“Well, well, well. You’ve really moved up in the world, haven’t yeh?”

My throat works around a lump of guilt. Even though I’d only been twelve or thirteen, when my mother and I had managed to escape the streets thanks to becoming a housemaid, I’d always felt mildly ashamed at leaving everyone I’d grown up with behind to continue living in squalor. Magda smirks at me as if the sentiment is tattooed on my face though there’s no resentment in it, and I’m relieved when she changes the subject.

“Any particular aspects that catch your eye about these places?”

“Just that the decor seems... odd.”

She quirks a brow. “Odd in what way?”

“Nothing like I’ve ever seen here. It doesn’t seem entirely earthly. ”

Blowing out a plume of smoke, she waits for me to continue.

“Go on.”

“And we just talk and get to know one another for a while, though I can never quite remember about what, but I do recall he is very tactile.”

Magda’s brow arches. “Define tactile.”

“There’s lots of kissing, nipping, grazing, holding, petting, caressing—all the things.

As a preface to our love-making.”

Magda rolls her eyes as if she’s thoroughly disappointed.

“Jaysus, don’t tell me he’s like that polished turd, Mr Darcy, from Whatsheface’s novel.”

My gasp is slightly more dramatic than I’d intended as I clutch my non-existent pearls. “I loved Pride and Prejudice.”

Magda scoffs. “ ‘Course ya did. You’ve yet to have a proper man fuck yew til yer seein’ stars. Then you’ll be sayin’ Darcy fuckin’ who?! Anyway, back to yer man with the horns. He gotta big cock on ‘im?”

My head tips back with laughter. “Nearly the size of my forearm and has a…”

I gesture a little helplessly unsure of how to describe it.

“It has a bulge at the end of it.”

Magda gives me a confused look. “Which end? The cockhead end or the base end?”

More laughter bubbles out of me at the ridiculous image.

“At the base end… And it has these glowing markings on it.”

Magda’s brows shoot skyward. “Glowing markings?! Like a magical tattoo er sumthin?”

I nod, chewing my cheek with giddiness. I’ve never gotten a chance to speak with anyone about this before and it’s thoroughly exhilarating.

Lady Magda shakes her head as if in awe. “I’d pay good money to see a magical cock like that.”

My cackle would make any witch proud. “Maybe I’ll paint you a picture of it one day.”

Her face lights up so bright you’d think I’d have handed her a brick of gold as she barks another raspy laugh. “Girl, I’ll love ya ferever if ya do.”

Magda laughs her delight as her feet stomp a little excited jig from where she sits. “And the rest?”

I lean forward, speaking in a hushed tone. “Well, there’s always lots of foreplay, and he makes me achieve orgasm at least a few times before he finally joins me. And then there’s... well... lots of fluid.”

“Fluid as in his semen or d’yamean like some kinda magical potion?”

My laughter renews. “His semen!”

Magda grows thoughtful, taking a long drag of her cigarette. “HMMMM. But what’s his disposition like? Is he quite passionate and intense? Or soft and gentle like the polished turd?”

Chuckling again, I heave a fool’s sigh as my heart flutters just thinking of him. “Both? He can be rough and demanding but also tender and loving. He’s the best of both worlds.”

Magda’s brows pinch with emotion as a softer smile than I’ve ever seen her wear dances across her face.

“Awe... that’s beautiful. So yer sayin’ he fucks yeh and makes love to yeh.”

Tears well in my eyes. “Yes.”

She gives a wistful sigh as she picks up a deck of oracle cards and begins to shuffle.
“Well, let’s see what the future has in store fer ya, love.”

I swipe at my eyes, smiling. “You don’t think I’m insane?”

Magda’s eyes lift from her cards to mine, donning an admonishing look.

“Girl, I can tell ya right now, I’ve seen far more far-fetched things than a man wit’ horns and wings. Yew’d be surprised to discover the creatures hauntin’ these streets—many of them not nearly as human as yew might think.”

My mind wanders to Forsythe, the Master I’ve worked for the last decade, and her words aren’t at all that hard to believe.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:48 am

ELOWEN

TERRENEA | A FEW DAYS LATER

The Lovers, Ace of Pentacles, Wheel of Fortune, and Knight of Cups. Essentially, Lady Magda's reading had foretold love, wealth, and prosperity. I heave a sigh, trying to shove away the doubt and anxiety weaselling its way into my mind. As they always do. I seem to go through this never-ending cycle of knowing: when I wake up, I can still feel his touch. His breath upon my neck. His claws digging gently into my flesh. I can hear the echo of his words and feel every ounce of love that radiates from him; that my dreams, or the male starring in them, are not merely the stuff of fantasy. But when the harsh reality of this world, and his obvious and painful absence settle in... doubt trickles through the cracks.

It's been a few days since I've dreamt of him now, and I feel as though my heart and soul are beginning to wilt like a plucked flower.

And it's then that the fear that I have inherited my mother's condition becomes a crushing weight upon my chest, combined with the guilt that I have no other word to describe it. She was a gentle soul tortured by unseen worlds. Lunacy, as I'd often heard others refer to it as. But it was a word that never sat right with me. Not that condition was much better.

The pitter-patter of rain tickles the single-pane windows of Forsythe's study as I enter with a silver tray of tea. Dr. Cedric Forsythe is a highly esteemed professor at the Eldridge Conservatory of Medicine. A handsome and usually soft-spoken man—if not a little mad. Pouring over mountains of documents and scribbled notes, he hardly

notices my presence, tugging at his wild, thick dark hair, streaked with shocks of silver that match his moustache and goatee.

My eyes steal a glance at the handwritten document he's hunched over and catch on a sketch of what appears to be a wolf-man standing on his hind legs. Harshly scribbled notes lie beneath and I try to sneak as much information as I can before he reprimands me.

The Lykanthropic Factor

... a cryptic genetic sequence embedded within the host's chromosomal structure... not solely dependent on direct inheritance from both progenitors but is influenced by a broader interplay of genetic predisposition and external variables...

... Possesses a stochastic nature of its expression: a singular afflicted ancestor may transmit the factor across generations without predictable patterns, lying dormant for decades before reemerging... May be subject to epigenetic regulation... triggering phenotypic transformation...

Miraculously, he still hasn't noticed me as I hover and try to decipher a whole load of other information that rises beyond my limited scientific comprehension—desperately wishing that, for once, I would find something that spoke of a daemon-like being. I never do.

“My lord,” I murmur quietly so as not to startle him. He doesn't look up from his work as a hand slides to the tray to lift a cup of tea to his lips, blowing gently at the curling steam before imbibing. Again, I'm desperate to feel the solid touch of a man to help me feel not so alone. Or not so deranged, as anyone other than Magda would think if I confessed the nature of my reoccurring dreams.

Finally, it is apparent that I've lingered too long because his gaze lifts to mine, brows

furrowing. “Is there something else, Elowen?”

My throat works on a rough swallow, heart pounding beneath his penetrative gaze. I open my mouth to speak as crimson blossoms on my cheeks. I must be ovulating, because my body feels even more demanding than usual. His nostrils flare slightly as his brown eyes seem to darken. “You require my touch again? Already?”

I manage a timid nod. “Yes, please.”

He quirks a brow. ““Yes, please, ‘what?’”

“Yes, please, master.”

His lips purse. “I will require something of yours in return. A sample of your blood.”

My lips part as arousal blooms further. I’m not certain why the idea thrills me. It shouldn’t, but for some reason, the thought of him taking such an integral part of me—for whatever reason—makes me slick between my thighs. Forsythe is the only male I’ve ever been intimate with.

In this day and age, I am little more than a thirty-year-old spinster and servant. I was a virgin until Forsythe hired me, and as the years passed and it became clear that I would not marry, I chose to seek out pleasure for myself for once.

“Gladly, my lord. Take whatever you desire.”

Forsythe stands, unbuttoning his waistcoat as he nods at a clear space on his otherwise messy desk. “Lie down.”

His eyes flare with annoyance as I hesitate, instead taking my time to unbutton the front of my dress until my breasts spill out atop the corset. Forsythe proceeds to

remove his shirt and trousers, lest they become soiled or wrinkled—he's rather obsessive when it comes to personal hygiene. I imagine if I hadn't been a virgin, he would have never been receptive to my wanton pursuit of him. Thank fuck I was; otherwise, this would be an even more lonely and frustrating existence.

Forsythe removes a dropper bottle from the top drawer of his desk—a tonic of his own creation to prevent pregnancy. His knuckles are whitened where he clutches it in his hand as his eyes lock on to the tightening peaks of my breasts, now tender and aching for his ministrations—ministrations that never come. He rarely touches me with anything more than his cock. Finally, I lie back on his desk and hike my dress up as I bring my knees to either side of my waist to reveal just how slick I am.

Forsythe, now standing in only his socks, openly stares between my splayed thighs—where he insists I keep myself thoroughly groomed. He procured a wax from France for me to do so. As painful as it is, I much prefer it, sometimes leaving a teasing strip of hair, other times making myself entirely unobscured by my otherwise thick, dark hair. He also keeps himself well-groomed, and while I haven't experienced another man, I know that a groomed male is my preference.

Forsythe stares down at the glistening core of me, cursing under his breath. It makes me feel as though I possess some arcane power to control his body as I watch his cock defy gravity, his body shift into something more—trembling with restraint.

“Please, doctor.”

Forsythe's eyes leap to mine; something unnatural seems to loom behind his dark eyes. He almost looks like a different man now. Larger. More animalistic. The canines in his mouth are notably longer. I know that my master is different from the rest of us, though I'm unsure how. Logic would lead me to believe he is in some way related to all the various creatures he studies in secret when he isn't teaching or in surgery.

For the most part, he is a man of control, but in heightened moments—such as now—he struggles to restrain himself. His previously toned but slender form now bulges with muscle. I relish in it because it reminds me so very much of the male in my dreams.

I watch with held breath as Forsythe's hand takes on a slight tremor, lifting the dropper from the bottle and brings it to my mouth. I obediently offer him the flat of my tongue. The concoction is as bitter as it is sweet, but I've grown used to it now.

The desk drawer slams abruptly when he returns the bottle to its home. Unable to wait any longer, I begin circling my throbbing clit with my index finger as Forsythe lines himself up with me. Claws that weren't previously there prick my thighs, where he takes a vicious grip to hold my body still against his soon-to-be punishing thrusts. The head of his cock breaches my entrance. I feel him grow further—previously rather average-sized, I imagine—but in his aroused state, it grows larger to what I estimate is a thick six or seven inches.

He thrusts forward, drawing a sharp whimper from me that seems to spur him on. My eyes slip shut as he withdraws to the tip before sliding forward once more to repeat the action over and over until he finds his rhythm. Forsythe's eyes remain fixed on where we are joined, and I allow my eyes to slip shut and visualize the hulking silhouette of an entirely different male.

Endowed with horns, wings, and a tail, he is something I've only ever seen in fairytales or described in religious texts. Each time I snoop around Forsythe's study, trying to find hints of a being with such features, I find nothing. Try as I might, the creatures in his documents, fascinating as they may be, have no such endowments.

In my dreams, though I can scarcely recall the minute details of his visage, he is still so visceral, so real that when I wake up, I can still feel a phantom of his touch. Hear his voice. It's only as the day goes on and my logical mind berates me with

undefiable logic that doubt trickles in—making me wonder if I am truly as mad as my mother once was—only for that doubt to be eradicated when I return to my dreams.

My index and middle fingers work faster as that delicious coiling energy begins to rise through my body. Each one of my muscles tightens, and I swear I can hear an echo of the promise given by the male in my dreams. “Soon, mea floarea.”

Forsythe’s thrusts become frantic. My back arches, and my legs spread further as my climax reaches its peak. Grunting, Forsythe's thrusts stutter before swiftly withdrawing to aim his cock into the petite trash bin beneath his desk.

Though the ache in my body is somewhat relieved, the ache in my chest only spreads further. Ever just the two of us, Dr. Cedric Forsythe has been fair to me, but there is no love there. And without it—or the horned and winged male in my dreams—I feel my soul withering like an unwatered, long-forgotten plant on a dusty windowsill.

The sensation lingers the entire day and as night finally claims its victory in the sky, I undress alone in my bedroom to prepare for my nightly bath. Pressing a kiss to my fingers, I then touch them gently to the small portrait of my mother—rose bud lips, heart-shaped face, dark eyes like mine, and her port-wine birthmark on display. Something she never felt the need to hide, no matter who said otherwise.

Removing my mother’s silver and heart-shaped ruby pendant necklace—one of the few items of hers I possess, and undoubtedly her most valuable—I thumb the silver engraving on its back longingly.

Where my heart belongs. Right beside yours.

I never met my father. He passed before I was born, but I envy the love he and my mother had, nonetheless.

SARIEL

ATRATUS

“A ny luck today?”

Book in hand, my father glances down at me from the bridge of his glasses. Take away the book, spectacles, newly procured and finely tailored clothing—you’d think he were a daemon come to torture your soul. Lethal horns pierce the air above his head, and between that, his leathery wings, spaded tail, and midnight skin, he looks like one of the creatures found in Terrenean fairytales. And despite my mother’s Sanguinati genes, I’m the spitting image of him.

The only considerable differences are my slightly paler skin—dark grey—and my infernum—the visible veins of magic marking my body. While mine are gold, in geometric and celestial patterns, my father’s are red and whorling.

My parents and I have searched tirelessly for a realm that matches the one my brother fell into. We spent much of what treasures we’d managed to salvage from the rubble of our palace on seers and mages to help us find him after we willingly stepped through one of the gaping portals into Atratus.

“No. Not yet, but I did read about some kind of enchanted ear that allows you to communicate across realms through telepathy.”

My brows leap. It’s been a year of searching, and even my faith—despite my usual sense of fatal optimism—is beginning to wane.

“An actual ear? Does it say whose?”

My father shakes his head. “Some god I’ve never heard of.”

That is... mildly fascinating. “Did it grow back?”

He shrugs, returning to his book.

While my parents have made it clear to me that they don’t blame me, I can’t help the gnawing guilt in my gut, regardless. However, as of late, a slightly more urgent matter has stifled that guilt and replaced it with the demand of the Summoning.

“I need to use the mundrapedra.”

My father’s eyes remain fixed on his book, his voice bored. “No.”

My jaw works in frustration—both at my father and the building physical agony that is the symptom of trying to ignore the Summoning.

“You don’t understand. I cannot keep ignoring it. ”

He still doesn’t meet my gaze, but I can see his mouth press into a hard line. “I won’t lose another son to that blasted ring again.”

At yet another denial, I feel the weight of the last three months upon me. The sole reason I haven’t ignored my father’s denial and tried to borrow the ring from them is out of guilt. My parents have already lost one son—something I am at least in part to blame for—when he slipped through the cracks to Akash- only-knows-where after our home realm, Vassileo, was split open by a goddess, the Queen of Atratus.

A deep grunt escapes me as my too-large body drops onto one of my mother’s chaise

longues, and I throw an arm over my eyes. The settee groans beneath my weight, a plea for me to get off of it. “You wouldn’t be losing me because I have the mundrapedra. I’ll be able to come back.”

The book in my father’s hand slams shut before he slides it back onto the bookshelf. “And what will you do when all the humans see your horns, wings, tail, stone-colored skin, hm? When they run in terror from you?”

“I can wear a glamour.”

“What if you can’t convince her to come back with you? What if you have to stay there until you can? What will you do while you sleep? You don’t have the magic to maintain a glamour when you’re unconscious. What if someone finds you?”

“I can come back here to sleep. No harm done.”

My father gives me a look like I’m an idiot for even daring to say something so ridiculous. We both know once I find her, I won’t be without her—even if it is just to sleep.

Hopefully, there won’t be any sleeping, and she’ll feel the Summoning as strongly as I do—and I’ll be buried up to my knot in her pretty pink cunt I’ve been dreaming about for the last three months.

With a long-suffering sigh, my father shakes his head, not even bothering to argue. Silence ensues for so long that when I move my arm and open my eyes, I’m startled to find him standing in front of me. The male moves like a fucking cat. “Akash almighty. Can’t you walk louder?”

“It is not worth the risk.”

“You do realize how hypocritical that is don’t you? If it weren’t for that ring, you and my mother would never have met.”

His scowl deepens. “If you’d been to Terrenea, you’d understand. It may be filled with humans, but they are as barbaric as they are clever.”

“So what, I’m just supposed to ignore the Summoning?”

“There are plenty of humans here in Atratus. Maybe she’s here.”

She’s not. The world I saw was nothing but humans, but I don’t need to remind him of what I’ve already said.

“Great, then the mundrapedra won’t have to take me very far.”

My father frowns.

“Are you even ready to take on the responsibility of having a mate and all that would follow? Are you ready to ascend to archdaemon? Begin breeding little hellions of your own? You know that’s what would be expected of you.”

I would love nothing more than to have a mate and fill her belly with our young. Ascending to archdaemon, however, is a responsibility I do not want. Theriel was supposed to assume that role.

“... It’s not like as soon as I have a mate, you would have to step down from the throne.”

The frown before me deepens into a scowl.

“Tell me how old I am.”

Sympathy strikes a chord within me. I would not wish for the burden of responsibility at his age. His brows lift, urging me on.

“Tell me, Sarel.”

Expelling a heavy breath, I reply. “Eight hundred sixty-four.”

He shakes his head, eyes fixing to some distant point as his voice softens. “ Akash almighty, that’s even older than I thought.”

His gaze eventually slides back to mine. “Just... promise me in a few years, you’ll consider it.”

My throat works on a rough swallow. “Okay.”

With a nod, he attempts a hopeful smile. “Do you think she’ll be receptive to the shift?”

Anxiety spreads through my gut like poison in water. When a daemon consummates the bond with his soulbound through sex and a claiming bite, if they are mortal or a minori— those with little to no magic, and thus, shorter lifespans—they become part daemon. They won’t suddenly sprout wings, but there will be some shift in appearance: growing fangs, pointed ears, perhaps even horns and claws. Their lifespan will match that of their soulbound— and will potentially live thousands of years. It also means that if their soulbound is killed or dies, so will they.

What’s just as daunting is that they will also need to consume blood on a fairly regular basis in order to sustain their magic and life force. They will also gain some portion of the magical potential their mate has, usually abilities that will compliment their soulbound.

“Who knows. I would imagine so, but she’s a human from Terrenea. I imagine what little she’s heard or seen of us has been reduced to the obscure and grossly exaggerated references made in fairytales or religion.”

My father nods in understanding. “Do not fear, my son. She is your soulbound. Akash would not have coupled you with a mate who will reject you.”

It’s happened before. Though I don’t dare speak the words aloud, my heart squeezes in empathy for the poor souls who have suffered such a fate. Like Azrael.

As if he can read my mind, my father’s solemn gaze returns to mine.

“Did I ever tell you what Azrael said when he gifted the mundrapedra to your great-great-grandmother?”

“Perhaps, but too long ago to remember.”

“That you create a karmic debt by manipulating the universe in such a way that you were not born with.”

“What? Why would he even give it to us then?”

“He said, ‘No matter the debt, there are some things worth suffering for, and there is no greater suffering than to live a lifetime without one’s soulbound.’”

My face scrunches up in disbelief. “You’ve literally just proven my point.”

“Yes... I just thought I should make you aware of the potential consequences.”

Fearful hope sparks to life in my chest as my father’s expression softens, his black eyes filled with tenderness and love that would otherwise contradict his fearsome

form.

“My darling boy...”

I am nearly a century old, but I don’t bother to correct him—eternally grateful for the fact that I couldn’t possibly have had more loving parents.

“For aeons, there have been countless others who found their soulbound without the mundrapedra. I used it to find your mother, and now I have lost a son. Perhaps that is the balance of life. Do not forsake the magic of the universe by trying to force your limited perceptions upon it. Just because you don’t see how it’s possible doesn’t mean that it is impossible.”

No matter how true his words, the demand of the Summoning is unignorable. He studies me for a moment in understanding. He knows me well enough that if he does not give me the mundrapedra himself, I will either find a way to steal it or risk getting mixed up with a mage or seer that could lead me astray.

“Prepare your home for your mate. Return this evening, and your mother and I will give you the mundrapedra and a drop from The Well of Tongues.”

While it doesn’t contain any actual tongues, a single drop of it will endow the one imbibing it with the ability to speak the language of every tongue.

Excitement unfurls inside me with the force of a cracking whip. In the next moment, I’m lunging toward my father to wrap my arms around him in gratitude. His chest tenses beneath mine, and I can clearly hear the rasping emotion rising in his voice. “Just promise me you’ll come home to us.”

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:48 am

SARIEL

As instructed, I have prepared my home for my soulbound, each otherwise mundane task performed with a fervor unlike anything I've experienced before. I even stopped by our former palace's seamstress on the way home to add to the already immense collection of women's clothing I've had her create for my soulbound. The last place I stop is the silversmith's to pick up the ring I commissioned the day after my Summoning began. The ruby and gold-yellow diamonds inside it are infused with my own daemon magic. As I hold it in my hand, I can feel the warmth radiating from it.

If it weren't for the profound, crushing pain in my chest from an ignored Summoning, I'd be roaring with delight at the prospect of uniting with my soulbound for the first time. Instead, my euphoria is stifled by a pain that I can only compare to that of an anvil crushing my chest.

Even so, by the time I arrive home, my cock and knot are heavy with the need to fill my mate. Scalding hot water rains down upon me as I brace myself against the mosaic-tiled wall of my shower and take myself in hand. Fleeting images from my dreams of her fill my mind as I imagine sweeping my cock through the glistening pink petals of her cunt—what I've dreamed of every night since my Summoning began—before pressing into her tight warmth, thrusting steadily in and out of her with increasing depth until I'm finally buried in her welcoming body to the hilt.

My need for her is so great that my fantasy can't keep up with my body. In my mind, I've only just begun, but my hand and cock are leagues ahead. My groan ends on a growl tearing from my throat as my seed spills, splattering the wall in front of me.

My chest heaves, and even though I've just cum, my cock is still hard and demanding. My hand continues to stroke, albeit a little more gently.

Twice more, I stroke myself to completion, and still, it has done nothing to soothe the ache in my chest. It won't do to introduce myself to my mate with a full-blown erection, like some untried, adolescent hellion.

Despite my now swaying vision and the thundering pull in my body to retrieve my mate, I manage to give my horns a polish before replacing their gold adornments—caps, rings, and delicate chains with jewels. Daemon males pride themselves on four things: horns, wings, fangs, and cocks. I'm not too modest to admit that I am well endowed in all of the above, praise Akash. Outside of protecting their family, a dominant's greatest honor is being able to please and provide for their mate in every way.

Nervous butterflies thump around clumsily in my stomach as I rush out the door to my stables to retrieve Pearl. My sweet girl is a pretty thing whilst also being just about the largest horse I've ever seen. Her mane is inky-black, like my own, except it's curled and wavy at the ends, just like the heavy feathering of her hooves, adding an extra touch of femininity.

My skin is crawling with heat, sweat trickles down my nape. I can scarcely breathe; the weight of the Summoning's demand is so great. Before we've even left the barn, I urge her into a gallop. In spite of the pain I'm in, my only thought as we leave my humble cottage in the forest behind us is, 'Will she like our home?'

The answer matters not. If she wishes for a bigger home, I will build her a bigger home. Even if it has to be with my bare hands—considering my family and I lost the majority of our wealth when Vassileo split apart and we fell into this world.

Thankfully, the King and Queen of Atratus have proven benevolent and helped my

family and our people settle comfortably here under the condition we maintain our rule over daemonkind and prevent any further violence or havoc that was wreaked when more than half of Vassileo's population landed here. Though we no longer have a palatial home, I'm more than happy to have my own land, live in my own home—one that I built with many a helping, educated hand. This place has been kind to us. And despite the turmoil it wrought when we'd first arrived, it's a far better place than Vassileo—which is an actual hell realm.

Dizziness has overtaken me by the time we arrive back at my parents' home on the outskirts of the city. I practically tumble off Pearl, barely managing to give her a pat and some oats before I say goodbye. For now.

On silent feet, I tiptoe through their house so as not to wake or startle their staff?—

“Hello, darling.”

The light flicks on to reveal my mother in her long nightgown, my father stands behind her, his hands resting on her shoulders. Her silvery hair hangs in a long sheet at her back. My father brushes it for her every night, without fail, as she reads—something he has done since long before I was even born nearly a hundred years ago. The thought causes the Summoning's ache in my chest to turn white-hot.

At the sight of my pain, they both rush towards me as my mother yanks the ring carrying the Mundrapedra stone off to shove it onto mine. “Akash almighty, you superstitious old fool. We should have given it to him sooner.”

The guilt on my father's face is transparent as she jams the ring on my pinky finger, and the magic of it instantly molds the metal to expand and fit my finger. “Just promise us that you'll come back?”

I nod, feeling the ache alleviate slightly. “Always.”

“Do you remember the words, my love?”

Leaning against the bannister of the stair landing, a tremor works through me, my body feverish even as my skin grows cold. My mother’s hand caresses my jaw, her bright eyes darting back and forth between each of mine as she reaches into her pocket and procures a small, glowing blue vial.

Water from The Well of Tongues. She removes the cork and tips it gently into my mouth. I feel nothing aside from a faint tickling sensation in my brain.

My mother pats my cheek. “Don’t worry. The closer you are to her, the more the pain will ease.”

My heart begins to thump an excited beat as I begin to recite the words that will unite me with my soulbound . Merely saying the Vassileon incantation that activates the mundrapedra provides slight relief. A sharp light bursts from the ring, and before I have a chance to orient myself, the world around me shifts, and I land with a thunderous thump on a hardwood floor.

I roll over, head spinning, to find myself in what appears to be a study. My blood throbs in my ears, and I can barely hear above it. Despite the darkness consuming the room, my keen eyesight—just as comfortable in the dark as I am in the light—I can see the books lining every wall and a mountain of paperwork covering a desk. Not a feminine touch to be found except for...

My nostrils flare as I take in her scent. Slightly floral and soft, like powder. Smothering it is the scent of another male. And his seed . Jealousy roars through me, however illogical, closely followed by fear. It’s entirely possible she knows nothing of me and has found another mate.

My thoughts take a dark turn as I manage to crawl to standing with the help of a

cabinet sitting beneath a large, inlaid bookshelf. Sucking in deep breaths as I brace myself on the edge of the cupboard, my eyes catch on several illustrations of majori. Thanks to my English studies—after I'd researched the Terrenean language I'd heard my soulbound speak in my dreams—I'm able to recognize a few words: fae, powers, blood, etc. but nothing to garner the jist of what I'm reading, aside from the fact it appears to be research.

To my dismay, it seems drinking water from The Well of Tongues only gives you the ability to speak the language, not read it.

My attention shifts to the magic pouring off a few of the artefacts decorating one shelf—particularly because this realm is supposed to be filled with humans who possess little magic. The most significant of which appears to be a small wooden chest covered in a fine layer of dust. Before I can think better of it, I find my hand drifting towards it and lifting its lid. A velvet cushion boasts a petite spinning top of polished wood and intricately engraved metal, with a twinkling crystal at the tip of its handle.

I've never been much for thieving, but whatever male's home this is that my mate is living in... I don't feel any remorse about pocketing something that clearly isn't his. I will the top away for safekeeping and close the lid as I try to quell the jealousy and anger roaring through me at the cursed stench of another male's seed—a lykos, based on the faint musk of fur permeating the air—mingling with that of my soulbound.

Will she hate me if I murder this imposter mate from whom she has sought pleasure?

My vision sways, even as it bleeds red rage, as I drag myself towards a large desk and hover, squeezing my eyes shut to still my spinning equilibrium.

Fuck me, this is no state in which my soulbound should see me.

After a few steadying deep breaths, I turn to search for the door.

Only to find a gun pointed at the center of my forehead. I barely have time to register the moustached and goateed male before me before there's a bright flash and darkness consumes me.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:48 am

ELOWEN

The unmistakable bang of gunfire jolts me from my dream—a blissful one of the male I always dream of. It takes a moment for me to realize that the gunshot occurred inside Dr. Forsythe’s home. Dread sinks in the pit of my stomach as icy-cold fear trickles through my veins. Despite this, I find myself peeling back the bedcovers and quickly sliding my feet into my slippers, beelining for the door. If I had any sense of self-preservation, it would have me crawling out of the tiny window in my room and onto the roof to hide until the police arrived—or until the doctor came searching for me.

Instead, as though tugged by some unseeable force, I find myself wielding the nearest candelabra and padding through the doctor’s dark home. Making my way down the stairs, light spills from Dr. Forsythe’s study into the dark hollow, shadows dancing on the opposite wall. Big shadows.

My heart slams violently against my chest, and I screech in terror as a towering dark figure takes up the space in the doorway.

“What the fuck are you doing?”

While the voice sounds more animal than man, it is still quite obviously Forsythe’s.
“Get me a sheet, woman.”

He turns on his heel, steps thundering back into his study.

Drawing in a deep breath, I exhale my relief—or at least some part of it. There’s a

certain pressure on my chest that seems to demand I go into that room. But I'm not about to ignore my master's command in favor of it, lest I be reintroduced to the back of his hand. Again.

Rushing toward the hallway cupboard, I pull out one of the large cotton sheets stored there before heading into the study, but what greets me once inside has me stopping in my tracks.

Horns...

Wings...

Grey skin...

The male is giant. And easily the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. Something in the depths of my soul recognizes him so viscerally, there is no doubt—this is the male of my dreams. The one that has haunted me for years, like a phantom only I can see, and nearly driving me to madness at his questionable existence.

There's a black spot in the center of his head, and it takes a moment for my mind to accept what my eyes are telling me.

Right in the center of his forehead is a tiny, round hole.

And suddenly, I can't breathe. The pressure in my chest cracks wide open, and I find myself gripping the nearest shelf to stay upright as a sob creeps up my throat. Forsythe's gaze wrenches from the felled male up to mine, a sneer marring his features as he marches towards me and snatches the sheet off the ground from where I've dropped it. "Useless, woman."

Tears spill from my eyes as I bowl over and collapse to my knees. Forsythe's

compassion proves absent—as per usual—as he narrows his eyes at me like I’ve turned into some sort of bug. “Are you mad, woman?”

Whipping the sheet in the air in front of him, Forsythe returns to the male and drapes the sheet over his body. He turns towards his desk, lifting the receiver, and cranks the handle.

“... Connect me to Dr. Thoren Watson of Baker Street...”

Forsythe turns his back on me, one fist propped on his hip as he waits for the operator to connect him. As if driven by some unseen force, I find myself crawling towards the beautiful male hidden beneath the sheet. My tears pepper his dark grey face as I uncover his head. His large black horns are decorated in elegant yet understated gold finery. Two dim gold lines trace across the width of his face, over his high cheekbones, and something intuitively tells me it would glow if he were alive. I feel like my soul has been torn in half.

The tap, tap, tapping of Forsythe’s foot announces his impatience. Sneaking a glance at him to find him still facing the window, my eyes drop back to the dead male as some part of me refuses to believe that he is truly dead. My trembling hand caresses over his still-warm cheek. Without thought or reason, I find myself uttering silent prayers. Please, wake up. Please.

“Ginny, it’s Dr. Forsythe. Put Dr. Watson on the phone at once. It’s an emergency...”

A hissed curse tells me Watson must not be in town. He is a kind man. Though I’ve only ever met him once, that much seemed clear.

“Get your hands off my corpse! Are you deranged?”

I find myself ignoring the doctor as he slams the receiver back down, only to lift it

again and crank the phone once more. I can feel Forsythe's scowl upon me as he waits, and I have to physically force myself to remove my hands before he drags me away from him.

"... Evandriel Vayne of White Chapel Rd..."

Evandriel is not a nice man. He's not even a doctor. He's the Undertaker. I've known him since I was a child, and his presence is just as unsettling now as it was then—a certain darkness seems to loom around his otherwise bright, otherworldly features. Forsythe hires him privately to bring him corpses when his research requires something altogether different from what the morgue usually has to offer.

"Evandriel. I need your discreet assistance with something rather urgent."

"Not a word. Do you understand?" Lightning streaks across the pregnant sky beyond the back door as Forsythe's eyes bounce between mine, filled with both impatience and excitement. The ominous rumble of thunder follows a moment later as my throat works against the emotion swelling in my chest. Something inside me screams not to let them take the so-called daemon away—to let me keep him—but I have no power here. Forsythe would sooner have me committed. Not that he would be wrong in doing so, logically speaking. What in god's name would I do with a corpse? Still, I can't help it as my eyes wander from Forsythe's to the horse-drawn hearse waiting in front of the house.

Where Evandriel waits.

My eyes connect with his—an unnatural shade of pale blue—no doubt brimming with secrets beyond my imagination. His expression is entirely unreadable as he tips the brim of his cloth cap towards me, pipe in hand.

Forsythe slams the door, and I realize then that I've never felt a greater sense of doom

and longing in my entire life.

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:48 am

SARIEL

The scrape of metal on stone stirs me from a deep sleep, followed by an unfamiliar, strangely accented male's voice.

"... He'll be waking up soon. Best keep him drugged until we can reinforce the steel, or he'll rip the iron bars right out of the cell."

The words have adrenaline trickling into my system, gradually lifting the fog clouding my mind and the lethargy weighing down my body slowly lifts as reality settles heavily upon me. My eyelids feel like they've been glued shut as I attempt to open them—only to discover a leaky stone ceiling above me. A steady and slow drip, drip, drip echoes against the walls. I hear two pairs of feet shuffle somewhere in the distance.

Dread and panic, in equal measure, bleed into me. I rise from the hay palette upon which I've been laid, only to find myself encased within three stone walls and another wall of black iron bars. My head spins, and my vision doubles and triples in a way that I can distinctly sense has nothing to do with the Summoning—though it remains an ever-present ache in my chest. By some miracle, I make it to the iron bars, gripping them to keep myself steady.

My skin prickles at the sensation of an oddly familiar yet foreign magic as booted footsteps echo down the hallway. A few moments later, my teeth are bared at a male whose features might vaguely tick all the human boxes, yet I can clearly discern he is very much something other. Despite being a foot shorter than my seven feet five inches, he is just as heavily muscled. His silvery-blue eyes are so pale that, if it

weren't for their eerie, preternatural glow, they look almost entirely white. Even the pupil is oddly pale. White hair hangs in a straight sheet at his back, peppered with a few braids from between which a pair of gilded horns poke out that match his golden-tan skin. Large feathered wings of white and gold are tucked tight against his back.

And if all of that weren't enough to tell me this male is anything but human, the magic rolling off of him in waves certainly would. The only thing about him that is distinctly human are his rounded ears. My eyes dip to his blunt fingertips—another distinctly human feature.

Still, there is no doubt about what at least half of this male's genetic makeup is.

“Seraphi.”

What humans refer to as an angel.

I cannot begin to fathom why he would choose this place over Ourinessa, the place in which his kind are from, a breathtakingly beautiful divine realm parallel to the hell realm in which I was born.

From all my considerable studies on Terrenea—particularly since my dreams harkened the arrival of the Summoning—I read that only humans and animals walk this realm, minus the rare few who visit or seek exile here. Clearly, this male is the product of one such occurrence.

Though it does nothing to better my situation, even if at least half of this male's genetic makeup should implore him toward benevolence, it is clear he has chosen to do the opposite.

He studies me with a hard expression that I cannot mistake for anything but a mixture of awe and disbelief. Admittedly, I am equally surprised to see one of his kind here.

And his words, despite being barely audible, make my fucking skin crawl.

“Do you have any idea how long I’ve been waiting to find you?”

I have nothing to say to that.

He must glamour himself heavily to be able to walk freely amongst a world of humans.

“Where is she?”

The Seraphi’s attention shifts briefly from me to the door at the end of the corridor. A moment later, the hinges of a door whine, followed by the clicking of boot heels, and my nose is filled with the scent of... wolf. In the span of a blink, the Seraphi’s horns, wings, and all other nonhuman features disappear to give the appearance of a human... A strange-looking one, but a human nonetheless.

“Safe.”

The word is pointed like a blade as he holds my gaze in a way that tells me, if I don’t go along with his charade, she’ll be anything but. The clicking of boot heels echo down the hall and it triggers a smile to split the Seraphi’s face. Two white, though less prominent, fangs seem to glitter in the low light.

“My name is Evandriel Vayne. You’re currently in a cellar within the Eldridge Conservatory of Medicine, under the care of Dr Cedric Forsythe.”

As if on cue, the doctor arrives and turns to face my cell. As anticipated, it’s the same male who pointed the gun at my head. He gives me a smile that belies the darkness within him.

“A great pleasure.”

My nostrils flare again at the faintly musky scent of his fur.

Evandriel smiles, fangs glinting. “Lykos,” he confirms.

Wolf-shifter.

The doctor’s eyes shift briefly to Evandriel’s, as if he’d have preferred to keep that bit of knowledge unspoken. Evandriel’s gaze roves over me in a way that tells me the wheels of his mind are spinning with great possibility. It makes my stomach churn with disgust, and my claws extend with the need to tear his throat out.

My hands grip the bar so tightly that the metal groans. The Akash-forsaken doctor steps forward, though he still remains wisely out of reach. “Ah, ah, ah.” He pulls out the tiny gun he attempted to kill me with earlier. “Unless you want me to put yet another hole in your head, I would stop doing that.”

I’m too dizzy to dodge out of the way in time, but it doesn’t stop me from seeking my freedom. The bars in my grasp bend, and one even breaks free from the crumbling stone it’s been hammered into, but before I can move any further, the doctor steps forward, gun aimed, and everything goes black once again.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:48 am

ELOWEN

Nightmares haunted my sleep—what little I managed to steal for myself. I'm stirred by a gentle caress to my cheek. "Good morning, darling..." My skin suddenly crawls at the recognition of Forsythe's voice, now so sweet and opposite to the cruel monster he'd become last night. His moods have always been extreme, and last night was hardly out of form. Not to mention, this man has never called me darling. Before, I'd always turned the other cheek. What was the alternative? Risk his wrath and endure celibacy?

Still, I fail to conceal my repulsion. Forsythe must take offence to my grimace. Whatever mask of tenderness he managed to wear is instantly replaced with something cold.

"Your presence is required."

Forsythe stands and moves towards my wardrobe to begin rummaging through my sparse clothing. My fingers seek out the comfort of the pendant at my throat to thumb it soothingly until the metal encasing the ruby goes warm.

"I need you to wear something... attractive."

My brows pinch. I don't exactly have a salary that can afford me a seamstress. All I have, with the exception of one dress, are the servant's dresses he provided me over a decade ago when he first hired me. "What's going on? What happened to the... the..."

“The daemon,” Forsythe finishes for me.

“He’s alive?”

Forsythe turns sharply away from my wardrobe, holding the singular nice item of clothing I own—a dark red dress with a V-shaped bodice that dips low to reveal my buxom décolleté and long, billowy sleeves that button at the wrists. I inherited from my mother—a gift from a male suitor, she’d explained to me with rosy cheeks.

“Yes, and the creature seems intent on killing Evandriel and me, but for some reason, Evandriel seems inclined to believe he won’t hurt you. Thus, I am tasking you with the daemon’s care and promoting you to...”

Forsythe hesitates for a moment, as if deliberating.

“... research assistant.”

My brows leap. Forsythe clears his throat at my obvious shock. “And so long as you are able to get him to cooperate, I will need you to collect specimen samples. Nothing unusual. Just blood, tissue, semen, etcetera, etcetera.”

“Semen?!”

My horror isn’t at all in response to the idea of collecting it. No, if anything, that excites me. It’s the fact that Forsythe wants it in the first place.

Forsythe narrows his eyes at me with impatience, his voice growing increasingly impassioned. “This creature is immortal. Do you have any idea how important this is to the world? How many lives we could save? I shot him in the head, and within an hour, his body had somehow purged the bullet and made a full recovery. Imagine what we could do for humanity!”

Forsythe and I give each other matching scowls as he takes a deep, steadying breath and yanks a handkerchief from his tweed waistcoat pocket to dab at his brow, where a vein throbs. “Christ. You never fail to provoke me, woman.”

A long beat of silence passes as he calms and seems to shrink subtly in size. “You will do this, Elowen. And you will do it well. If not for yourself or me, then for humanity. If I had had access to his healing capabilities and all the knowledge his biological processes hold, I could have been able to save your mother. This opportunity will give your life meaning and purpose. You should be grateful.”

Give my life meaning.

His tone suggests my life is otherwise meaningless, and I’m suddenly disgusted with myself that I spread my legs for this man. Perhaps he’s not wrong in regard to the lack of meaning I’ve had in my life over the last decade. Though I don’t linger on the statement.

Instead, my heart clenches painfully in my chest for an entirely different reason. Already ten years have passed, and still, the memory of her death is like a stab to the chest. She’d had a slow and torturous death where the body seemed intent on slowly killing itself, no matter how Forsythe tried to save her. Which is the one thing that endeared me to him. If this male has ever shown me tenderness, it was during that time. He had been my only source of emotional support—scarce as it was—but it was there nonetheless, in his own way.

My throat works around a lump of emotion. His speech was undeniably inspiring. I would never wish what my mother went through upon anyone. Perhaps I should help Forsythe in this. Even if I will be plotting against him the entire time. I dare not imagine what Forsythe will do to my daemon once he’s completed his research. Or to me.

My eyes shift to the portrait of my mother on my nightstand. I was there when the picture was taken. The photographer had suggested my mother turn to the side and use her hair to cover the port-wine birthmark on her neck and cheek. She had demurely replied, “No, thank you. I quite like it. Don’t you?” And then bared her teeth in a grin that seemed to make the male’s balls shrivel.

Simply glancing at her photo imbues me with courage.

Eventually, my eyes return to Forsythe’s. His lips are pursed as he studies me with that tense gaze as though trying to look at me through a microscope.

“Aren’t you horrified? Aren’t you going to scream and beg me not to take you anywhere near the beast?”

Frightened as I may be, it isn’t the idea of being near the male I’ve been dreaming of for three too-long years. My fear stems from Forsythe alone. I need to hide my connection to my daemon and all the affection I feel for him, lest he end up brutalized, and I end up in the psych ward of the very hospital Forsythe works in.

“I’m thoroughly terrified,” I admit, in ambiguous honesty.

Forsythe’s lips purse further as though he can sense all that I omit before finally relenting. “Good. You should be. He nearly tore Evandriel’s intestines from his body with nothing more than a sweep of his claws. Managed to rip two of the bars straight out of the stone holding him in his cell.”

My mouth drops open in horror that my beloved daemon is being held in a cell like a caged animal. It takes everything in me not to lunge forward and wring Forsythe’s neck until fucking eyes bleed.

“Fear not. He is now chained to the wall.” Forsythe strides out of the room before I

can deliberate whether to claw his eyes out now or later, calling back to me from the hallway.

“You have fifteen minutes to make yourself presentable.”

SARIEL

The scent of flower petals draw me from another deep, black, dreamless sleep. My head throbs, and my equilibrium whirls as I attempt to sit up. The rattling of chains has my panic surging through me, despite the drugs they've given me. The harder my heart pumps, the faster it pushes the toxins through my system, and clears my head. Their drugs aren't affecting me as they did before. I may feel like I've taken an anvil to the head, but I can see straight. Straight enough to take in the sight of manacles clasped around my wrists and ankles. Long, thick chains—like those used to anchor a boat—shackle me to the wall. I can still move enough to stand and perhaps reach the bucket, which I'm assuming is intended for me to utilize when my body demands it. Thankfully, such an occurrence isn't as frequent as a mortal's, considering I only need to eat but once every few days and consume blood just as infrequently.

Heavy footsteps announce Evandriel's arrival. Fuck. Before the doctor had put another bullet in my brain, I thought I'd killed him. He gives me a pleased look. "Let's play nice today, shall we? I promise you, it's in your best interest."

I don't bother to reply—can do scarcely more than breathe. She perfumes the air around me, even if I can't see her yet, and while I am enraged that they have dragged her into this hell, I am so very selfishly breathless with anticipation at finally being able to lay my eyes on her. And angry that her first time seeing me will be in this state. They've taken everything from me—including the mundrapedra— even the adornments from my horns, except for the gold caps and rings, which I assume they only failed to remove, along with the gold cuffs around my biceps, which are magicked in place to prevent them from constantly shifting.

My ears prick, twitching at the sound of soft footsteps. Evandriel leans closer to the bars of the cell, dropping his voice so that only I can hear him. “You came here looking for her didn’t you? That’s why you were in his house.”

Evandriel pulls something from his pocket, and my eyes widen in horror at the sight of my family’s heirloom perched between his thumb and forefinger.

“Does it have something to do with this? Is this how you got here? I can feel the magic coming off it in waves, and I know daemons weren’t gifted portal magic. Though I do know they have another gift. One that leads them to their mates. What do your people call them again?” Evandriel’s eyes light up, and he snaps his fingers. “Soulbound, no?”

Outside of the grinding of my teeth, I remain silent.

Evandriel’s voice drops to whisper. “Don’t worry. I won’t tell the doctor.” A few moments later, soft footsteps—closely followed by heavier ones—echo off the stone walls. The scent of flower petals grows stronger, and despite my nightmareish circumstances, I find my cock and knot thickening at the smell of her.

I haven’t met many humans in my life. In Vassileo—where I had spent my entire existence before the realm was torn open by the Goddess of Rebirth, now the Queen of Atratus—they were exceedingly rare.

Here in Atratus, where we now reside, humans are more common. Still, my interactions with them have been scarce.

A metallic cranking noise grates my ears as Evandriel begins to turn the wheel connected to the chains of my shackles until I’m pulled closer to the wall—but not against it. I can still lift and move my arms, but my range of motion is greatly hindered. I’m left standing above a drain, just opposite the bed pallet.

My breath ceases. Finally, long, wavy brown hair, pale skin, and rosy cheeks greet me through dark eyes framed in long black lashes. Something bitter, albeit faint, spikes the air. Fear.

My voice is gravelly from disuse and roaring my rage before the doctor subdued me with another bullet.

“I will not harm you.”

My soulbound’s delicate throat dips, though she doesn’t reply. Instead, her eyes dart around the cell with increasing horror.

The doctor stands behind her. “Oh good, then I can skip reminding you of the fact that if you attempt to harm her, I won’t hesitate to put another bullet in your brain. No matter how many times it insists on spitting them back out.”

As if entirely unconcerned with her own well-being, she turns to him with a horrified expression. “These living conditions are utterly inhumane.”

Forsythe only gives her a haughty look. “Well, he can hardly be considered human, now can he?”

Her jaw drops before snapping shut, petite jaw clenching in anger. “I will not work for someone who treats his subjects cruelly.”

Forsythe’s pale cheeks redden, and it becomes imminently clear that the male has a hard time controlling the beast inside him. Before our eyes, he grows an inch or two in size as he tries to stifle the shift. The muscles of his lithe arms and legs swell until his clothing is stretched thin, his fists clench with barely restrained rage. To my surprise, the female staring indignantly up at him doesn’t cower.

In an instant, I'm halfway across the room, shackles biting into my flesh, the metal groaning in protest. "Lay a hand on her, and so help me Akash, I will tear your head from your body."

Forsythe's fear scent poisons the air as he takes in the sight of my seven-and-a-half-foot-tall form: towering horns, wings flared wide, tail thrashing angrily behind me, muscles bulging, and claws extended.

He steps back, drawing in a deep breath to compose himself as he hastily pulls out a cloth to dab at his forehead, eyes flicking away from me. "Break those chains free of that wall, and you risk the whole building collapsing on us."

My soulbound is clearly not one for self-preservation. Her gaze remains glued to him. "He needs a bed. A proper one. Clean clothing. And access to a toilet and bath."

Forsythe's jaw clenches so hard I'm surprised he doesn't spit out shards of teeth. "You know, I find it awfully alarming how concerned you seem to be for the daemon's well-being. One might even think you've inherited your mother's lunacy."

My mate's breath catches. Sadness and anger seep from her as her voice drops to a whisper. "How dare you."

The doctor's lips purse with distaste. "I will have Evandriel retrieve what he can to make the daemon's quarters more livable, but allow me to make myself clear, Elowen. If you do not prove yourself invaluable in this cause, then you will be proving yourself expendable. A liability. Do you understand?"

My own fear scent permeates the air, right alongside my rage.

If this male hadn't already put an exceedingly short expiration date on his own life, he certainly has now and ensured it would be an unfathomably painful one.

Elowen turns toward my cell door, impatience radiating off of her. “Well, then, I better get started.”

Forsythe gives a huff, pulling out a set of keys before jamming one into the cell door. “Your first task is to bathe him, and while he’s still clean, I will need you to collect a tissue, semen, and blood sample. Evandriel will return shortly with your implements and further instruction.”

Evandriel’s expression is tight, but otherwise gives nothing away. Elowen’s heart rate leaps even as her jaws clench, turning to him. “Ensure the water is warm.”

ELOWEN

Bathe him. My heart begins a riotous beat in my chest. I hardly notice Forsythe shut the cell door behind me, locking me inside. My gaze lifts to the male before me—the one of my actual dreams.

Long black hair frames his preternaturally handsome face, even if it is... strange. Each angle of it is somehow both broad and sharp. Those two gilded lines streaking across his face glow, just as I'd suspected. Three more spill down his throat and branch out into a larger but simple geometric design that frames star-like points dotting his sternum and extending over the tops of his thickly muscled arms, the biceps of which are adorned in gold cuffs. I can't help but notice more of those designs fall beyond the low-slung waist of his trousers.

I can feel his gaze passing over me like a heated touch as we take one another in—even though his eyes have no whites, and I shouldn't be able to sense where he's looking. They're a solid dark grey, even darker than his smooth, hairless, dark grey skin. The same color as a thundercloud, ready to burst with rain and lightning. His full lips part slightly as he openly stares, revealing a hint of his lethal, bright-white fangs. His broad chest rising on elevated breaths. The wings at his back—also adorned in dark golden lines—settle, closing against his back like the lowering of a ship's sail as Forsythe's footsteps retreat.

The only clothing he's wearing is a pair of filthy, torn linen trousers, yet despite the chill of this subterranean basement, I can feel his body radiating heat.

My heart ratchets beneath his gaze, and I find myself awkwardly stepping forward

and offering my hand. Despite who I sense this male is to me, it doesn't make our introduction any less awkward. If anything, the weight of it makes it doubly so.

“Hello. My name is Elowen.”

He attempts to step forward, but the chains prohibit any further movement. I dare another step to where his hand can finally reach mine. Calloused and impossibly long, thick fingers embrace my offered hand, and I swear to God—every atom in my body seems to vibrate with blissful energy as heat coils low in my belly, weaving itself with the tendril of fear that this could all go very, very wrong in the blink of an eye. That doubt slithers into the back of my mind, whispering that I am as mad as my mother—wholly negligent of the fact that I never truly believed her mad, but merely misunderstood and endowed with a gift that even she couldn't fully grasp.

My survival instinct feels like I'm toeing the line with death, taunting it. Yet here I am. Ready to fling myself bodily at the male before me.

He repeats my name as if savoring a pleasant flavor. “Elowen... My name is Sariel.”

My reply is breathless. “Sariel... It's lovely to meet you. Despite the abominable circumstances.”

His smile is sad, and it inspires a soul-deep longing within me—to make it reach his eyes. To witness what I know would be an awe-inspiring sight. My tongue sweeps out nervously to lick my lips, and even though he has no pupils, I can feel his eyes track the movement. Electric energy seems to course between us as he continues to hold my hand between his, only finally letting go when we hear the scuffing of boots and squeaking wheels approaching.

Sariel gives a subtle tug, pulling me closer to him before he releases my hand just as Evandriel appears, pushing a cart that boasts a variety of objects. If there's a daemon,

in any sense of the word, in this room, it is him. A grin that makes my gut churn with dread spreads across his deceptively handsome face. “I see the two love birds are getting along.”

Fear spears through me—that somehow this male knows—though I refuse to show it.

Evandriel unlocks the cell and rolls the cart inside before lifting a large, steaming bucket of water from the bottom shelf of the trolley and setting it down on the floor. “Bath.”

He then tosses a large sponge and a bar of soap inside and sidles up to the cart, lifting objects to explain each one’s purpose. “Iodine. After you bathe him, swipe the sample site with this sterile gauze and use this scalpel to make a one-square-centimeter-sized incision—in both width and depth—and place it within this receptacle.”

If my stomach wasn’t roiling, I might be in awe of the crystalline jar glowing a pale blue that is quite obviously magical in some way.

“You want me to cut out a chunk of his flesh ?”

Evandriel heaves a sigh. “Unless you want Forsythe to come and put another bullet in his brain so he can collect it himself, I suggest you get comfortable with blood.”

At my pained silence, he continues, lifting a large, needled syringe. “Which is precisely what these are for. Come here.”

Chains rattle as Sarel steps forward as if to stop me, but I’m already closing the distance between Evandriel and myself. He rolls up his sleeve, revealing a thickly muscled forearm. Between thumb and forefinger, he lifts a rubber tourniquet. “Wrap this tightly just above the elbow, and the veins will reveal themselves. Choose a prominent one. Like so?—”

Dropping the tourniquet, he flexes his arm, and the veins rise. He prods a thick forefinger at the largest one in the crook of his elbow. “Apply the alcohol to the skin, then gently insert the tip of the needle to the sterilized area, about 2 millimeters in, and carefully pull the plunger until the barrel of the syringe has been filled. Then...”

Evandriel grins, mischief twinkling in his eyes, as if this is all some big joke to him, and it makes my hatred for this male burn even brighter. Reaching for another glowing pot, he holds it aloft, wagging his cursed eyebrows.

“La pièce de résistance.”

My eyes narrow. They don’t exactly teach French on the streets of London, and he damn well knows it.

The words are growled with annoyance. “The what?”

Evandriel chuckles. “The semen sample.”

I train my expression to remain neutral, even if internally, I’m now squealing my delight despite our twisted circumstances.

Perhaps I am more of a monster than I’d previously thought myself. Even so, a certain protectiveness rises within me.

“What the fuck could he possibly want with a semen sample?”

Evandriel’s expression settles into something thoughtful, as though genuinely considering my question.

“Well for one, blood and tissue samples can only provide somatic DNA, whereas semen will provide germline DNA, along with unique epigenetic markers, specialized

genetic markers—which is what I imagine Forsythe has a personal interest in—and of course, the seminal plasma which would provide unparalleled insight into the epimorphic regeneration—the rapid healing.”

I don’t bother to mask my shock at his insight. Clearly, I’ve thoroughly underestimated this man. And the fact he has so thoroughly hidden such keen intelligence under the guise of a brute only makes it all the more unsettling. It also makes me realize, this is the most I’ve ever spoken to him.

Evandriel gives me a knowing smirk but chooses to keep the subject on the tasks at hand.

“ You may collect the semen however you wish, which will conclude your final task. Savvy?”

I don’t bother to mask my scowl. If Sariel’s semen belongs to anyone it’s-fucking-me. My reply is spoken through gritted teeth. “Yes.”

“Excellent. There’s some clothes here once you finish,” Evandriel points at what appears to be a thick black pile of clothing. I’m not entirely sure how we’re supposed to get Sariel’s dirty ones off and the clean ones on while Sariel’s in manacles, but I don’t bother to ask.

Evandriel turns to face Sariel, and something like electricity—so dense I can taste it in the air—crackles over my skin. In the next moment, Sariel is naked. To his credit, he doesn’t flinch. The only indication he’s even noticed is the low growl that leaves his throat. I, however, gasp in shock—both at the display of magic and, despite trying my best not to lower my eyes, the sight of Sariel’s cock.

While I’ve seen it countless times in my dreams, seeing it in real life is so much better.

Evandriel's eyes openly ogle Sarel, brows lifting.

"Good for you, mate."

He turns and strides out of the cell, shutting the door behind him. I don't miss the knowing glint in his eyes.

"Take your time. The doctor will be leaving shortly to teach his classes and visit his patients. I have my own work to attend to in the morgue and a great many errands to run... things to prepare for."

Evandriel's eyes study me keenly, and I can't help the sinking dread I feel at those last words. I don't have it in me to ask what it is he has to prepare for.

"Those containers will keep everything preserved in the meantime. Forsythe will retrieve you this evening. I'll return tomorrow."

Page 12

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:48 am

ELOWEN

Without another word, Evandriel turns, leaving Sariel and me alone. Taking a deep breath to steady my nerves, I turn to face Sariel. My willpower proves feeble—eyes dropping again to my poor male's groin.

Poor , however, isn't an adjective that could ever be associated with Sariel's nether region. Impressive? Yes. Massive ? Yes. Aesthetically appealing? Absolutely. Mouthwatering ? Without-a-fucking-doubt.

Who knew the words semen sample could make a person giddy. Yet here I am, anticipation alighting every nerve of mine as those two bizarre words echo in my mind as my eyes trail over his body.

A few shades darker than the rest of his body and with a faint hint of purple, the dark, glowing gold lines decorating his body run the length of his silky cock, ripe with plump veins begging to be worshipped by my tongue—something I've never had any practice with, though I yearn to do it to him all the same. His girth is likely the width of my wrist, and the mere sight of it causes my core to clench with desire.

At the base of his cock is the thick bulge I remember from my dreams. Wetness is already blossoming in my core as if preparing to take it.

God of heaven and earth, what is wrong with me? The male is in shackles, and here you are, simpering over his body.

Inwardly, I recognize it is so much more than that. This male is three years' worth of

dreams, consuming nearly every one of my waking thoughts. He is the male I knew I was destined for. And he for me. Even if my belief did waver, as logic would have it.

But oh dear god, as my eyes take in the broad crown of him that boasts a prominent, thickly flared edge—again, just begging for my lips to cushion either side of it as I lave it with affection—that primitive and salacious part of me shoves all logic and thought for our circumstances and this cursed cell out of the nonexistent window. Wetness and heat pool between my thighs as I watch his cock harden beneath my gaze, growing impossibly larger, and the gilded markings running its length glow all the brighter.

Sariel clears his throat, his baritone voice so tight it snaps me out of my stupor. I find his cheeks darkening with embarrassment. “Forgive me, Elowen...”

My gulp is audible, and my breath comes out little more than a sigh. “It’s only a natural reaction.”

I move into action, determined not to make him anymore uncomfortable, and take the opportunity to change the subject. Finally ask the question that’s been echoing endlessly in my mind since his arrival. “How did you end up here? ”

“My kind are endowed with a gift that enables them to find their mate once they reach a certain maturity that varies in each individual. It is called The Summoning. It is a sacred event and a powerful, undeniable compulsion that can lead someone to cross realms, go to any lengths, to find their soulbound... I came here for you, Elowen.”

Against all logic, I already knew in my depths, why he was here, but hearing his confirmation of this wholly inconceivable detail brings tears to my eyes nonetheless. Tears that I desperately try to stifle. Sariel already has enough reason to be troubled; I needn’t add to it. Still, my lips tremble as I clarify myself.

“I didn’t ask why you came here, darling. I asked how.”

Sariel’s breath catches as his gaze holds mine. The shifting of the reflected light reveals to me their movement as he studies my face. “You knew?”

“Not explicitly, but... to some degree, yes. Though I am grateful to hear it in your own words.”

Confusion knits his brows. “Humans have The Summoning too?”

I shake my head. Not that I know of.

If our circumstances weren’t so bleak, I’d laugh at how surreal this is. Even with him here in front of me, my logical mind still whispers in a distant voice that this is all a dream, and I’ve succumbed to my mother’s condition.

“No, but I had dreams. For years.”

His brows dip. “Years?”

I nod.

“My Summoning only began three months ago.”

My lips tease a smile. “Well, what took you so long?”

My heart leaps at the sight of his own grin curling at the corner of his mouth. “I came as soon as I could, love.”

Those blasted tears in my eyes threaten to spill. Before he can notice them, I turn and bend at the waist to lift the bucket and bring it closer to him.

My eyes catch on a drain in the center of the floor as I do so. I can't help but wonder just how many other poor souls have been trapped here before. And to think—this whole time, I'd been giving my body to the devil who dragged them here. Nauseous guilt twists my gut, and I shove the thought away, deciding I can only handle one thing at a time.

Grabbing the sponge, I give it a squeeze, draining it of some of the water as I fetch the bar of soap within. When I straighten to face him, I realize there is no way in hell I'll be able to reach the top of his head or wings, their claw tips nearly above his horns.

His eyes latch onto mine, and as if reading my mind, he bends down to one knee and then the other. It brings us eye level. Something unspoken seems to pass between us, what exactly I'm not sure. But it makes my heart squeeze all the same. I have the most bizarre urge to press a kiss to his brow and tell him everything's going to be okay. To graze my lips against his, something I've done with no man.

Despite not being a virgin, Forsythe has never kissed me. He's barely touched me with anything other than his cock. The very memory now makes me want to gag, and I promptly shove it from my brain. Though I feel a chest-full of satisfaction at that fact because I now realize that I want no one other than the male before me to lay his lips upon me.

My breathing turns shallow as I lift the sponge and bring it to his shoulder, squeezing slightly. Water runs in rivulets down his thickly muscled shoulder and chest. His cock hardens further, now fully engorged and straining towards me. Even the bulge at the base of it grows fuller, as if desperate for my touch. It makes every silken inch of him glisten, the veins more prominent. Saliva pools in my mouth as I watch a bulbous, glistening pearl of pre-cum leak from his tip. A barely audible whimper leaves me. Sariel lets out a low groan that echoes in my chest. "Elowen..."

The word is pained and reverent in equal measure. A shudder works through Sarel's body as I finally begin to scrub gentle circles with the sponge, followed by the bar of soap. His body relaxes slightly after a few moments as I methodically begin to cleanse the top half of him, front and back, unsure if I should wash his hair. This soap doesn't look like it would be kind to his long locks. "Shall I wash your hair?"

He hesitates for a moment. "Perhaps just a rinse." My throat works when I return the large sponge and lift it above his head, dousing him in water. "Close your eyes."

Sarel tilts his head back as I pour water over his body, a vision I never thought possible. It spills down his face, and his arms flex, but the restraints hold. Murmuring an apology, I drop the sponge and gently wipe the water from his eyes, my fingers lingering at the corners, my thumb brushing his sharp cheekbones. His gaze locks onto mine, and that strange pull in my chest tightens.

His tongue sweeps over his sculpted lips—broad, full, and perfect—its near-black hue catching me off guard. My core clenches, his nostrils flare, and in my periphery, I see his cock twitch.

"Your scent is intoxicating, Elowen."

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:48 am

ELOWEN

Drawing in an unsteady breath, I return to lathering Sariel's body, thoroughly working over every inch of him.

Lower and lower.

Until finally, I've reached the lowest point of the V at his defined hips before it draws unforgivably close to his erect cock. My mouth grows dry. "May I?"

A helpless laugh shudders out of him. "I would say yes, but I'm afraid I'll shame myself and spill my seed all over your pretty dress."

My reply comes too fast, pulse fluttering wildly as leaden butterflies take flight in my stomach. "I wouldn't mind."

My cheeks flame with hot-faced shame as I stutter an explanation. "I—I just mean that, as I said earlier, it's only natural. You can't help your body's needs, and you've been through a traumatizing ordeal. I... I wouldn't mind helping you to—to achieve some relief for yourself... I know what it's like. To some degree."

Sariel's brow remains tense as he grows silent for so long I fear I've offended him. Just as I open my mouth to offer an apology, he finally speaks. "May I smell you first?"

Smell me?

As unusual of a request as it is, I nod despite being unsure of how to fulfill it. Sariel, thankfully, senses my confusion.

“Set your hair to one side and bring your neck to my face.”

My heart thunders wildly. “Will you bite me?”

Even though the idea frightens me, a larger part of me hopes the answer is yes.

A streak of white splits in his face in a devastatingly handsome grin. “Bite you? Elowen, there are only a few things I desire more in this life—all of which revolve around you—but I would never give you my bite or my mark to harm you. Only to bring you pleasure and claim you as mine. If you’ll have me.”

Foreign emotion rises and swells like a cresting tide within me. I’ve never heard of such things in my life, and I’m not entirely sure I have the nerve to vocalize them. My body, on the other hand, seems to have no question at all. With very little hesitation, I find myself following his guidance.

A deep hum starts in his chest and turns into a purr as his nose traces the column of my neck. A soft, undeniably needy sigh escapes me. The sponge in my hand falls into the bucket as my knees threaten to buckle. I have never in my life been touched in such a sensual way. His name is a murmured prayer upon my lips. “Sariel...”

My breath comes in soft pants that cause my peaked nipples to scrape against the fabric of my dress as my hands settle on his shoulders, nails carving crescent moons into his flesh. His voice comes out as little more than a growl. “Let me taste you.”

A soft gasp escapes me as I draw back to look into the dark twin pools of his eyes as I whisper my surprise.

“Taste me how?”

“I can smell your arousal so strongly, I’m salivating for it. I want you to sweep your fingers through the pretty little pussy I’ve been dreaming about, coat them with the honey dripping between your thighs, and then I want you to bring them to my lips.”

I am... thoroughly scandalized.

But I am even more aroused.

I can scarcely believe I’m doing it as I bend to grab the skirt of my dress and reach a hand into my undergarments. Sariel’s lips part as he watches me. “Show me,” he breathes.

My throat works as I lift my skirt higher and pull my undergarments down to rest just beneath the heft of my bottom. My body hums with need for him, and emboldened by the sight of his desperation for me, I part the lips of my pussy for him and drag two of my slender fingers from entrance to clit. I can’t help but circle it once, twice, thrice, before finally holding them inches in front of his face and spreading my fingers to show him the clear string that stretches between them.

The word is said on an exhale. “Fuck, Elowen.”

I bring my fingers to his lips, and without a moment’s hesitation, Sariel’s long, black tongue seeks them out and pulls them into his mouth. His eyes squeeze shut briefly as he releases a deep groan of satisfaction, sucking on my fingers before releasing them with a pop.

“Let me soothe your need, love. Don’t make me hate myself for not giving you pleasure when I cum as you wash my cock.”

My breath catches. If it weren't for his statement, I'd deny him. I want this to be about him. Still, I can't help the trill of excitement in my chest. I acquiesce to his request and step closer to him. Due to his restraints, I have to angle myself diagonally—ass-first towards him—if I want to face him while he touches me. And I very much do. I want him to kiss me. I want to hold his gaze as I give myself over to him and he draws me to climax. I want his face imprinted in my mind as I cum around his fingers.

I burrow against his side and hold my dress up for him so he can reach my needy clit from behind. A low growl rumbles in his chest the moment his fingers slide through my folds, and I realize his claws have retracted almost entirely. Still, I can feel them, and I have no doubt he is conscious of this. His touch is slow and gentle as his fingers tease, circle, and faintly dip into my clenching entrance. A high-pitched, breathy whimper leaves me, and he hums deeply with satisfaction as he buries his face against the crook of my neck.

“Soon, we will be free, Elowen, and then I will claim you properly as mine.”

I nod against him, and he rewards me by dragging his fingers up to my clit, working in achingly tender circles.

“Please, Sarii, yes.”

Vulgar, wet noises make my cheeks heat as he continues to stroke me. “Gods damn it, this perfect pussy is drenched. Is this all for me, love?”

“God, yes. Just for you.”

His purr starts up again—sounding like a growl and a purr harmonizing to create something gravelly, baritone, and warm—as his fingers work a little faster.

My eyes lock on to his cock and knot, proud and engorged, as it leaks copious amounts of pre-cum onto the floor. I can't resist reaching down to smooth it over the thick, swollen head of him. Another growl tears from his throat, and his hips punch forward, gaze dropping to watch as my hand—small by comparison to the massive length of him—begins to stroke him from knot to crown. I can feel the parallel line markings of magic humming beneath my palm.

“Not yet, Elowen. I'll never forgive myself if I cum before you do the first time I get to touch you.”

The words are a groaned plea. One that I bend to. This time.

I obey, but bring the gooey mess now decorating my hand to my mouth. He watches with parted lips as my tongue licks his release from my fingers, and I moan my pleasure. His hips give a mindless thrust as gives a reverent groan.

“ You like the taste of me, mea floarea?”

The taste of him is surprisingly sweet. I've never tasted a man's essence before, but I know what it smells like, and it's nothing like this. This is like raw, salty honey, vanilla, and a divinely masculine musk.

“I want more.”

My eyes remain fixed to his as I gather more from his cock and suck it from my fingers. I'm so primed that already my orgasm swiftly approaches, and as the flat of my tongue cleans his pre-cum from my fingers, it crests. Sariel's gaze burns with need.

“Say it out loud, sweetheart. Tell me who this pussy belongs to. I want my name on your lips as you cum.”

My mouth opens, and a keening noise of sheer need and desperation as his gaze holds mine. My core clenches viciously around his thick fingers, and I'm so overwhelmed by my orgasm it takes me a moment to process his words. I rely purely on instinct, which is to chant his name over and over again—each repetition a whimpering, moaning plea, mirroring the shifting tidal wave of my climax.

“Sariel—Oh, god— fuck! Sariel!”

A wave of tingling euphoria washes over me as electricity seems to burst through me. Sariel's name is a mantra upon my lips before his mouth finally closes the distance between us, and his tongue sweeps against mine. I've never made the soft keening noises he draws from me as he continues to stroke every last ounce of my climax from my body, whilst our tongues caress—firm yet gentle, as if he's trying to be careful with me.

When my orgasm subsides, he nips at my bottom lip before sucking it into his mouth, briefly swiping his tongue over it.

“Fuck, Elowen. I wish you could see the way you come undone for me. You're so fucking beautiful it hurts.”

SARIEL

My chest pinches painfully tight with emotion at the sight of my female nuzzling against me, like it's the safest and coziest place in the world. Utterly at ease, despite our circumstances. I crane my neck to lower my mouth to the curve of her jaw.

“Soon we will be free, Elowen.”

With one arm draped over my shoulder, her other hand slides up my torso and across the broad expanse of my chest as she whispers against my neck, warm breath fanning against me. “I'll find a way to get you out of here. Don't worry.”

My fingers gradually withdraw from her wet heat as fear trickles like ice water down my spine. “You will do no such thing. I will not have you risk your life with such a needless endeavor. The time will come when Forsythe lets his guard down, and I will strike. I will be obedient and gain, if only, a sliver of his trust. Somehow, some way, we will be free, and you will not have to risk your life in the process.”

Elowen pulls back to take in the gravitas of my words.

“Promise me.”

Her throat works, hesitating to nod. I study her gaze as she stares up at me with wide eyes—so different from my own, yet so familiar—before capturing her mouth with mine again, to savor the feel of her against me. Despite the shackles around my wrists and ankles and the godsforsaken collar on my throat, my heart sings.

Elloven draws back, stroking my cheek with her finger. “Stand up so I can show you how grateful I am that you came here to find me.”

My heart pounds in anticipation as I follow her orders. She grabs the sponge and soap, returning to her task of bathing the last of me—everywhere but my cock throbbing with neglect, my balls grow heavy with seed that is eager to be buried inside her.

I’m panting like a beast in heat by the time she finally passes the sponge over my engorged length and down to gingerly explore my knot. My hips give a mindless thrust, and my eyes roll in the back of my head as her soapy hands begin to work the length of me. She drops to her knees, heedless of her lovely dress getting wet, and holds my gaze as both of her fists glide over my cock from root to tip. The sound her wet, soapy hands make against me is nothing short of filthy, and I fucking live for it.

My words are a barely coherent growl. “Fucking gods, Elowen.”

That tingling energy begins to rise swiftly from the base of my spine, but I desperately try to tamp it down because I don’t want this to end. She seems to have the same desire, because her hands release me to rinse me off.

My breathing stills as I watch her delicate fingers tug at the string at the top of her dress. One drawn-out moment later, her breasts spill out. Supple flesh and pink, peaked nipples greet me, and it’s enough to bring me back to my knees, but before I can, she captures my cock in one of her hands and brings the leaking tip to one of her pert nipples.

Without even stroking me, I feel that rising energy again, and once more, I’m forced to give an internal clench to try and keep it at bay. She paints sloppy circles from my drooling cock across one nipple before moving to the other, all the while her eyes gradually dance back and forth between her work and my gaze.

“Fuck, sweetheart... Look at you. You’re perfection in the flesh. You could make a poet out of even the most illiterate male, and yet I can’t quell my desire to fucking ruin you for anyone other than me.”

Her smile is warm as she stares up at me with reverence just before her tongue slides over her lips. She hesitates for a moment, suddenly looking nervous.

“I’ve never done this before.”

A dark, possessive sort of satisfaction fills me at her words. “Good. Your mouth belongs to me. Every fucking inch of you is mine.”

Emboldened by my words, she leans forward to welcome me into her mouth by licking a thorough stripe across my crown before her lips close over me, and she sucks. The shackles at my wrists dig into my flesh as my arms strain towards her, desperate with the need to wrap her silken hair around my fist.

Instead, I’m left entirely at her mercy. Elowen’s eyes roll in the back of her head as she moans her pleasure, teasing at one of her cum-drenched nipples as she strokes her other hand down my length. The sight is my undoing.

“Fuck, love, don’t stop. I can’t hold back any longer.”

I half anticipate her to reach for the jar to collect my semen, but she doesn’t falter for a moment—something for which I am exceedingly grateful.

Her eyes lift to mine as she tries to take me deep in her throat but quickly gags against me. The sensation of her throat spasming against me in protest makes me think of what it will feel like to have her beautiful cunt milking my cock. Determined, her head bobs over the crown of me and only a few inches further, unable to take anymore, as her fist works the rest of me in tandem and strokes over my throbbing

knot.

That coiling energy rises swiftly and lights up every molecule within me like fucking fireworks. That ache in my chest—the tether between us—bursts with sensation as my cock jerks, and my seed spurts. Her eyes widen in surprise at the bountiful volume of it before groaning her satisfaction and swallowing it down gulp after gulp that overflows from the corners of her mouth as she continues to suckle and stroke me for long, heart-pounding seconds until the pulsing in my length ceases.

Taking me in both hands, she hums a satisfied sigh as she pulls back and begins to lick and clean me from knot to crown, pressing sloppy kisses to every inch of me. My chest heaves with emotion and determination as reality settles back in.

ELOWEN

Collecting the tissue and blood samples proved more difficult than I'd anticipated. His flesh required far more effort to cut than I'd expected. Even so, Sariel had scarcely made a sound as I cut out a tiny square of his flesh and set it in the metal tray. I'd watched with wide eyes as the shallow square of flesh knit itself back together in under a minute. I should feel a pang of guilt that I sacrificed the potential well-being of humanity for mine and Sariel's pleasure, but... I don't.

Forsythe returns sooner than anticipated, clearly eager to begin his research. A deep scowl contorts his face as he takes in the empty semen collection jar. "What did I tell you earlier, Elowen?"

My throat works around a gulp tinged with fear as Sariel growls low, sounding more like a bear or a lion than a male that stands on two legs. At the very least, I imagine it tempers Forsythe's anger. "I told you that if you do not prove yourself useful, you prove yourself expendable. Do I need to elaborate?"

Anger eclipses my fear. "I'm not entirely sure why you speak as though I've ever been anything but expendable."

Something like guilt flickers briefly in his gaze, but it's gone so fast I wonder if it was ever really there. "Come. My carriage is waiting for you. I will remain here and retrieve you in the morning. Tomorrow, you will provide me the semen sample." Forsythe dares a glance at Sariel, whose lip instantly curls, revealing a long, vicious fang. "Do you understand, daemon?"

My own growl escapes. “He has a name, Doctor.”

Forsythe’s eyes narrow, but he ignores the comment.

“Say goodnight to your friend.”

I normally relish the solitude on the rare occasion I have the manor to myself. Instead, I’m ready to gnaw my own lip off with worry. Forsythe is still at his laboratory, and I can’t help but worry about gods-know-what he might be doing to Sarel. By the time I finally lie down, I’m trembling with both nerves and exhaustion. I can’t bear the fact that while I’m in a comfortable and warm bed, Sarel is chained in a basement cell.

At some point, though, I don’t notice when my eyes fall shut, and it isn’t until a rare shaft of sunlight is piercing my eyes through my eyelids that I wake, feeling like I haven’t slept at all. The drool on my pillow says otherwise.

SARIEL

Sleep evaded me most of the night due to all my reeling thoughts. The majority of which revolved around the fact that I've finally united with my soulbound— all the truths and obligations before her that I am terrified to confess—and the dire question of how the fuck I can possibly get us out of here. Like how to steal back the mundrapedra from Evandriel. My mind also keeps returning to the spinning top I'd stolen from the chest on Forsythe's bookshelf. I have no idea what it could possibly be, but based on the volume of magic radiating from it, there is no doubt something significant. Even if it had been left there, collecting dust.

Forsythe eventually shows up alone—much to my dismay—wordlessly rolling in another cart carrying only the semen collection jar and a pair of paper-thin gloves made of some kind of rubbery-looking material. A few minutes later, he returns with my mate, who looks beautiful as ever in spite of the simple linen servant's uniform she's wearing today.

Dark circles line Forsythe's eyes from the lack of sleep as he gives her precise instructions on how to prevent any contamination in the semen sample. Something Evandriel hadn't bothered with.

“Whilst wearing the gloves, you are to use your hands to manually stimulate him with this water-based lubrication. When you feel him nearing climax, position the jar over his glans as you continue to pump the shaft to ensure you capture all of the ejaculate and that nothing else contaminates the sample or the container. After the jar has been filled, keep it tightly sealed. It is magicked to preserve it. Again, I'll return after my classes and surgeries.”

Forsythe's expression remains cool and unreadable as his eyes dart hesitantly between Elowen and me. "If the sample is not collected properly, I will be forced to resort to drastic measures. Do you understand?"

A scowl carves my face, and my muscles flex against my restraints. One day, I will tear this male apart—limb from fucking limb. I needn't exclaim it with easily spoken and soon-forgotten words. It will be proven in action. Forsythe's eyes leap to mine as if he can sense my intent, and his acrid fear scent taints the air a moment later.

Without another word, he turns on his heel and locks us in the cell before moving to the mechanism connected to the chains shackling me to the fucking wall. Elowen shrieks in protest. "What are you doing?! You're going to hurt him!"

Forsythe ignores her and continues to turn the wheel that harnesses my chains until I'm forced to stand naked as the sheet pools on the pallet of the bed beneath me. My arms and legs are splayed wide against the stone wall.

Finally, he flicks his gaze at her. "It's for your safety, obviously. Imagine what he might do to you in an aroused state."

Oh, so very many depraved things.

Elowen's face hardens, but she remains silent. And at that, Forsythe takes his leave.

As twisted as it is, excitement and desire pool in my gut as his footsteps recede, and Elowen and I are left alone again. She rushes to my side, her cool, delicate hands sliding over the too-hot flesh of my abdomen as she stares up at me with wide, concerned eyes. "Are you ok?"

Between her blatant affection, her touch, and being put entirely at her mercy, my cock is already heavy and aching for her ministrations. "Better now that you're here."

Elowen gasps as she feels the weight of my hardening length pressing against her. Eyes alight with surprise, a wry smile tilts her parted lips.

“You are a naughty boy, aren’t you?”

I fail to stifle my groan as my head tips back briefly against the stone surface behind me before my gaze snaps back to hers—unwilling to miss a single look on her beautiful face.

“For you, love, I’ll be whatever you want me to be.”

Elowen’s arousal perfumes the air as her breath catches, a heady mélange of desire and anticipation twinkling in her doe eyes. Ripe with so much earnest want, tenderness, and affection.

It makes me want to tell her everything.

While she knows I’m her soulbound, I haven’t had a chance to tell her about the demands of the bond—something that would make her part daemoness; that it will change her appearance to an unforeseeable degree; that she will need to consume blood at least once every handful of days; that her lifespan will not only be extended by potentially thousands of years but that it will directly be tied with mine; that my parents are the royal archdaemons; the fact that accepting our bond and marrying me, would make her a princess, and quite possibly, one day a queen if we can’t find my brother, the previously destined heir to my mother’s throne; and that she will be expected to provide an heir.

It’s such an understandably overwhelming set of expectations and responsibilities that I can’t help but shudder to imagine her reaction. Guilt gnaws at my chest, but there hasn’t yet been any opportune moment to have such a heavy discussion.

Before I can linger on it any further, she turns towards the cart, pulling it towards me. All thoughts of responsible conversations flee. My cock twitches when she turns to me, suddenly looking a little sheepish. “Do you... have any requests?”

Fuck me, she looks so sweet it makes me yearn to defile her.

Instead of admitting that, my head tilts in question. “Requests?”

She nods, nervously biting on her plump lower lip.

“Is there any way that I can make this more comfortable or easier for you?”

My heart trills even as my cock hardens to the point of pain. I hadn’t even considered it, but now my imagination is bursting with ideas. With a thoughtful hum, I deliberate our best options. “I want you to kneel at my feet and tease your nipples with the arousal dripping from cock...”

My eyes dip to the bed pallet at my feet. “Spread this sheet out so you can lie down, and then I want you to play with that pretty little pussy until you cum.”

ELOWEN

Despite the fact this won't be the first time Sariel and I will be intimate, my heart pounds a nervous beat. The idea of him watching me pleasure myself makes my stomach take flight. It feels so... vulnerable. Though I feel ashamed at the thought, considering the position he's in.

Still, just the sight of his tall, thickly muscled, completely bared body—the long, thick, veiny, and silken length of him; his prominently flared head weeping with need for my touch—already has me slick between my thighs. Even my mouth salivates with a soul-deep urge to capture the clear, gooey goodness now stretching towards his bed.

My heart flutters as I kneel beneath his feet and tug on the strings of my bodice, allowing my breasts to spill forth. Their peaks pebble in the cool air. Sariel's gaze hesitates to leave my face before finally giving in to hungrily watch as I swipe the tip of his leaking cock over each of my hardened nipples. The magic within those glowing veins hums beneath my skin.

A soft moan escapes me as my fingers caress in wet circles before pinching and giving them a gentle, teasing tug. My core clenches as Sariel groans, and his hips give another involuntary thrust. "Fuck, Elowen. Yes, just like that."

The moment is so charged and intense, and my arousal so bright, I know that by the time my fingers seek out my clit, I'll be coming in mere moments.

"I'm pretending it's you touching me."

His words are a growl. “Soon enough, I’ll be sucking and teasing those perfect, fat tits of yours until your honey coats your thighs and you’re begging me to stretch your cunt around my thick cock and knot.”

My core clenches as I give a little whimper of need.

“Oh, god. Sariah, I need that...” My voice turns into a pout.

Another thick stream of pre-cum spills from his tip, creating a pool between us. While I don’t have much to compare him to, it’s still far more than I imagine any human male produces. Even last night, as I’d greedily swallowed every drop, I’d nearly choked on the sheer volume of it as his cock gushed hot cum into the back of my throat for long, pulsing seconds.

The jar Forsythe has provided won’t hold nearly all of it.

My lust for him takes over—damn the consequences to be had on my dress—as I grasp the length giving it a lingering, teasing stroke that has my fingers sliding over his cock with little more than a wet graze. More fluid spills from him as he groans, and his hips give another needy thrust. “Gods damn it, I need to bury my cock inside of you.”

My pussy clenches in agreement, and even as I focus on pleasing him, my mind distantly works to determine how to free him. Though I can’t imagine a scenario that doesn’t end in my death.

Pushing the macabre machinations of my mind, I can’t take any more of this burning need. I don’t even bother to spread the clean sheet over the pallet before I lie down beneath him, hiking my skirts up and sliding my undergarments off until only my stockings and garter belt remain.

With each of my knees bent and pointed towards the bed on either side of my waist, my core is bared to him—and positioned directly beneath the slow, overflowing stream of his arousal. As the first of it reaches me, it seems to magically land directly onto my clit and trickles down to my entrance.

Sariel growls at the sight. “Fucking gods, Elowen. I’ve never seen anyone or anything more beautiful and depraved. I wish you could see how your needy cunt clenches with desperation to be filled by my cock, my knot, and my cum.”

I’m too far gone as my fingers work in a steady circle around and over my drenched clit. Sariel holds my gaze as my hips give panicked little thrusts towards the cum trickling onto me. Something warm and firm presses against my entrance, making me yelp in surprise. I look down between my legs to find Sariel’s long, thick tail now glistening with both of our arousal. It sways side to side as if waving hello before dipping back to my entrance.

Sariel gives me a dark, feline grin. “Lay back, love. Let me give you what you need.”

My breath is stolen as his tail slides over my slick folds, tracing my clit before breaching my entrance. It’s not as thick as his cock, but it does have those glowing, linear veins of magic running down it, and the same buzzing whisper of magic lying within them hums gently through me. It feels like adding tiny, titillating pin pricks of electricity to each cell of my body.

The surprise of the sensation settles as Sariel’s tail thrusts languidly, pushing the steady dribble of his pre-cum inside of me—filling me with immense satisfaction and spurs my arousal. The pressure of his tail increases against a breathtakingly sensitive spot inside me. A garbled sound climbs up my throat as it works harder, faster. My fingers circle my aching, tingling bud, and within seconds, my climax ascends. My mouth drops open as my need escapes me in a breathy, wanton moan. “Oh, fuck, Sariel ? —”

There's a pinching tightness where his tail presses so firmly that it teeters just on the edge of pleasurable pain. My moan turns into a keening cry as my orgasm explodes through me, and fluid gushes from me in spurts as his tail continues to work me.

Embarrassment flames my cheeks even as I continue to cum, all while Sarel continues to hold my gaze with heavy-lidded satisfaction. His chest heaves, and he watches me climax whilst his pre-cum drenches me.

“Such a good fucking girl, aren't you? My sweet mate. So eager for me to mark you as mine. For me to drink from your veins, and you from mine, as I feed you my cock, my knot, and fill you with my cum.”

With a whimper, I nod, brows knitting together in helplessness my pussy gives pulsing squirts of fluid and my hips thrust greedily against his tail whilst his pre-cum continues to mark me.

“Please.”

By the time my orgasm finally recedes, I am utterly boneless and in shock. I have never experienced anything so intense. I'm also distantly aware my dress is absolutely ruined, but I couldn't possibly give fewer fucks. In fact, I find a dark satisfaction in it.

I want to be marked as his.

When my core stills, his tail gently slips out of me and gives my folds a soft, stirring caress. “Akash almighty, your beauty never fails to steal my breath, but the sight of you drenched in my cum is enough to bring me to my knees.”

If only he weren't chained to the fucking wall, is what goes unsaid.

I hum my contented pleasure as I allow myself the pleasure of taking in his masculine beauty. Finally, crawling to standing, my anticipation is renewed as I retrieve gloves.

I can't help the grin of delight that curls my lips as I squirt a few dropperfuls of the lubrication—not that it's needed—directly onto the swollen head of his cock and the bulging knot at his base. Sariel hisses, eyes leaping to mine to find my guilty grin. “Are you enjoying this, love? Having me at your mercy?”

Gaze holding his, I tug each glove on with a snap to punctuate my words. “I do, indeed. Coaxing your pleasure to the point of madness is a fetish I never knew I had.”

Sariel hums his pleasure, looking between us at his monster-sized cock with its veins of magic streaking vertically atop it glowing brightly. “Look at what you do to me, Elowen. No one holds a candle to you. Even in the depths of this hellish place, you bring me to heights I've never known.”

ELOWEN

Emotion fists my heart so fiercely it makes my eyes burn. I swallow it back, determined to give him as much pleasure as possible despite our deplorable circumstances.

Standing on tip-toes, I tilt my head upwards as Sarel cranes his neck down to capture my mouth with his lips. Electricity courses through my veins at the soft touch, and though we've known each other for such a brief amount of time, the action fills my soul with breathtaking affection, gratitude, and an inner knowing that this male belongs to me, and I, to him.

What starts out as tender quickly becomes an impassioned caress of tongues and nipping teeth. With a gloved hand, my fingertips trace over the engorged length of him in a way that causes a shudder to chase through his entire body, making him hiss a curse.

"Fuck, Elowen, please. No more teasing. I can't take it anymore."

A grin parts my lips as I suck his bottom lip into my mouth and bite. It's a move I learned from him, and it made my toes curl with delight. Only now, when I do it, it's hard enough that it draws a bit of blood. The magic in it must be potent, because I can feel it zing through me like each of my cells that it touches bursts with light.

"Is that so?" I whisper against his neck before tugging at the lobe of his ear with my teeth and sucking it into my mouth. My hand forms a wide half-circle that whispers over his straining cock. His hips pump forward, trying to steal some relief with his

aching length, and I tsk, removing my hand.

He growls, eyes flashing to mine, fangs slightly bared. It shows me a hint of the monstrous potential within him, and instead of it rousing my fear, it only causes my arousal to blossom anew.

“The moment we are free Elowen, I’m going to pin you down and fuck you into ruination. And when you beg me with trembling and twitching legs, as your pussy greedily milks my cock, that you ‘can’t take anymore’, only then will I fill you with my knot. You’re going to be rendered mindless and bathing in my cum as I continue to mercilessly fuck you into oblivion.”

I very nearly squeal with delight, but somehow— miraculously— manage to drop to my knees gracefully. Holding his gaze, I stroke over him with feather-light pressure. “You promise?”

Sariel’s groan turns into a growl, muscles straining against his shackles, and sweat dots his perfectly sculpted brow. Truly, there must be a wicked thing inside of me because I can’t help but delight in his sweet torture.

“Will you be gentle when you slide your massive cock inside of me? Will you take your time with me before you force your knot inside my pussy that’s far too tight to take it all at once? Or will you bend me to your will and make me scream your name in pleasure and pain?”

His brow pinches with need and frustration. “The latter, if you continue to misbehave. In my culture, it isn’t uncommon to take one’s mate over their knee and punish them with a hand, belt, or paddle. I’m going to make your hindquarters as pink and aching as your pretty little pussy, as soon as I get the chance.”

Excitement swells in my breast, and I so desperately want to welcome the gorgeous

length of him inside me. Sariel's gaze drops to my hands, whispering over his swollen flesh, and his hips thrust again. The action earns his cock a gentle smack on its crown. "Naughty boy. You will take what pleasure I give you—no more and no less. Do you understand?"

Sariel gives me a feline grin, offering a view of a white, gleaming fang that could so very easily tear my throat out. But instead of inspiring fear, my core clenches with want. "Yes, mea floarea."

With a hum of pleasure, my hands finally begin to work over his cock in earnest. Between the lubrication and his pre-cum, the action fills the air with wet, squelching noises that are music to my ears. My clit throbs with neglect.

Sariel's breath punches out of him, and every muscle in his body grows tight, but I don't want this to end just yet. My hands fall away, and Sariel growls, pinning me beneath his scalding gaze.

"Fuck, you're sadistic, Elowen. Who knew my mate would relish my torture?"

A glistening bead of sweat trails between the gloriously sculpted planes of chest as he gifts me a crooked grin.

"You're absolutely fucking perfect."

A grin curls my lips as my hands return to him.

"Such a good boy."

A deep groan rumbles within his chest. "Oh, my fucking gods, Elowen."

A whimper escapes me despite my effort to remain composed—he's just so fucking

delicious. My strokes along his length slow. “Shall I reward you now? For your good behaviour?”

Sariel’s body trembles beneath me at his forced restraint. “ Akash, yes.”

I don’t know who Akash is, but I assume it’s a deity from the reverence in the word.

“Beg. ”

Sariel’s eyes leap from my stilled hands around his cock to my eyes, alight with surprise, before a grin splits his gorgeous face.

“Please, mea florea. ”

My own grin widens as I give him a single teasing pump. “More.”

Dark satisfaction rumbles in Sariel’s chest.

“Please, princess. I beg you to stroke my cock and my knot so I can give you my cum. Let me mark you with my seed and my scent. Show you how desperately I need you. I vow to devour every drop of honey from your cunt every chance I get.”

It takes everything within me not to suckle directly from the head of his cock, both for my own satisfaction and his. Still, I relish the sensation of my thinly gloved hands passing over the thick ridges and veins, all the way down to his knot. Within a few strokes, Sariel’s body tenses once more and his breathing becomes staggered.

“Keep begging, darling,” I add with a sultry grin as I stare up at him.

Sariel’s eyes briefly roll back in his head with pleasure. The metal of his shackles groans against the force of his strength.

“Fuck, Elowen, yes. Please, don’t stop. Please, please, please, mea floarea. Fuck!”

I watch in equal parts desire and fascination as his smooth, heavy balls draw up tight and his enormous cock spasms. Quickly snatching up the collection jar, I position it just over the head of his cock as I aim it downward. Pumping him with one hand, Sariel’s hips thrust in tandem as I murmur my praise to him in a voice sweeter than anything I’ve ever used before in my life.

“Look at what a good boy you are. My powerful mate, behaving so well for me and giving me so much of your delicious cum.”

Sariel’s cock fills the jar in only a few spurts, and it’s soon overflowing. I set it on the trolley and nearly weep with joy as I can finally take him into my mouth to swallow. His length hardens impossibly further as he groans in ecstasy.

“So...”

Thrust.

“Fucking...”

Thrust.

“Perfect...”

My throat works around his crown as I swallow and try to take him deeper whilst my hands stroke lovingly over his knot. Sariel lets out a deep, helpless sound—one I’m quite certain a formidable male such as he has never made in his life. I find myself smiling with wicked delight as I stuff myself full of his cock and his essence.

“Gods, Elowen, yes. My beautiful mate.”

By the time his climax recedes, his fluid is leaking from the corners of my mouth and is splattered across my breasts and dress. Tears stream down my cheeks from taking him so deep.

We are both wholly spent from this soul-nourishing endeavor, and to think—I have Forsythe to indirectly thank for the most erotic and pleasurable experiences of my entire life.

SARIEL

Elowen remains curled against my side for the remainder of our time together today, refusing to sit and relax whilst I'm forced to stand. My body aches at having to stand in the same position for hours on end, but Elowen kisses my tense brow and kneads my sore muscles as we gradually come to know one another and our histories. Outside of being torn away from my eldest brother as our world was flayed open by a goddess with unfathomable power—Elowen has made what should be the worst experience of my life into the best experience of my life. And although I can't yet see how exactly, we are going to liberate ourselves from Forsythe, I know that we soon will.

I can feel it without a shadow of a doubt. I can feel it on the horizon, like a reassurance so present it's as if my future has extended his hand to pull me forward.

Elowen studies me with her dark, beguiling eyes as our conversation lulls. She's told me about her mother and how Forsythe tried to save her. And failed.

Something seems strange about the story and how she came under Forsythe's care. Why was her mother placed in what she called an asylum in the first place? And how did Forsythe become her employer? I feel like it's not quite my place to point any of that out. Yet.

Still, the knowingness sits in the pit of my stomach like a fucking boulder that I can't move.

“What about your family? I've told you everything there is to be said about mine.”

Anxiety creeps in with its piercing talons, and through sheer force of guilt, I decide to seize this window of opportunity. Her brows knit together with concern, as if she herself can feel it. I try to smile in spite of my fear, but it doesn't quite reach my eyes.

"My family is... complicated."

Her tongue gives an anxious sweep over her lips. "Complicated how?"

Heaving a sigh, I decide there's no way to tiptoe around it. "My mother and father are the Archdaemons of my realm."

"Archdaemons?"

"The King and Queen, essentially."

Her lips pop open in shock. "You're a prince. "

"More or less."

She quirks a brow.

"I have no desire to rule. That kind of responsibility..."

I shake my head, heaving a sigh. "My brother. He would have been a good king."

Emotion stings my eyes. While I think about him often, I almost never speak of him. His absence is far too painful to be affirmed aloud.

Elowen's hand rubs soothing circles over my chest, and as if somehow by her own magic, if she had any, the tightness and pressure there ease. Sagging into her touch, exhaustion suddenly overwhelms me.

“There was an incident... about a year ago. He may very well be alive, but we just have no way of finding him. Though we are still searching and hoping to find him.”

“Oh, darling... I’m so sorry.”

It takes considerable effort not to wallow but to push onward to what I need to tell her.

“Which leaves me as the heir.”

Elowen draws in a steady, thoughtful breath. “And if you wanted me to come with you, I would be your consort? I can’t imagine your family—or your people—would be pleased with a human ruling over daemon-kind.”

A sad but no less relieved grin tilts my lips. “Actually, that’s the least of my worries. My mother’s a Sanguinati.”

“A what?”

“It’s another type of immortal being that sustains itself from the blood of other magically inclined beings.”

Elowen’s brows leap as her jaw drops. Somehow, she is more shocked over this than me being a prince. “You mean a vampire? Vampires are real? And there are more beings than just vampires that sustain themselves from blood?”

Here we go...

“If that’s what a Sanguinati is, then yes... and daemons, like myself, also sustain themselves from blood—though we enjoy food as well.”

A beguiling flush creeps up her neck as her eyes widen, and her arousal scent blossoms anew. “That means you will need to drink my blood?”

Hope and relief wash over me like a tidal wave. The fact that the very idea of it arouses her is an immense relief, and I silently send a prayer of gratitude to Akash . I imagine there are many who would have an aversion. Though this does not even begin to cover half my concerns, it gives me faith that perhaps she will be receptive towards the other things she will need to take into consideration.

“Yes. Once we fulfill the bond, we will need to drink from one another’s veins regularly.”

Her lips part, and the desire and want in her eyes is as clear as the scent of her honey seeping from her core.

“There is more.”

“More?”

“Much more.”

Her eyes widened again, darting between each of mine as if they would reveal the answers. I heave a sigh, trying to exhale my trepidation. “Because you are mortal, when we fulfill the bond, my blood and my venom will cause your body to shift... from then on, your life will be tied to mine. You will live an immortal life alongside me, you will need blood to survive, you will even grow fangs similar to mine, and perhaps experience other shifts, though we cannot be sure which precisely.”

Her lips part in shock. Silence descends between us, and with each passing fraction of a second, my fear grows more immense.

“Wow...”

Oh, fuck.

“Is this something you are opposed to?”

She shakes her head with certainty, easing some of my fear. “No... I just... It’s a lot.”

Akash almighty. It really is. And we’re only halfway through.

“There are a few other things to take into consideration as well.”

Her delicate brows leap yet again before she chuckles, and a wistful grin dances across her face. “How extraordinary... Even though I knew you in my soul, even if only in my dreams, I would never in a million years have fathomed such things for myself. I think I only ever imagined being stuck with Forsythe, serving him in all ways, until I grew old and he grew tired of me.”

Dark satisfaction rises in me. “Now we will grow old together, in many years’ time, and Forsythe will soon be dead.”

Like her thoughts, Elowen’s eyes drift for several moments, not looking nearly as excited as I’d hoped before she breaks the silence. “What else do I need to know?”

“Well, first and foremost, because my parents are the Archdaemons, and they are already nearly a thousand years old, they are more than ready to step down from their thrones. And because my brother isn’t here...”

“They expect you to take their place.”

I nod.

“Which means that what? I will have to become a... Archdaemoness?”

My unease is obvious as I nod again.

“Anything else?”

“I’m afraid so.”

She blows out a breath. “Jesus. Well, let’s hear it.”

“They will expect you to provide an heir unless we find my brother.”

Elowen’s expression, for the first time, is unreadable. Flat. My anxiety returns. “Well then... I suppose we’ll just have to find your brother.”

I’m not entirely sure which of the myriad changes forced upon her I’d have preferred her to be resistant towards, but bearing my children certainly wouldn’t be it. I will be a happy and fulfilled husband to Elowen regardless of children, but I can’t help the sadness welling in my chest like a sad little puddle.

“You do not wish to have children? Ever?”

Her own sadness is palpable as she studies me with forlorn eyes.

“I fear they would have my mother’s illness.”

I do not think your mother was ill, Elowen. I think Forsythe lied to you. But these are things I cannot yet say. So instead, I speak another truth.

“No, they would be immortal. Like us.”

“Her illness was not merely of the body, but the mind. I would not wish it upon anyone. I sometimes have feared that I possess it myself, though meeting you has dispelled much of that fear—since it has been proven that you were not merely a figment of my imagination.”

Just as I’m about to ask more about her mother’s ‘symptoms’, I hear the squeak of a metal door far down the corridor leading to my cell and the soft clicking of booted heels, followed by a whiff of Forsythe’s scent mixed with a cocktail of other chemical scents that make my skin crawl.

His lip is curled in disgust as he finally stands in front of us, safely behind the bars. “God, you reek, Elowen. You’re covered in him.”

The words make my chest swell with satisfaction.

ELOWEN

Forsythe keeps his distance from me, scarcely looking in my direction, as we return home. He even made me sit on a sheet in the carriage, ‘lest the beast’s filth sully the velvet seats’ of his precious carriage. And blessedly, I’m left to bathe in relative peace. Relative because my thoughts are awirl with conspiring a way to free Sarel. And perhaps an even greater question lies in how the hell we’ll sustain ourselves afterwards. It’s not like there are any jobs available for daemons in this world—though it goes without question he intends to return to his realm.

How to do so is a question I’ve been meaning to ask. But with his talk of me having to turn into a daemoness, drink blood, and bear children, I hadn’t quite had the presence of mind to ask.

And on top of that, my body seems at war with my mind because, despite the absolute-fucking-pickle we’re in—there’s a desperate and demanding ache that I promptly return to Sarel and beg him to fuck me and fill me with his seed. To fulfill our bond.

Images of attempting to smother Forsythe with his own bed pillows are a constant moving picture in the back of my mind.

Rat poison?

No—his nose is too sensitive, and I gather he has at least some of the immortality Sarel possesses. Poisoning him would likely only result in a pair of soiled trousers.

A giggle bubbles up my chest at the thought. For some reason, I am utterly delighted at the thought of Forsythe shitting his pants. Considering how obsessive-compulsive he is in regards to his personal hygiene, he'd probably be in such duress over such an incident, he might just die of humiliation.

Another giggle rises, intensifying until I'm wheezing with silent laughter, and tears stream down my cheeks.

And then I'm sobbing.

How cruel is fate that the moment my soulbound and I are united, Forsythe has to get in the way—and we may very well die trying to escape?

My sobs slow as something like realization washes over me. Something seems to click into place, but I can't yet see what.

Something about this seems so very familiar, as if history is repeating itself.

My mother had dreams and visions. Though they were in such a multitude, and I was so young at the time, that I could never make much sense of what little she would tell me about them. If so, I might wonder if she, too, had experienced The Summoning? Did she have a daemon mate out there somewhere? My heart aches to imagine suffering through not merely three years but a lifetime of dreaming about a male you know is yours but that you never get to meet.

My mind races back through linear time—Forsythe had been one of the consulting physicians at the asylum where my mother was frequently hospitalized. My mother at the time suffered only from an illness of the mind, one that induced auditory and visual hallucinations. It wasn't until sometime after that that we'd met Evandriel—through Forsythe. I never knew the nature of my mother's and Evandriel's relationship, but I'd gathered they were friends. Though I can scarcely

imagine why.

Forsythe had attempted to help my mother, but her condition eventually spread from her mind to her body. She remained under his care until her passing.

Rage and nausea churn through me in equal measure as the realization hits me that Forsythe likely had something to do with her death.

All these years, I thought he'd been helping her.

London is not a safe place for women to walk around alone at night. Sarel would be furious if he knew I was sneaking out of my bedroom window to head towards one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in the whole city. I slipped a paring knife into my garter belt and sent a prayer up to whatever god will listen. Crawling on hands and knees over the roof, I reach the eave, ready to try and shimmy my way down a rainwater pipe—only to find Evandriel, the cursed male himself, already leaning against his hearse carriage, staring up at me from beyond the garden wall on the adjacent side street.

Despite the distance and the dim light, I can clearly make out the gleam of his too-sharp teeth as he grins before taking a pull on his pipe and exhaling a billowing plume of fuchsia-colored smoke.

Attempting to descend via the rainwater pipe proves futile. Instead, I slide halfway down before the strength in my hands gives out, and I fall backwards. The breath is knocked out of me with a whoosh, and I can hear Evandriel hiss a curse before there's a thud by the garden wall, and in the next second he's standing above me.

I wheeze for air, rolling over to crawl to standing, and quietly growl several curses. As Forsythe's only servant, I possess the keys to every gate and door in his house. There's no fucking way Evandriel climbed the fence that fast. I've always known

Evandriel was something other , like Foresythe, but had never really witnessed any proof of my suspicion. He tends to make himself rather scarce in my presence.

Yet here he is, a smirk tilting his lips as soon as I shove his helping hands away.

“You alright, girl? Took a nasty spill there.”

“What are you doing here?”

“Oooh, just because, I imagine after speaking to your soulbound, it might have gotten a few of your wheels turning. Thought you might have a few questions for me—and I wanted to save you and myself both the trouble of having to rescue you from any unsavories and their ill-willed ambitions.”

The bottom half of my jaw nearly falls straight off my face. Evandriel takes another drag from his pipe and blows a large plume of smoke into the air. It doesn’t smell like tobacco. Instead, the scent is floral, sweet, and spicy.

He gives me a moment to gape, as though this was all so very expected, as he continues to puff away. Finally, I muster the fortitude to ask for answers I only now realize I’m terrified to discover.

“Did Forsythe kill my mother?”

Evandriel’s mouth slackens from around the lip of his pipe, eyes widening a fraction as if I’ve caught him off guard. The reaction is gone so fast, it makes me wonder if I’d just misinterpreted the expression. Taking a deep breath through his nose, his broad chest expands before exhaling surprising weariness. “Not intentionally.”

His words gradually sink in like quicksand, and my mind becomes so distant from my body that it takes me a few moments to recognize the warm water spilling over my

cheeks are in fact my tears; that the sharp pain in my curled fists is from my nails digging into my flesh.

For all my softness, lying beneath the surface of my flesh is a dormant creature—even if only within my mind—that when summoned has a thirst for blood.

The part of my mind that martyrs itself beneath the weight of guilt and constantly reminds me that I owe a great debt—to whom, I'll never know—because my mother and I were rescued from the streets and everyone else was left behind, tiptoes around the awakened, bloodthirsty beast in an attempt to reason with it in some milquetoast voice.

But he employed you, clothed you, fed you...

Righteous or not, it does not matter to the beast—the demon inside me—because whether or not he intentionally killed my mother, Forsythe is going to die.

Evandriel hesitates for several moments, studying me with a look of unmistakable sadness shadowing his eyes. “He was trying to cure her.”

Somehow, the words make me even more angry.

Cure her.

Now that Evandriel has revealed a modicum of truth, my mind is now able to puzzle various things together—like the fact that her mental affliction only escalated to a physical affliction when Forsythe came into picture.

Saline seeps across my lips, pressed in a grim line to try and stifle the grief threatening to crumple me beneath its weight. My voice is a tremulous whisper. “Cure her from what?”

Some part of me has always had some idea but I'd been too young at the time to grasp the reality of it.

“Her gifts.”

My brow hardens as my throat works, unable to form words. Sensing this, Evandriel elaborates.

“She was a seer. Had no one to help her control her gifts. They consumed her. The doctors thought her schizophrenic. They wanted to lobotomize her. Forsythe was the one to convince them otherwise.”

“That doesn't explain her death.”

Evandriel draws in a deep breath, as if to steady himself, and it's then that I finally recognize the signs of exhaustion etching his features. “Forsythe found a way to temper her visions by draining them. And apparently, trying to drain too much of someone's magic will drain their life force. While her visions decreased, so did her health. Forsythe tried to convince her to stop using the device he'd given her to do so, but she said she would rather ‘be weak in body than in mind because’...”

A tremor that began in my hands has now taken root throughout my entire body as the revelation strikes me.

“Because why?”

Evandriel shakes his head. “She loved you more than anything, Elowen.”

I can barely hear him over the pounding of blood in my ears. With a few bold steps forward, I fist the lapels of his woollen coat. Evandriel doesn't flinch as my tears and spittle pepper his cheek when my words rush out of me in a hissed reply. “Because

why?”

The sadness creasing Evandriel’s begrudgingly handsome features is painfully sincere. “She wanted to be there for you, Elowen. She felt tremendous guilt for how her mental health—or rather, her inability to control her gift—had affected you and your childhood...”

While it is true that my mother couldn’t hold a job because of her condition?—

Guilt churns within me at having spent all these years calling it such a thing, as though it were a disease, when truly, if Evandriel is to be believed, it was a gift.

“She just wanted to be there for you in a way she had never been able to before.”

My grip on his lapels tightens, as if it’s the only thing keeping me from sinking into the wet cobblestones beneath me, before my forehead lands squarely on his chest.

Fuck, what I would give to be in Sariel’s arms.

I’m not sure why I don’t immediately recoil when Evandriel’s heavy arms wrap around me. Instead, I allow myself to crumple against his chest as I finally release a held-back sob.

“I’m sorry, Elowen... I wish more than anything she was still here too.”

After I managed to stop sobbing against Evandriel’s chest—thoroughly dousing it in tears and snot, none of which he batted an eye at—I don’t bother trying to sneak back into Forsythe’s. I simply walk through the front door, numb and unconcerned as to whether or not he notices.

He doesn’t.

The house is so still and silent that I wonder if he's returned to his laboratory.

SARIEL

The heavy footfall of Evandriel's boots echo down the hall, stirring me into wakefulness. The scent of powder and flowers drifts towards me, making my heart and my cock throb. The latter of which is promptly replaced with fear and anger when I take in my mate's distraught emotional state. While her appearance, outside of her hollow expression, gives nothing away, even without my magic I can feel the grief working through her.

"What have you done?"

What's even more unsettling is that I can feel Evandriel's sadness as well. He doesn't bother to reply, merely holds my gaze as he opens the cell door. Unlike Forsythe, he doesn't bother to tighten my chains until I'm splayed against the wall. He just shuts the door behind Elowen as she runs into my arms.

Anxiety takes hold of my chest like a vengeful fist, even as I'm flooded with relief that my mate is in my arms.

"I'll be back in a few minutes. Forsythe requested more samples."

Elowen buries her face in my chest as my arms instinctively scoop her into my embrace and sit down on my pallet with her in my lap.

"Tell me what's wrong, mea floarea, so I can fix it. Please."

She shakes her head against me. "There's nothing to fix..."

Elowen tilts her head back to look up at me as she explains what Evandriel told her. It makes me want to tear his head off. And to think my mate could have gone her entire life in peace without having to hear such a wretched thing. Even if I, myself, would want to know the truth. I express as much. She shakes her head. “He didn’t say it to hurt me. I don’t think he meant to say it at all. I forced him to tell me.”

The reassurance does nothing to quell my ire for whoever—or whatever—has distressed her. I want to press her for answers, but as she sags against me, face buried in my chest, I can’t bring myself to steal her comfort. Instead, I sink onto the bed pallet, pulling her into my lap, holding her in the protective cocoon of my body as I press soothing kisses to her forehead and run my fingers through her hair.

The whine of the metal door down the corridor announces Evandriel’s return, followed by the chattering squeaks from the wheels of the trolley. He wisely remains safely out of range from my claws and fangs as he rolls the cart into my cell, laden with buckets of steaming water and other items. Elowen doesn’t bother to move from my lap, and I’m glad for it. He’s already well aware of the nature of our relationship.

Evandriel points to a large pile of dark clothing. I can only guess he intends to will them onto my body when he returns.

“For after your bath, etc... As per usual, Forysthe will be busy with his classes and surgeries for several hours. I have my own errands to attend to, but I shall see you in some hours’ time. And do be sure to bathe thoroughly. I’m not entirely sure when you’ll be given another opportunity.”

Anger bleeds into my veins at both this male and our foul circumstances. I clutch Elowen tighter in my arms, and I can’t help but notice Evandriel’s eyes linger there. My lip curls as a low growl rumbles from my chest. His eyes leap to mine, but his expression is empty. It shares the same hollowness that Elowen’s does.

Only a moment more passes as he turns to leave.

Elowen nuzzles closer, pressing her lush rump squarely against my quickly hardening cock, where only a thin bit of cotton sheet and the layers of her clothing separate us. She wiggles against it, sending my claws curling into her dress and the supple flesh beneath as I grunt my restraint.

“Would you like a bath?”

The chains are loose enough that I am now entirely capable of cleaning myself, but I can see the hopeful desire in her eyes. Still...

“You are distraught. You need my affections.”

She gives me a soft smile. “True on both counts, but bathing you would bring me immense fulfillment.”

I take my time searching her eyes for any sign of hesitation, before pressing a kiss to her forehead. “Why don’t you let me bathe you, hm?”

She shudders. “In this frigid basement air? God, no.”

“There are other ways I could give you fulfillment...”

Her grin gradually sweeps across her face, and it makes that sweet fullness to the point of pain take hold of my heart again. “Do you, now?”

I shift both of us, laying her beneath me on my pallet. “Oh, yes, but I’d rather show you than give you mere words.”

Careful not to snag the material of her dress with my claws—even fully retracted

their sharp points are still there—I tug at the string of her bodice. The fabric droops giving me a titillating view of the tops of her nipples and fullness of her heavy breasts. Pulling the fabric aside to bare her lush breasts, the sensitive peaks stiffen before my eyes. My fangs, and cock, throb with need to claim her, a hum of pleasure rumbles in my chest. My palms cradle the soft, luscious flesh, gently pushing her breasts together so that the short distance between the two is lessened for my hungry mouth.

Arching against me, her legs wrap around my waist as I suck one turgid nipple into my mouth, gradually releasing it with a pop. Her fingers card through my hair before tightening into a fist, as if she intends to smother me betwixt her breasts. In which case, I would die a happy male.

My cock weeps its neglect onto her dress and spread thighs as she grinds her hips against me. A breathy moan rushes out of her as I continue to lick, suck, and tease her breasts, all whilst growling my appreciation.

“Look at these perfect tits, Elowen... How do you expect me not to devour you?”

Raking my teeth against one of the precious little buds, I tease it with the steady flicking of my tongue before I finally suckle. She whimpers and her writhing grows all the more desperate.

“God, Sarii... Please, I need you inside me.”

“Fuck, me too, love. More than anything.”

Outside of escaping this hell hole.

With a growl, I release her breasts and glare down at the thick clothing shielding the rest of her body from me. If she had anything else to wear, I’d fucking tear it off of

her. As if reading my mind, her fingers make quick work of all the many buttons, strings, and ties of her bodice. After too-long moments, all that remains are her undergarments, which I take the liberty of removing myself with the exception of her garter belt and thigh-high stockings that perfectly frame her gorgeous, soft, pink cunt. Like a gilded frame might a painting.

I shall have to commission a great many garter belts and stockings from the seamstress as soon as we return to Atratus.

My hands press her thighs wide, and the action causes the lips and delicate folds of her pussy to part for me, revealing how drenched she already is to receive my cock and, eventually, my knot.

The bond burns inside my chest, demanding that I do so. Elowen gives a little thrust of her hips, accompanied by a plea, urging me to do exactly that. Gingerly, so as not to scrape her with my claws, my thumb sweeps over her clit in a tender caress. The sight of her pussy clenching with need makes my cock jerk and blossom with new seed as she whines. “Please, Sariel. Please.”

My heart swells with the sweetest pain.

“You would accept our bond? Already? Even with all the repercussions I told you?”

Elowen doesn’t hesitate. “Darling, whatever I have to give—my heart, my body, my soul, my blood... It is all yours. There isn’t a thing in this world that could stop me from wanting you.”

ELOWEN

S ariel leans forward, bringing his face close to mine. “And I will spend the rest of our lives earning the gift of you, Elowen. Not merely with words, but in action—I will love and serve you in all ways. Everything that I am, all that I have, belongs to you.”

Tears fill my eyes as he closes the distance between us, his mouth grazing mine before capturing it fully as I hitch my legs around him and his cock slides over my clit. The magic flowing in those glowing veins, adds a further heightened level of intensity to the already overwhelming pleasure.

Our tongues slide and caress. S ariel’s hips draw back to slide forward again over my aching bud, where his pre-cum leaks in copious strings and puddles. We both groan with euphoria, our hunger for one another spiraling as he continues to repeat the motion, over and over again. From all the attention he’d lavished my breasts with, it only takes a few more strokes before the initial tingling of an orgasm sings its promise.

S ariel suddenly pulls away, but before I can bemoan the absence of his cock, he replaces it with his mouth. A cry of surprise escapes me at the sensation of his tongue exploring me from entrance to clit.

Oh, my fuck.

Forcing myself up to rest on my elbows, I look down to find the most beautifully depraved sight—S ariel’s black tongue slicking over my folds before flicking steadily

over my aching bud. And just when I think it couldn't possibly get any better, his lips close over it, and he sucks.

Keening noises I've never made before escape me as I fist his hair in one hand to hold him to me. The sucking of his mouth works in a pulsing rhythm all while his tongue continues to flick against me in perfect tandem. The action sends my toes curling, muscles tightening, and my pussy clenching. And once again, he proves me wrong in thinking it couldn't possibly get any better as his tail makes its return to thrust inside of me. In only a handful of seconds, I'm crying out his name as fluid gushes from my core. As each molecule of my body explodes with divine pleasure, I hear Sariel give his own groaned growl of release and his hands fist my thighs to the point of sweet pain.

With panted breaths, tears leak from my eyes, my mind reels from what just happened. Sariel's fevered ministrations gradually slow to give me a gentle return to my body. His tongue proceeds to devour every last drop of fluid that hasn't already drenched my dress and his bed, while his tail continues its shallow strokes inside of me.

When my orgasm fully recedes, Sariel lifts his head from between my thighs, and the stark reality that I have—yet again—made a complete mess of myself and his bed has hot-faced shame creeping up my neck. Even as his tail continues to shallowly thrust in and out of me, gradually coaxing my arousal to life again. He sits back on his heels, devouring me with his gaze as his long, black tongue sweeps across his glistening lips in an utterly depraved way that stokes my arousal even further.

“You're so fucking beautiful in this ravished, sated state.”

A hum of appreciation rolls through me as I, too, take in the glorious sight of him. The plains of his thickly muscled body are sculpted to perfection. His biceps decorated in those simple but elegant gold bands. The gold caps on his horns. Thick,

glistening strings of pre-cum seep steadily from the dark, broad crown of his long, thick cock—so engorged that the skin is pulled tight and shining with a beautiful display of thick veins. And if I couldn't already smell the sweet, heady scent of it, the evidence of his release is smeared all over his lower abdomen, groin, and thighs. Another puddle of it visible beneath him on the pallet.

“As are you. Drenched in sweat and covered in my honey.”

My core gives another needy clench, and Sariel's eyes—and tail—don't miss it. His tail slides deeper inside me as he works one fist over his length. The action sends at least half a mouthful's worth of pre-cum spilling onto my clit.

His deep voice is both velvet and gravel. “Is my tail not enough to satiate your needs, mea floarea ?”

With a shake of my head, my heart thumps in anticipation as I drag my teeth over my bottom lip.

Sariel gives a thoughtful hum as he continues to stroke his hand slowly over his cock—the head of it aimed downwards, only an inch or two from my core.

“Do you realize I am incapable of denying you anything?”

With a little thrust of my hips, my entrance brushes against the crown of Sariel's cock. A growl rumbles from his chest as his head tips back briefly. “Fuck, Elowen.”

SARIEL

My restraint is rapidly waning, but a somewhat palatable solution rises to my mind. Even if it will prove to be the greatest test of my willpower, at least it will provide some semblance of relief for both of us until we can properly fulfill our bond. Only minutes ago, I found release without Elowen even touching me, and my cock still has not wavered its adamant demand that I sheath myself in her tight cunt.

With one hand on my cock and the other pinning one of her lush thighs to the bed, I slide my tail out from inside her and align my crown with her entrance. Her lips part, her petite pink tongue sweeps across them as she holds her breath.

I don't know whether to laugh or weep—because she's not about to get nearly as much as either of us needs.

Elowen whimpers, hands clutching her full breasts as I paint her folds and her clit with my pre-cum before pushing just the crown of me to her entrance. Despite all of our fluids, her cunt is so fucking small in comparison to my girth that I have to nudge my hips forward repeatedly before even just a fraction of my tip is inside her.

Her words come out as urgent and breathy, as if even she's surprised. She sits up on her elbows to look at where we are scarcely joined, and her pussy immediately gives another needy clench that pushes me out of her. I groan under the force of both pleasure and restraint.

“Fuck, Elowen, it's taking all my restraint to hold back.”

As if she can't wait a second more, she takes me in hand herself and positions me at her entrance again, scooting herself down the pallet slightly. I assist her by thrusting slightly forward again, and this time, there's less resistance. With only about half the head of my cock inside of her, her pussy flutters again, and she looks up at me with pleading eyes. "Can't—help—it. You feel too fucking good."

She cries out as I push forward to prevent being pushed out of her body again by the spasming of her cunt. My head tips back on a groan at the relief and pleasure of the entirety of my crown being squeezed inside her clenching channel.

"Gods damn it, Elowen. This pussy is so fucking good it should be a sin."

Her breathing turns to panting as I withdraw slightly to push forward again—still only giving her the head of my cock. My tail returns to her clit, to ever-so-slowly stroke it in barely-there circles. On instinct, I add a ball of my spit out of some primal instinct that I want this woman absolutely coated with my essence and marked as mine. She seems to appreciate the sentiment because, instead of being repulsed or offended, she whimpers another, "Yes."

I withdraw fully from her to sweep my hand over my leaking pre-cum and coat my length and knot with it before returning it to her core.

My hips give steady, shallow thrusts in earnest as I work my fist along the unsheathed length of me. Elowen's eyes dance between mine and where we are joined as she makes needy keening sounds between whispered curses. Her brows pinch together in supplication when she realizes I have no intention of truly fucking her. Yet.

"Why won't you give me all of you?"

Her words nearly break my fucking heart—and my willpower.

“Mea Floarea, when I give you my knot, and we fulfil our bond, we will be free of this place. I will not taint the memory of it with this place.”

Understanding fills her eyes, and she nods. My eyes catch on the dip of her throat as if swallowing back her emotion.

Her hands leave her breasts in favor of seeking me out. One hand rests on my thigh as the other slides over my fingers curled above her knee, where I’ve pinned it to the bed. It’s such a small gesture, and yet it causes a surge of giant emotion to swell in my heart. Our fingers weave together perfectly until our palms are pulled flat against one another.

The love building in my chest for this woman strikes the match that lights the fuse to my climax.

My gaze holds hers as my tail works against her clit, and I continue to shallowly thrust the head of my cock inside of her entrance. Her voluptuous breasts bounce as her cunt squeezes me tight in fluttering spasms to milk my cock as her own orgasm rises. Tears spill from her eyes as she cries out my name in between barely coherent curses.

“Yes, mea floarea. Milk my cock of every last drop. It’s yours.”

Within only the first one or two spurts of cum, it’s already leaking out of her. Both of our eyes dip to watch as her core clenches over the head of my cock, and my release continues to spill from where we are joined. “So fucking perfect, your pretty cunt stretched around my crown and overflowing with my seed.”

Her hips writhe as I continue my shallow thrusts while our orgasms gradually recede. Elowen’s eyes roll in the back of her head as she proceeds to work her hips, desperate for more.

Sweat beads on her brow, and I soon find my efforts increasing once more. It takes every single ounce of self-restraint not to thrust all the way inside of her. My body trembles from the effort, doubly so as the beginnings of another orgasm tingles at the base of my spine.

“Fuck, Elowen... I’ll never have enough of you.”

She nods helplessly. “ Oh, god... Sarel... I’m gonna cum again.”

Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck.

Just as I feel the last of my restraint give way, my orgasm crashes over me. Elowen cries out again, and I feel her pussy squirting in pulses around my cock, sending another gush of wetness between us. My thumb replaces my tail as I gently stroke her sensitive clit and ease her down from the peak of her climax.

“You’re doing so good, love. You milked my cock so well.”

Releasing her hand, I scoop her up in my arms, and her legs slide into place over my hips, where she straddles me. Her hands stroke my hair as she looks up at me from where her head is perched on my shoulder. “Now, will you let me bathe you?”

Our laughter is easy and bright as we hold one another’s gaze, appreciating this happy moment, despite the circumstances. And as I watch the faint crinkle of her big, beautiful, dark eyes, I feel myself falling even further in love with my soulbound .

You are a besotted fool , I hear a helpless voice murmur inside my mind. And I wouldn’t want it any other way.

ELOWEN

S ariel takes care to wash most of his seed from my skin before he finally allows me to bathe him. As I lift the clothes Evandriel left for us on the cart, my eyes catch sight of a skeleton key hiding beneath them. My mind stutters at the sight. Disbelief pounds through me as the clothing now makes sense, and the key is entirely too deliberately placed for it to have been by accident.

Urgency burns through me too fiercely to take time to decipher Evandriel's motives. I turn to face S ariel, whose eyes are already locked on me—as if he can detect the shift in my energy. Wordlessly, I hold the key in front of me. His eyes widen in shock and it's then that I leap into action.

My heart slams against my chest so violently it's a wonder it doesn't rattle my entire body, yet my hands are surprisingly steady as I grip the manacles at S ariel's ankles. The teeth of the skeleton key slide in perfectly. Time and space seem to narrow down to the singular moment. I'm met with no resistance as I twist the bow of the key, and a soft click echoes. The manacle pops open, hitting the stone floor with a clank.

Hope explodes inside of me like a fucking pyrotechnic fireworks display. Adrenaline takes over as I swiftly unlock each of S ariel's shackles—including the magic-suppressing collar on his throat. My breath is held as we both turn towards the cell door.

The memory of Evandriel shutting the door flashes in my mind. Of him sliding the keys back into his pocket—without locking us in.

Oh, my fuck.

He planned this.

Sariel and I exchange a glance, both of us coming to the same realization. My voice drops to a whisper. “Do you think it’s a trap?”

Sariel’s brows drop into a V as his face contorts in a vicious scowl before he moves for the door. “He’s welcome to fucking try.”

“Wait!”

The word is a whispered shout. Sariel halts, twisting towards me.

“You’re naked!”

I snatch up the clothing from the bottom shelf of the cart, which we discover is a set of what Sariel identifies as fighting leathers, two cloaks and even two pairs of boots—each in large and small sizes. Inside one of the boots is a bit of rolled parchment. With held breath, I pass the mound of clothing and boots to Sariel, and he efficiently begins to shove them on as I hurriedly open the letter.

“Exit left, third door on the left, take the stairwell all the way down. There lies your exit. It will take you into the underground railway system. When you enter the first tunnel, take a right and follow it 8 km (east). You will see a sign for Whitechapel Rd. Take the nearest set of stairs to exit to street level. I’ll meet you there.”

By the time I finish reading, Sariel’s already finished dressing. And if terror and hope weren’t currently paralyzing my thoughts and emotions, the sight of him in that black cloak and fighting leathers certainly would. Fuck me, he’s beautiful.

My body seems to be incapable of deciding what to make of this new revelation. My hands finally begin to tremble with both hope, anticipation, dread, and fear as I quickly change into the boots and pull the cloak over my shoulders.

Snatching my hand in his, Sariel wrenches the cell door open, and I lead us down the hallway following Evandriel's instructions. With each descending level of the stairwell, the air grows colder, mustier, and wetter. The metal stairs become rusted. The walls shift from stone to dirt. Claustrophobia begins to settle on top of us, threatening to crush us—or at least me—with the panic that follows.

It isn't until we reach the bottom level of the stairwell, now little more than a hole in the earth with a metal door, that he finally speaks.

"I don't have a good feeling about this, Elowen."

"Nor do I."

Sariel has to use his strength to pull the heavy black iron door open. The stench of sewers, rat shit, mould, dirt, and gods-know-what-else nearly slaughters us where we stand. The both of us draw the cloth of our cloaks over our noses.

I pull Evandriel's directions from my dress pocket. "He instructs us to go right, but... perhaps we could find our own way. I don't have much to support us, but?—"

Wearing a grim expression, Sariel cuts me off with a shake of his head. "We have no other choice but to go to him. He has the mundrapedra ... It's how I got here. I would give you everything I have and more to bring you back to Bellorum with me."

I don't know what the hell a mundrapedra is, but tears burn my eyes nonetheless—and it's now no longer merely from the stench of rodent fecal matter. My heart swells with affection for this male who travelled from another world and

risked his life to find me.

The apples of my cheeks rise from behind the curtain of my cloak. My answer requires no deliberation. The only person who existed in this world that truly mattered to me died a decade ago.

“I would love nothing more.”

SARIEL

The journey through the so-called underground railway tunnel proves harrowing. Rats the size of fat cats eye us warily as we dodge and hide in carved-out burrows to avoid being hit by snake-like metal beasts that fly by, leaving trails of cloying steam in their wake. I've never seen anything like it, though I have visited more technologically advanced realms. This place seems advanced in the most primitive and clunky way.

Ourinessa—a divine realm parallel yet entirely opposite to the one in which I was born, Vassileo—is a breathtaking place of floating cities, where technology harnesses the power of magic, seamlessly blending into the natural world. Everything about this place, Terrenea, seems to defy that harmony. From what little I have seen, it has proven to be grotesque indeed.

Each forward footstep to this Whitechapel is a moment subtracted from the sum total of time we are forced to endure here. I am both enraged with and eternally grateful to this Evandriel. He helped Forsythe to imprison me, and yet he is also the reason we are freed. At least for the moment. And I don't trust for a singular fucking second that he has done either of those things for any greater good outside of his own aims.

By the time we reach the exit from this Terrenean hell and I open the door to Whitechapel Rd., I'm gasping for air. Elowen is still waiting safely inside so I can ensure the cursed half-Serpahi male doesn't plan on attempting to murder us the moment we arrive.

My eyes squint against the pale grey light of day as I step onto a cobblestoned

alleyway, and I am, yet again, met with a cloying putrescence that invades my nostrils so thoroughly, I'm certain my nostrils have been singed.

Akash almighty, save us from this foul place.

I tug the hood of the cloak further over my head, having glamourised away my horns, wings, tail, and changed my skin to appear pale like Elowen's. When I catch sight of my own hand, I see that it's a dark brown. My glamouring abilities apparently need some work—I can't even remember the last time I used them—but that's close enough, right? Surely, something as trivial as some shades darker couldn't possibly make a difference, could it? I wonder, patting my head to reassure myself my horns are, at least, no longer visible. A paper-soft crackling noise sounds behind me, making every muscle in my body go rigid. I turn to find Evandriel smoking a pipe, shoulder propped on a brick wall, blowing floral-scented plumes of smoke into the air.

“Took you long enough.”

My reply is a scowl that I imagine looks far less intimidating in this human glamour. Evandriel's eyes twinkle with mirth and knowing, like we didn't just narrowly escape some mad doctor's hellish prison.

“Where's Elowen?”

My hackles rise further at his casual use of my soulbound's name, even if he has apparently known her since she was in utero.

“Why are you helping us?”

It's a question I already know the answer to, but I am compelled to ask it all the same.

Evandriel's lips quirk with amusement as he exhales another billowing cloud from one corner of his mouth and wills the mundrapedra into the open palm of his hand. "You're taking me with you."

It was the answer I expected.

I'm half-tempted to ask about the magical spinning top, but now isn't the time. Urgency tightens like a noose around my neck.

My jaw clenches in protest to our situation as I knock softly on the metal door beside me. Elowen peeks her head out, eyes widening and jaw dropping at the sudden change in my appearance. Still, she doesn't hesitate to press herself against my side, where I protectively drape an arm over her. I glance down at her to find her eyes narrowed with distrust as she holds Evandriel's gaze. I answer her question before she needs to ask it. "He wants to come with us."

"Absolutely not."

Evandriel's demeanour remains nonplussed.

"I'm afraid you don't have a choice."

I growl at the fact. "I could just kill you and take back the mundrapedra."

Evandriel gives me a bored look. "You'd have to have access to my aether to do that."

Aether being that place between time and space where we are able to will objects to and fro. It appears that this male knows slightly more than I'd imagined about his magic, having, presumably, been born and raised in a human realm to a human parent.

Elowen's glare is enough to make a male's balls shrivel and invert. Still, Evandriel's brows gradually inch further and further up his somehow suntanned forehead as her rant progresses.

"You're Forsythe's henchman. You kidnapped people so he could conduct his sick experiments. You stole unclaimed corpses from the morgue. You have no moral compass, and I will not condemn another world to the stain of your existence!"

Pride blossoms in my chest that she so openly speaks her mind to a male twice her size—even if he does have all of the leverage.

Evandriel's head tips back with a deep laugh, revealing the thick column of his throat. The veins there thick, and despite his golden skin, I can still make out the faint blue of the blood that rushes within. Hunger twists in my gut. I haven't eaten in nearly two days. It would take so very little effort to tear his throat out and feast.

When Evandriel's laughter finally wanes, he wipes tears from the corners of his eyes. "You're correct on all counts except for one, girl. I don't work for Forsythe. I work with him. As for the rest, your perspective is a little warped."

He exhales another slow breath of floral-scented smoke before continuing.

"The only people I kidnapped were those preying upon the weak. You might not realize this, considering Forsythe has kept you sequestered away in his house for the entirety of your adulthood, but there are predators that visit this world to seek out unsuspecting human flesh. This world is a buffet for them. And who is there to stop them? A human dressed in a fancy uniform and a tiny little baton?"

Elowen's jaw hardens as though she can't quite believe what she's hearing as he continues.

“The only reason I work with Forsythe is because, despite his unconscionable methods, I believe in his work. You know better than anyone, Elowen, just how fragile humans are. I knew your mother well, Elowen. Spent years trying to convince her to leave London with me, and I loved her more than you’ll ever know. Which is precisely why, now, you’ll be taking me with you, and I won’t take no for an answer.”

My soulbound suddenly looks a worrisome shade of alabaster. Evandriel frowns—an expression that looks strange on his perennially amused features. “And, if you’re trying to surmise whether or not I could be your father, the answer is no. She was already pregnant with you when we met.”

I can smell the salt of her tears just before they swell and spill over the dams of her eyes. Her voice trembles under the weight of the sob trying to work its way up her throat. “I don’t believe you.”

Evandriel takes a deep breath, suddenly looking much older than his thirty-something-year-old appearance—even if he is likely much more than twice that, considering his Seraphi blood. His eyes drop to the necklace at my mate’s throat. “Where my heart belongs. Right beside yours.”

Elowen sucks in a gasp, as she shakes her head. “How dare you. This necklace was a gift to her from my father.”

Like most daemons, I am an empath—able to sense people’s emotions, and even take them on as my own if I’m not careful—and now that I don’t have the palladium collar dampening my magic, the crushing weight of sadness that pours off of Evandriel is enough to have the mirrored emotion swelling in my own chest.

Evandriel studies Elowen for a moment, and I don’t miss the slight glistening in his eyes as he holds her gaze. “Is that really what she told you?”

Elowen is silent, her shock like a bucket of ice water as sudden realization unceremoniously settles itself upon her mind. Evandriel gives her a soft smile as he wills a small parcel into his hand. It's encased in a silk floral handkerchief. "We would write to each other when I had to go out of town. When you're done with them, I'd like to have them back, though. It's all I have from her aside from a ribbon and a lock of her hair."

As Elowen takes the parcel, Evandriel draws out a gold pocket watch. "Best be going now. Forsythe, as you might have guessed, has the nose of a hound, and he'll be finishing his classes soon."

I narrow my eyes at him. "You could have forced anyone to take you back with them. Why only now?"

Evandriel gives me a strange look, as though it should be obvious.

"Because you're the first daemon I've found."

I frown. "What does that have to do with anything?"

"You're from an after-realm, aren't you? A realm for the dead? I'm going to find my mate. "

ELOWEN

“... I

’m going to find my mate.” Someone makes a strangled sound, and it takes me a moment to distantly realize that someone is me.

Sariel and Evandriel proceed to have a hurried and heated conversation while all I can manage is not to faint. Dozens of questions whirl in my mind, the most prominent of which is, if my mother is in an after realm... is there a chance I’ll be able to see her again?

It isn’t until I see the flashing of a blade that I’m snapped out of my thoughts. Instinct has me trying to shove Sariel behind me, but I’d have more luck trying to move a boulder. Sariel gifts me an expression that is somehow both warm and admonishing as he presses a kiss to my brow.

“Please don’t ever try to come between me and a blade, love. If I had to choose between your life or mine, I would sacrifice mine without hesitation.”

Evandriel gives us an appreciative smirk before offering the blade—handle first—to Sariel. “It would take a lot more than a blade to fell this beast anyway.”

My heart drops as I watch Sariel take the dagger in hand and swiftly sweep it over his palm. Blood spills, and I shriek in dismay. “Wait, what are you doing?!”

“Can’t have you two love birds running off into the sunset without upholding your

end of the bargain, now can I?”

Sariel frowns as though that was exactly what he'd intended to do. Evandriel gives him a knowing smirk. “Right, let's keep it simple: you will let me use the ring to take us to my soulbound and then wherever we wish to go afterwards to make our home. Hopefully, not here?—”

“That's not how it works,” Sariel interjects. “The ring will only ever take you two places: to your soulbound and to the place you call home.”

Evandriel's brows lift, flicking briefly to the soggy, littered alleyway. “I do not wish to call this place home. And I imagine Ffion will want to be near her daughter. Take us back with you.”

Sariel scowls, but the expression softens when his gaze returns to mine. The burden of having to tolerate Evandriel's presence is nothing compared to being able to be near my mother again.

Sariel offers Evandriel a curt nod, making the male's face light up. “So, I use the ring to bring us to my soulbound, and then you take us both with you and Elowen back to your home in...?”

“Atratus.”

Evandriel's face splits into a wide, too-bright grin, and for a moment, he almost looks like another person. It's like hope has lifted a dark cloak from around him to reveal the radiant soul beneath.

However, it's promptly snuffed out as a muffled roar echoes from behind the door leading back into the underground railway tunnel. Evandriel's brows lift as icy terror trickles down my spine. “Time to go. Shall we?”

Sariel features harden. “And you will promptly return it to me when we all return to Atratus?”

Another roar rumbles through the tunnels, making my panic spike and my breath hitch. Evandrial gives him a desperate nod.

“Yes, dear fuck, yes, whatever you want.”

Blood roars in my ears, drowning out the words as Sariel and Evandriel quickly proclaim their vows. In the next moment, a strange but rather innocuous-looking ring appears in Evandriel’s hand. Sariel snatches it and shoves it on Evandriel’s finger as another enraged bellow echoes and rumbles from beyond the metal door.

SARIEL

Evandriel's eyes leap to mine expectantly, waiting for me to tell him how to use the ring—but I can hear Forsythe's beast thundering beyond the underground entrance.

With careful hands, I guide Elowen to stand behind Evandriel, out of harm's way. Realization slackens her jaw before she shrieks her dismay.

“Dear god, what are you doing?!”

“There is no world in which I will allow someone who has threatened you to live.”

She splutters something about Forsythe's gun, which I ignore, pinning Evandriel with a look that communicates the obvious as I herd them away from the door and against the wall.

Forsythe no longer has the element of surprise, and I am no longer bound by magic-suppressing shackles.

Frustration tightens Evandriel's features, but he knows it's an argument he won't win and doesn't have time to make.

When we'd left Forsythe's cell, I'd felt no small amount of dismay at the idea of not being able to wreak vengeance upon him. But now, this is an opportunity I will not pass.

I can feel the spirit of death hover beside me in waiting as the door to the

underground bursts open, and time seems to slow. Forsythe, in some strange half-shifted lykos, lunges towards me. It takes little effort to counter the sloppy, untrained movement to turn his momentum against him and slam his body to the ground.

In my peripheral, I see one of his hands sneak into his pocket—no doubt digging for his gun. Elowen screams my name in warning.

My grin stretches from ear to ear as my fingers wrap around his hand holding the gun and squeeze. The gun fires before he can even aim at me, shooting himself in his own leg. Maniacal laughter roars through me, muffling his cry of pain as I continue to squeeze his gun hand until bones break. He screams in protest, and it's then I realize I have to bring this little foray to an end—before we draw unwanted attention.

Recognition wets his eyes, and I relish the fleeting moment of his swiftly approaching death. “Please, no...”

With an incredulous chuckle, I shake my head. “Perhaps if you had not threatened my soulbound , I would have considered showing the same mercy you showed me.” Which is to say—none. But at least it would have been swifter.

“Instead, I will give you an equivalent death and it is a greater mercy than what awaits your soul in hell with the God of Death.”

Terror oozes from him, his garbled screams soon drowned out by the blood flooding his windpipe as my claws extend. I slowly press my fingers into the center of his chest, guiding my magic into the movement so that I can cut through flesh, bone, and marrow until my fingers wrap around his still beating heart and remove it from his chest.

Do I recognize that this is a little over the top?

Yes.

Do I care?

Not even remotely.

I can feel the whisper of death upon my neck, but I do not fear it because I know Azrael, the God of Death, would have done precisely the same or worse.

Standing, I toss Forsythe's heart onto the cobblestones, where they land with a soft plap, and will away the foul male's blood and sweat coating my palms. It doesn't quite replace soap and water, but it will do for now.

I turn to find Elowen looking a little green in the face, making a pang of guilt prick at my heart. Relief suffuses me as she rushes towards me, wrapping her arms around me. Though it is a relief felt too soon. A moment later she draws back, growling and hammering her precious fists against my chest.

"You reckless-fucking-asshole, what if he had shot you in the head again!?"

My heart melts, and I collect her wrists, pulling them—and her—against my chest before crashing my mouth against hers. Her struggles give way as her body moulds against mine, and I wrap her in my arms.

"Oi!"

The sound of another male's voice tears my attention away as Evandriel curses. Several people are gathered only fifty feet or so away at the mouth of the alleyway. Evandriel holds his ring-hand up, impatience making the movement rigid as his eyes dart anxiously between me and the growing crowd behind us.

“Are you done swinging your dick around? Can we fucking leave now?”

My eyes flick briefly to the crowd just as two uniformed men appear.

“Repeat after me.”

The anxiety in Evandriel’s eyes is replaced by excitement and hope as he repeats the ancient words I’ve long since memorized—words that send goosebumps rising on our flesh. Elowen’s eyes are round with both hope and fear as the three of us stand arm in arm and the world around us folds away.

EVANDRIEL

My lips part as my head cranes to take in the towering buildings surrounding us. Forsythe's gory memory evaporates as my eyes trail along the lush vines and flora sweeping across the many beautifully sculpted building facades, each in varying naturalistic designs. It's distantly similar to a style I've seen in my travels across Europe. A style termed as art nouveau or jugendstil, but this is something so much more. Celestial. Divine. Futuristic. Words come to mind, but none of them are quite capable of grasping the sheer majesty of this place.

Elowen's voice is one of pure awe—a relief, considering what she just witnessed. But having spent most of her childhood living on the streets of London with her mother before I'd found them, she's of a sterner, more resilient constitution than I often remember to give her credit for.

“What is this place?”

Sariel's reply snaps me back to reality.

“Ourinessa.”

The word, despite only having heard it once before in my life, seems to initiate a blissful out-of-body experience as I watch all the pieces of my life click together at this very moment.

“Is this Heaven?”

Sariel gives me a peculiar look. “No?”

My wave of euphoria comes to a halt. “No?”

Sariel’s brows pinch so tight, you’d think I’d grown a dick on my forehead—one so small that it could only be discerned through the straining of one’s eyes.

“It is a divine realm, yes, but it is not an after-realm.”

“But... Ffion, Elowen’s mother, is my mate. She’s supposed to be here...”

Something intuitively rings false as I declare the words aloud, and my mind echoes with Ffion’s words—words that I have held as my beacon of light, my hope, for the last decade.

Sariel’s brow is pinched with concern, and an expression that mirrors my heartbreak and disappointment tugs at Elowen’s features. Gods, I’m an asshole for even getting her hopes up.

“Shouldn’t we be in Heaven or something? An after-realm of some kind?”

Sariel gives me a look that tells me he thinks I’m nothing short of an imbecile. “We should be wherever your soulbound is.”

Dread begins to trickle into me as I turn in a circle, desperately scanning each street corner for the beautiful dark-haired, fair-skinned female with the port-wine birthmark on her face. The one whose seer magic ripples off of her in gentle, ephemeral waves that only I can see. My eyes take in beings of every shape, size, and race. Including ones like me. But none of them are her. The space in my chest where hope had carved out its home threatens to disappear like ash on the wind.

My eyes snag on my reflection in a mirror-like shop window. Something looks oddly different, but I can't quite put my finger on what at first.

I've never met another like me outside my mother. Never seen one until now. I only know what little I can recall from what my mother told before she'd left when I was only twelve, or what Ffion had told me. Everything I'd read about our kind in religious texts and lore seemed to be largely... inaccurate.

Seraphi line the streets here. Many dressed in sharp, military-looking uniforms. "... Protectors of goodness...", she had once told me.

I've spent most of my life killing people—whether it be as a soldier during the American Revolutionary War, keeping wayward scum from preying on easy victims, or leaving bad people at the hands of Foresythe. No matter how justified or unjustified, it's taken a toll on my soul.

No one's wings are glamourised here, and as if ripe with envy, the glamour I keep on my wings begins to itch and becomes a suffocating weight as their muscles flex with the need to be set free.

Tugging my cap off, I pull out the tie I keep my hair bound in as I finally drop my glamour. My wings unfurl and spread wide—knocking into several passersby and making several of them yelp.

An elderly woman with fragile, paper-thin wings that remind me of a dragonfly, scoffs in my direction as she shuffles around me. "I beg your pardon."

The words are spoken in a language I haven't heard since before my mother left. It causes some heavy, crushing emotion to close my throat shut.

My apology comes out a stutter as my mind stumbles to recall the proper translation

for, “Sorry.”

I rub my chest and throat as if somehow that will relieve the suffocating emotion as my eyes gradually return to my reflection. Somehow, simply being in this place, my skin, my hair, my horns, my wings seem to glow— the white and gold glitter brilliantly beneath the sun.

Fuck, I wish Ffion could see me like this.

I imagine her expression would look something like her daughter’s does right now— shocked.

Confusion and heartbreak batter my heart. She’d said that we would see each other again.

“Yes, yes, we all know you’re pretty. Now get out of the way, you useless-Seraphi-roadblock.”

The fine hairs of my neck rise at the voice speaking my mother’s native language. I shift to find a disgruntled female scowling in my direction as she’s forced to walk my twenty-foot wingspan to get around me. Her darkest blue hair is tied in a high bun so tight it looks painful. Dark blue eyes are a stark contrast to her pale grey-blue skin. Glowing blue tattoos whirl over her skin, nearly reaching the long, pointed tips of her ears. She looks nothing short of nefarious.

My wings snap shut as I mutter an apology—my accent clumsy and thick from having only rarely spoken it, and only to myself, since my mother left. With a curled lip and a gesture that I imagine is this world’s equivalent of the middle finger, she stalks off.

For the first time since I’ve met him, I see Sariel laugh—and the expression looks far

more natural than the numerous scowls I've put on his face.

"Divine realm, huh?"

"What? Did you think the benevolent don't have tempers? I can assure you, there's nothing that burns quite as bright as the flames of righteous anger."

I barely hear his words over the sound of my hope beginning to fizzle away as I continue to scan the vicinity for Ffion, who remains nowhere to be seen. Elowen looks equally disappointed but entirely unsurprised as we seem to draw the same inevitable conclusion. The one I am desperate to ignore.

"... But I don't see her anywhere? "

"You sure about that?"

Sariel quirks a brow at me, eyes flicking to the blue female who, I'm pretty sure, muttered, eat a dick when I tried to apologize. I roll my eyes. There's no fucking way. The tweed cap in my hand crumples as I crush it in my frustration.

"As I said, the mundrapedra will only ever bring you to two places: wherever your soulbound is and the place you call home."

"Maybe it's just brought me to my true home."

Sariel shakes his head. "Doesn't work that way either. Plus, they're two separate incantations. I didn't give you the one that will take you home."

I scowl with determination. "What're the words again?"

Sariel and Elowen each lay a hand on my shoulder as I repeat the ancient, tongue-

twisting words...

Only to appear a dozen feet away and directly in front of the blue female who clearly hates the sight of me.

She gives a dramatic scoff, as if I'm the rotten cherry garnishing a shitty day. "Gods. You again? Don't you have a mirror to gaze into?"

My heart riots in my chest. The only woman I've ever loved wasn't ever really mine.

My eyes burn as my gaze plummets to the ground—a veined, marble-like stone—between me and who it seems is my soulbound.

A female who already thinks I'm a complete and utter twat.

And pretty, some rebellious voice in my head adds.

I hear her give a muttered curse as she steps forward, filling my vision with her elegantly dressed form. "I'm sorry—I didn't mean to upset you. Did Odessa send you or something?"

Odessa?

I shake my head, the words coming slightly easier this time—though they still make it clear I am entirely foreign to this place. "No. Sorry. Just a mistake..."

The female gives me a strange look, as if surprised by my poor pronunciation. Her eyes roam over me as if she's not quite sure what to make of me. "Right..."

She hesitates for a moment longer, studying me in a way that makes me feel far too exposed before giving up and walking away.

I tug the ring off my finger, feeling like I need to mourn Ffion all over again, and hand it back to Sarel. “Let’s go.”

Sarel looks down at the ring, but doesn’t take it. “You made me vow upon my blood and magic to bring you to your soulbound and to bring you both with us to Atratus. If I do not do exactly that, it is under penalty of death.”

I heave a long-suffering sigh, scrubbing a hand over my face before I snap beneath my despair and frustration. “Well, how was I to know!? I wasn’t expecting this to happen. What’re we supposed to do now? Kidnap her? Surely there’s a way to undo the vow.”

Sarel gives me an unimpressed look. “I can assure you, there isn’t. Magic isn’t something to be meddled with, and vows are not something you can just go back on. Even if you both agree to it. The words, your blood, your life force, your magic—have sewn its will into the very fabric of the universe. It would be like trying to cut a hole into a blanket. The whole fucking thing could unravel. I assumed you understood this when you dared to suggest such a thing.”

My throat works around a knot of guilt. “No... Not entirely.”

I only know about these things from what Ffion told me—or what I’d pried out of the people I’ve tortured and kidnapped trying to find my way to exactly this place. Before Ffion, it was so that I could find my family. After Ffion passed, it only became about finding her.

Having been born in the New World—in the wilderness outside of the Virginia Colony—where human medicine is virtually nonexistent, I lost my farmer father when I was somewhere between boyhood and manhood, while all my other known family had been lost to disease or famine. And my Serpaphi mother had long disappeared... I returned to the place of my father’s birth—England—in the hopes of

finding family. Which proved to be an exercise in futility... Until I met Ffion.

All I've ever wanted was a family.

A wife.

Children.

As a seer, Ffion knew what I was. I didn't have to hide anything from her. I couldn't have even if I'd tried. She knew all there was to know about me. Told me that someday, I would find myself in a realm called Ourinessa— that I would find my destiny there. That I didn't belong in Terrenea, and my time there would pass in the blink of an eye in comparison to my painfully long lifespan.

“Seraphi are the protectors of goodness, Evandriel. Even if they are unwitting to their purpose, they will be guided to it by the unseen hands of the universe. By Akash. Just as a wave is drawn by the tide, so you are drawn by your destiny. Your time in Terrenea is exceedingly finite—when my soul is freed from my body, you will protect my daughter, and you will rescue her and her soulbound from this place. And through all your subsequent acts of goodness, you will be led to a fate far more beautiful—and filled with family and love—than you would have ever imagined. It is then that we will meet again.”

SARIEL

My intuition nudges me, and I figure this is as opportune a time as any to ask about the spinning top. I will the object into my hand and present my upturned palm to Evandriel. He does a double take at the sight of it, and his jaw falls. “For fuck’s sake... Where did you find that?”

I shrug. “Doctor fuckhole. What is it? And why does it have so much magic pouring off of it?”

There’s a glistening in Evandriel’s eyes that’d be hard to miss. I feel like from the moment I stepped out of that underground, and we left the Terrenean realm, the brute-ish mask Evandriel wears has slipped further and further. It makes me realize just how stark the contrast is between the facade he presents and the male he truly is.

With one hand, Evandriel slowly reaches out to grasp the top with careful fingers as though it is something immeasurably precious and fragile. “It is a mana siphon. It absorbs one’s power. Stores it to be used later...”

His eyes shift to Elowen, whose lips part in realization.

My heart roars its victory—at last, we finally have a way to find my brother. My heart thumps, and my muscles tighten with the need to snatch the top from Evandriel’s fingers, and I silently curse myself for being so naive as to let him take it from me.

“My mother’s power...”

Evandriel nods. “This is how he relieved her of her so-called ‘madness’.”

As if Evandriel can read my mind, his eyes return to mine. Instead of returning it to me, he takes Elowen’s wrist to open her palm, and places it there, curling her fingers over it. It gives me another wedge of respect for him.

“How much power is in it? How many times can we use it?”

Evandriel’s brows lift as he sighs, shaking his head. “I have no idea. She used it for years to drain her power. It’s why there’s so much magic emanating from it.”

Elowen grips the top tight. “I could use it to find her...”

Evandriel nods. “I would imagine so. Yes.”

I don’t have the heart to shatter her hope by demanding we use it to find my brother.

Guilt lines her features as she stares up at me. “I just... Until you, she was all I ever had. She suffered so much when she was alive. Even if I can’t speak to her, I just want to know she’s found her peace.”

The singular grain of hope I have of finding my brother slips through my fingers like sand. Despite having known Elowen for all of a few days, I’m woe to forbid her anything.

“How do we use it?”

Evandriel straightens, brows pinching. “ That is something I don’t have an answer for.”

ELOWEN

“Perhaps we should ask your mate.” I blurt the suggestion with little thought, purely out of desperation. Evandriel looks down at me as if I’ve just asked him to lick an unwashed asshole. Sariel even looks mildly surprised by it. “What? Who else are we gonna ask? It’s not like we know anyone else here.”

Evandriel scowls. “We don’t know her either. She could be a scoundrel for all we know.”

My eyes drift to where Evandriel’s soulbond lingers on the steps of what appears to be a town square—an open, park-like area where sculptures, elaborate flower beds, and sunbathing chairs are peppered about.

I can’t help but snort. “Scoundrel? She hardly looks it.”

Sariel follows my gaze, and Evandriel turns to do the same—just as she collides with a small group of teenagers, each of them issuing apologies.

“I mean, her clothing is quite obviously finely tailored and professional. She looks like she could be a politician even...”

My words drift as, the moment the teenagers’ backs are turned, the female dips her hands into each of their pockets. The move is so smooth, so fast—practised—that you’d have to be intensely focused on her to notice.

Evandriel’s gaze slowly rotates back towards mine, his brows perched in an

expression that is nothing short of smug.

“You know, I think you’re right. She does look like a politician. Sticking her hands into other people’s pockets, a wolf dressed in finely tailored sheep’s clothing. My, my... your powers of perception are astounding, Elowen . ”

My lips pucker as I chew my cheek to keep from laughing, while Evandriel continues looking more and more distressed with each passing word.

“Well, maybe she’s desperate?—”

Evandriel’s eyes search mine, as though seeing me for the first time. “Desperate enough to steal from children?”

My eyes roll as I give him a dramatic scoff. “Why, they’re hardly children. They’re teenagers! And silver-spooned ones at that. Surely, whatever she’s just lifted from them will be swiftly replaced by mummy or daddy.”

Evandriel’s jaw drops. “Who are you?”

With a shrug, I begin picking at an errant thread on the sleeve of my servant’s dress. “Just someone who knows what it’s like to have to steal in order to survive.”

Evandriel’s expression softens immediately. He clears his throat, shifting uncomfortably on his feet. From the look on his face, he remembers—just as well I do—the state my mother and I were in before she’d been hired as a maid. Though, I can’t be entirely sure. I was so young that I can only vaguely remember that it was approximately around that time I’d met Evandriel for the first time.

“The female doesn’t have a hair out of place. I’ve seen poverty before. Experienced it. Have lived among it for the last century,” Evandriel’s eyes narrow at mine, “And

you know just as well as I do—while poverty can strike anyone, it eventually wears us all down to the same brittle shade of tattered clothing, hole-y shoes, and haunted eyes. And that female is not it.”

I give a noncommittal grunt. Despite the veracity of his words, I also know that most people won’t risk their necks unless they have to. There’s something driving her to steal. And for some reason, I’m curious to know what it is. Evandriel continues rambling as if he can somehow convince himself that she isn’t his soulbound. Meanwhile, I continue to watch her, enraptured, as she pickpockets her way through the park with fingers as light as any feather.

“... In any case, she’s hardly the ideal person to seek help from. Unless we don’t mind being robbed of anything that isn’t physically anchored to our bodies. And even then, I wouldn’t be so sure. She’d probably happily relieve us of our internal organs for the right price.”

A bark of laughter escapes me. “You’re one to talk.”

Evandriel’s eyes narrow. “They were bad people.”

Sariel shrugs. “If anything, you two seem perfectly matched.”

My eyes flick up to Sariel’s twitching lips. Evandriel scoffs, looking thoroughly affronted. “I may be many things, but I can assure you that a slimy, slippery, conniving little thief isn’t one of them.”

My eyes roll. “That’s a little dramatic, don’t you think? I mean... maybe she’s desperate. And clearly, those teenagers are well cared for?—”

Even Sariel’s brows pinch with concern as he gives me a mildly admonishing look.

“—their school clothes are nicer than anything I’ve seen in my life unless it was from behind a thick glass window pane. Maybe she’s desperate. Maybe we can also help her.”

Evandriel’s hardly listening. He scowls in the direction of the female he thinks he’s been cursed with, and my heart gives a sympathetic squeeze as I consider the pendant around my neck and the bundle of letters in my hand.

“I’m going to talk to her.”

Sariel growls as I attempt to step out from beneath his arm. “She’s not going to bite me for trying to talk to her!”

Sariel’s frown deepens—as though the prospect is entirely within the realm of possibility. I scoff, turning on my heel, but grin to myself as his presence looms protectively behind me.

My footsteps rush forward as the female makes a hasty exit from the square. Sariel and I weave through the crowd inside the park until we burst through the other side, and my eyes hastily scan the vicinity frantically.

“Curses. We lost her.”

Not that the mundrapedra can’t remedy that. There isn’t a place in any realm she could hide from us. I turn towards Sariel—just as my eyes snag on a streak of blue bolting around a corner—and slamming straight into Evandriel’s chest.

EVANDRIEL

A whoosh of air punches out of my soulbound's lungs as she runs face-first into my chest. Her expression swiftly shifts from one of shock to disbelief—then anger. “Seriously, what the fuck do you want?!”

My lip curls. “You stole from those children.”

She rolls her eyes at me as one would a petulant child as she tries to sidestep me. “Typical.”

“I beg your pardon.”

The female has the audacity to clutch her nonexistent pearls and put on a face that matches her mockingly haughty voice. “Oh, I beg your pardon.”

She then proceeds to shove me out of the way with shocking strength that sends my large frame stumbling backwards. “Fuck off, Mr. Holier-Than-Thou. I’ve got shit to steal, people to pay, and a guillotine to avoid.”

Despite all her venom, her words have my hackles rising for an entirely new reason. People to pay? Guillotine? What mess has this female gotten herself into, and why-the-fuck do I feel the need to make it my problem?

Blasted soulbond.

With a growl, I trot forward to catch up with her, feeling Sariel and Elowen at my

back. But before I can reach her, she lunges for me. In the blink of an eye, she has me pressed against the stone wall of the alleyway and a blade at my throat.

Her eyes are narrowed as sharply as the tip of her dagger as she speaks to me through gritted teeth.

“Why are you following me?”

How twisted is it that fate would have the bond between us awaken and give us its first pulsing flare as she threatens my life. It’s promptly followed by a tingling shiver of arousal licking up my spine at the sensation of her body pressing against mine.

And from the look on her face, she can feel it too.

Only in my weakest and most desperate moments had I sought or accepted the touch of another in the ten years since Ffion passed. And never did it feel anything like this.

I hate it.

I vowed to find Ffion, and now the mere presence of this blasted female is threatening to upend all of my plans! Ten years! Ten years of pinning and hoping and longing—of trusting in Ffion’s words that we would meet again.

Gods damn it.

With a snarl and more force than I intend, I rend the blade from her hand, twisting her arm behind her back and thrust her against the wall.

“Help us, and maybe we’ll help you, thief.”

She chuckles, her body completely at ease—as if she’s been in this position a

thousand times before. It's a wretchedly worrisome thought.

"I'm all ears..."

Well... I wasn't expecting her to be nearly so receptive.

"Soulbound ."

She enunciates the word as though spitting out a wad of sarcasm.

Hearing her affirm it aloud has my jaw clenching hard enough to crack a nut.

Shell, you pervert.

And no matter who she is to me, I'm definitely not naive enough to trust her with our precarious predicament—lest she use it against us. I have no doubt she would.

I hum thoughtfully, and it comes out more like a purr of pleasure that I have to force away by changing it to a growl. I sound entirely unwell.

From where the thief's face is smooshed sideways against the wall, I can see one of her brows hike up as if she knows exactly what just happened.

A knowing, feline grin curls the corners of her lips. She then proceeds to wiggle her daemonic, wanton hips right against the rigid length of my cock pinned against my thigh.

The seductress lowers her voice to a husky purr.

"Ooooh, hello there. What's your name, big boy?"

My grip on her tightens as a real growl rumbles from me, and I angle my hips away from her surprisingly soft but firm flesh.

“Stop that, wench.”

She cackles, ignoring me entirely, to jut her hips out, wedging her thick ass cheeks right on either side of my cock, and wiggles some more. “Wench? Which pirate ship did you just step off of?”

The sensation tears a snarl from my throat, even as my cock fully hardens to the point of pain, and my balls ache with the need to release.

“Gods damn it, female. Remove your hindquarters from my cock at once or so help me Akash...”

She seems to take pity upon the pain in my voice, suddenly taking me seriously. My eyes dip to where the delicate column of her throat works. “Alright, sorry... I thought...”

She seems to hesitate on the words. On the obvious.

That we are soulbound and we should sacrifice all our life’s plans for being given the gift of one another. That I should be one thousand percent on board with filling every wet hole my soulbound possesses with my seed. Fill her belly with my offspring. Fuck her, claim her, mark ? —

“So what is it you want? Tick-fucking-tok, Seraphi. Guillotine, remember?”

Her words are a slap to my recalcitrant thoughts, and Ffion’s words return to me once more.

“... and through all your subsequent acts of goodness, you will be led to a fate far more beautiful—and filled with family and love—than you would have ever imagined. It is then that we will meet again.”

Going purely on intuition—and this bizarre, newfound, instinctual need—the question pops out of me without further thought.

“Tell me about this so-called guillotine and what do you need to avoid it?”

Her brows pinch. “It’s not a so-called guillotine. It’s an actual guillotine. And why do you care?”

I don’t bother to give her a response. She already knows the answer. Heaving a sigh, she relents.

“It’s a long story, and it’s too late to matter. Unless you’ve got 300,000 sovereigns, what I need— above all else—is to find a way to escape this pretty hell and a fresh start.”

I glance over my shoulder to where Elowen and Sariel stand across the alleyway, enjoying the theatrics. I squeeze my eyes shut as I am forced to experience the last ten years of hoping and planning are tossed right out the window like a fucking chamber pot.

“It is then we will meet again.”

It feels like Ffion herself is whispering the words in my ear.

Still, I have to force the words out through clenched teeth.

“I can help with that.”

I release my soulbound's wrists, and a pang of guilt goes through me as she absently rubs them, and turns to face me, her expression slackened with shock even as her brows pinch with disbelief. "The 300,000 or my escape?"

"We can take you with us. To Atratus."

Her eyes shift from mine to land on Sarel and Elwen. "Interesting company you're keeping. Where is that exactly?"

I don't actually have that answer, but I doubt admitting that would instill any trust in her. So I just shrug. "Does it really matter?"

My heart cracks a little as I take in the all-too-familiar, haunted look of despair darkening her eyes. "Will we be safe?"

We.

The ache in my chest burns anew at that singular word. We. How long have I yearned for there to truly be a we.

For being a thief, she's awfully trusting, and that alone is enough to have my protective instincts rearing up. Fuck me. Elwen was right.

"I'll make sure of it."

She hesitates—all of her earlier bravado gone—and I'm left to witness all the vulnerability underneath. The bond between us throbs with the need to replace it with safety and reassurance.

Eventually, she nods. "Come with me then."

ELOWEN

S ariel and I watch Evandriel and his mate from across the narrow alleyway—as though entranced by a theatrical production. “Do you think we should stop them? Before one of them gets hurt?”

Sariel shrugs. “Neither would die from a flesh wound. Best we leave their business as their business.”

Fair point.

Sariel and I hold our breath as Evandriel grows silent and the blue-skinned woman continues.

“... Unless you’ve got 300,000 sovereigns, what I need above all else is to find a way to escape this pretty hell and a fresh start.”

My jaw drops, and my elbow nudges at Sariel in shock. “It’s kismet, darling. Did you hear that? I don’t believe in coincidence.”

Sariel glances down at me, a soft grin curling his lips. “It would seem so. Perhaps she even knows how to use the mana siphon. Even if she doesn’t, I have no doubt my father—or one of the books in his library—will have the answer.”

My heart flutters with a hope I’d never dared to dream of. Not merely for the mana siphon and potentially being able to see my mother again—even if it’s only in a vision, just to see that she’s safe—but most of all at the fact that the universe has

brought Sariel and me together. Against all odds, no matter the unfathomable distance.

A fuzzy image of what Sariel's brother might look like enters my mind—and guilt coils in my gut. Again.

I have no doubt in my mind that my mother's soul is in a far happier place than our shared servant's quarters in London. I'd blurted out my desire to use the siphon to see her—purely out of my own selfish desire—and the moment the words left my lips, “Well, either way, I think we should use the mana siphon to find your brother first and foremost. If there's enough power left, then I can use it to check in on my mother.”

Sariel looks down at me, his eyes studying mine as though they're the most precious thing he's ever seen. “Even if there isn't, the Queen of Atratus—where we live—is the daughter of a death god. She is... surprisingly compassionate. I have no doubt she would help, if need be. My parents and I communicate with her and her mates regularly?—”

“Mates? As in plural?”

Sariel huffs a laugh. “Yes. She has a few of them.”

My brows leap. “How fascinating.”

With an arched brow, he suddenly looks every bit the haughty prince as unmistakable jealousy burns in his gaze. “Is it?”

I grin, fisting his shirt collar and tugging him down to meet my lips. “Darling, even my dreams didn't do you justice, and if it's not you, I don't want it.”

With a grunt, he leans into me, wrapping thickly muscled arms that could nearly wrap around me twice over, and brushes his lips against mine. My eyes study his, and I can't help but see the insecurity there. "Even though it means you'll be forever changed? That your soul, your life, will be bound to mine? That you'll require my blood, and I yours?"

I press a feather-light kiss to his lips as I caress his jaw trying to will every ounce of reassurance into each point of contact. "I wouldn't have it any other way."

His nose grazes my cheek.

"Then that is all that matters. But I would hope that one day, even without my family's expectation of us to produce an heir, you will allow me to keep you so thoroughly stuffed with my cock and my cum, that eventually, your belly would become round with my child and your breasts heavy with milk."

My throat works as my core clenches in the affirmation that she, too, shares this desire.

My previous fears about having children were rooted in them sharing my mother's condition, but since realizing she wasn't mad, she had simply been born in a world where her gifts were gravely misinterpreted, and she'd never been taught how to wield them, I no longer have that fear. Sariel lives in a place where magic is revered, and I have no doubt that if we were to have children they would be given every resource needed to hone their gifts.

Still, one can't erase overnight the last twenty years or so of fearing the opposite, but I have no doubt that one day, I will long to bear Sariel's children.

"One day, darling. Though for now, I must admit that I would prefer to keep you all to myself, but I crave your cock and your cum all the same."

Sariel releases a deep growl, grazing my neck with his fangs. My next words are exhaled on a tremulous whisper. “Like now... Can we go now, darling? I have this aching, soul-deep need for you to bury your knot inside me.”

The familiar sound of Evandriel clearing his throat startles me—but Sariel only tightens his grip on me. Reluctantly, he allows me to rotate and face our intruders, as his hard length presses insistently against my backside.

My eyes dance between Evandriel and his soulbound. The longing and envy in their eyes is a mirror of the other’s.

“Elowen, Sariel... This is Kelestra.”

When I attempt to step forward, extending my hand, Sariel’s claws dig into my flesh and every muscle in his body goes rigid. Kelestra gives him a sad smile in understanding before her eyes return to mine. “It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

I swat at Sariel, and while he still doesn’t let me go, he reluctantly steps forward with me so I can shake her hand. The smile she gives me is surprisingly warm, and I can’t help but return it. “Ready?”

“Not quite.”

Kelestra gives me an apologetic look—but in all honesty, I’m shocked she’s apparently agreed to come with him so quickly. I’d been suppressing no small amount of dread, anticipating that Sariel and I would be forced to wait until he’d wooed her.

Selfishly, the matter of the mana siphon is still prominent in my mind. I give Evandriel a questioning look, and his lips firm into a line that I’m guessing means he hasn’t asked her about it yet.

“Where to?”

Kelestra looks anxious—the cocky bravery she’d exuded earlier seemingly evaporated. “My home.”

I look over my shoulder to give Sariel a questioning look that says: Do we trust her?

His brows dip in the center to form a low V— and the change in expression makes him look downright sinister. “If you intend to trap us, I can assure you, it won’t end well for you.”

With a heavy sigh, she smirks. “I’m just as eager to leave this place as you are.”

EVANDRIEL

Kelestra's home—unlike her fancy clothing—is anything but. It's a tiny place. Paintings cover the walls—some of which are remarkably beautiful, while others are a smear of paint. Like something a toddler might do. She's folded us directly into her kitchen, and as I take in the eclectic decor with surprised eyes, a rotund woman with fuzzy, moth-like wings and antennae comes bustling in, jolting at the sight of us.

Again, whispering in Ourinessian.

“Akash- almighty. You scared me. Who are your friends, Kelestra?”

Kelestra's voice lowers to meet hers. “Some family friends.”

The moth-woman eyes us a little warily, but ultimately gives us a smile. “Well, it's good you're back. Halyra's been awfully fussy today. She's sound asleep now, but I imagine she'll demand you once she wakes up.”

My lips part in realization as my eyes take in the other obvious clues. Particularly the toys I now notice peppering the counters and floors. Kelestra reaches into her pocket and counts out a few silver coins—the same coins she stole from the teenagers in the park. My heart basically shatters and I have the sudden urge to flay myself to make penance.

Kelestra gives her a slight bow as she puts the coins into her hand. “Thank you for watching her.”

The moth-woman absently nods, studying our group as slips the coins into her purse. Her eyes seem particularly concerned with Sariel's presence. Kelestra repeats herself, an obvious dismissal. "Thank you, Brynhila."

"Oh, yes. Of course. Same time tomorrow?"

Kelestra's eyes slide to mine, an obvious question—and even more obvious vulnerability—in her eyes.

The shattered remains of my heart are now pulverized to dust.

Does she actually think I would turn her away because she has a child?

My eyes sting at the thought and I'm suddenly feeling the weight of the day—and perhaps the last 150 years—press upon me.

Jaw clenching to quell my emotion, I dip my head in affirmation. Kelestra's eyes linger questioningly on me before she finally returns her gaze to the nanny. "Not tomorrow, no. I'll give you a call if I need you, thank you."

My ears ring, and I feel a wave of dizziness wash over me as reality settles in.

Ffion is... well and truly gone.

I've met my soulbound.

And now, I'm going to be—for all intents and purposes—a father.

The fact that I was not an active participant in helping to conceive Halyra is of little consequence. I know what it means to have an absent parent. The fact I haven't even laid my eyes on this child does little to stifle the overwhelming sense of

protectiveness swelling in my chest.

I'm only distantly aware of the door shutting behind Brynhilla, and it isn't until Kelestra takes up the space directly in front of me that my mind returns to the room. "You okay?"

My throat works. "Yes."

She gives me a knowing smirk. "You look like you've seen a phantom."

I shake my head. "No... I just... It's been a surprising day."

She nods, sadness and vulnerability lining every feature—so polar opposite to the formidable front she'd presented earlier. The obliterated remains of my heart knit back together purely by the will to liberate her of anything that isn't happiness, safety, and security. This too is a startling sensation.

Her eyes search mine, hesitating for a moment. "Would you like to meet her?"

"I would..."

She hesitates for a moment, brows pinching as though she's now doubting the decision to come with us. No matter how desperate she is.

"Very much so," I add to reassure her as I press my hand to the small of her back. Tingling electricity seems to course through between us at the point of contact. And something about it seems so very right.

The action seems to convince her. Kelestra turns to face Sarel and Elowen. "Would you mind waiting here or in the living room for just a few minutes? Feel free to make yourselves at home. I'm just going to pack a few things and collect Halyra."

Elowen gives her a smile—all sweetness and warmth—looking so very similar to her mother, Ffion. “Of course, darling. Take all the time you need.”

So very clearly, I can see Ffion, in my mind’s eye, with her knowing, impish grin. For some reason, I feel like she’s there—even if only in my mind—telling me to let go of her.

And as Kelestra leads me out of the kitchen, down the hall, and into a small but bright nursery to stare down into the crib of a chubby, sleeping infant—with curly dark blue locks and pointed ears—I find myself suddenly surrendering to the intuitive urge that fate is shoving me toward.

I don’t know this child or her mother, hardly, but it’s in that moment that some sense of knowingness fills me with such an overwhelming sense of peace and rightness. As if every moment in my life has led me to this moment, and brings tears to my eyes.

It may not have at all been how I’d imagined it, but Akash is gifting me everything I’ve ever wanted. My soulbound , a child—a family—and the shining in Kelestra’s eyes, as she watches the emotion and adoration shining in my own eyes at the sight of her daughter—is anything to go by, maybe even one day, love.

SARIEL

A pparently, time in Bellorum—the realm in which lies Atratus—passes very differently. Only hours had passed here instead of days. In the wee hours of the morning, the mundrapedra returned us exactly where I'd left. My mother and father had both wept with joy for our seemingly swift return—I didn't have the heart to tell them everything we went through to do so, other than the fact that they could thank Evandriel for expediting the process. The company we'd brought with us—Evandriel, Kelestra, and Halyra—had come as a pleasant surprise for them. Speaking in thickly accented Ourinessian, my mother was ecstatic to coddle a babbling Halyra, all while flitting her eyes pointedly between me and Elowen.

When my soulbound had presented the mana siphon to them, and Evandriel explained what it was, tears showed in my parents' eyes. We've still to research how to use it exactly, but my father had promptly retreated to his library to do so. And as soon as I claim my mate, we're going to return to help him search.

My parents had been accommodating in allowing Evandriel and his new family to stay with them. Their home in Atratus, while still less than half the size of the palace we'd had in Vassileo, is still massive and has several extra guest rooms. Both my mother and father had seemed eager to take the opportunity to practice being grandparents. My mother had announced with waggling eyebrows as she eagerly ushered us out of their home.

And thank fuck because, now, I'm on the verge of jumping out of my fucking skin with the need to claim Elowen.

Even though we're still atop Pearl, on our hour-long journey back to my home sequestered away in the forest, my cock is a thick bar pinned to my thigh where Elowen's ass and thighs jostle with each sauntering step Pearl takes. I'm about to fucking erupt.

Elowen, on the other hand, is too in awe of our surroundings—and the miracle of where life has led her—to notice. With a heaved sigh, she twists to look up at me from where she's seated in front of me. Tears glitter in her eyes. "Thank you for coming for me... to imagine a life without you..."

Her voice cracks on the last word and it causes a fissure in my heart.

"There is no world in which I would not have come for you, Elowen. I'd give up everything I am, everything I have, to be with you. To protect you. To have the privilege of loving you. I'd take all the torture and experiments by a deranged doctor over and over again. Although, being chained up for you to do with me with what you will was anything but torture. You've unleashed a kink I didn't know I had and now will not be able to live without."

She grins up at me, and the crinkling of her eyes causes her tears to slip. With a hum, my lips and tongue collect the precious saline as I card my fingers through her hair. My cock twitches, drawing her attention and one of her hands. Pleasure shoots up my spine, making my body go rigid as her delicate fingers trace my length before her thumb begins to sweep teasing circles over to the straining head of my cock where a wet spot is already developing.

My voice is a barely restrained growl as I sweep her hair over one shoulder and graze her neck with my fangs. "If you don't stop teasing me, I'm going to have my cock buried inside you the rest of the journey home."

Her large, dark eyes bat their luscious lashes at me as her tongue sweeps over her

lips. “Do you promise?”

My eyes give a cursory sweep of our surroundings. We’re on a path surrounded by forest and blessed solitude. With a swift flick of my claw, the top of Elowen’s bodice surrenders her plump breasts with a mouth-watering jiggle. She gasps in surprise as her nipples stiffen to two delicious points against the early-morning breeze. I gruffly palm Elowen the reins before cupping her breasts and teasing each of their peaks with my thumbs. The sound that escapes her is enough to send my gut clenching to prevent my cock from spilling.

“Oh, gods, Sarel.”

The scent of her arousal is enough to make me drunk as she reaches her hand back to stroke my cock through my pants. She stills as my fangs hold her in place, applying just enough pressure to threaten her skin. I lap at the slight marks I’ve made as tiny droplets of blood rise to the surface. “I only have so much restraint, mea floarea, and I don’t want the first time I truly claim you and give you my knot to be on Pearl’s back.”

Still teasing her breasts, one of my hands tugs up the skirt of her dress and sweeps a careful claw through the bit of cotton hiding her sweet cunt from me. My words are murmured against her throat. “Lean into me, love.”

Guided by my arm, Elowen leans back against me at an angle and shifts her hips forward, giving me access to the pretty hole I’m about twenty minutes away from claiming for the rest of our lives. She’s already fucking soaked, and I can’t help but groan as I slide my thick middle finger through her folds—having retracted my claws—over her clit and dip into her tight entrance. I repeat the teasing motion until her hips are giving needy little thrusts as her breathing turns into shallow panting. “Please, Sarel.”

A chuckle rumbles from me as I reward her clit with a few teasing slaps. “Please, what love? Tell me what you need.”

My middle and ring finger glide over her clit and into her core, stretching her around my thick digits. “Don’t make me wait any longer. I don’t care that we aren’t in a bed yet. I just need to feel you inside of me.”

My heart, and knot, fucking ache with need for this woman. “Are you that desperate, love? You can’t wait twenty minutes for my cock?”

She shakes her head against me, the action causing her breasts to shift in counter. My fingers withdraw from her to reveal the truth of her words. Her honey coats my fingers in a clear, gooey sheen that makes my mouth water and my fangs ache. Pre-cum leaks from my cock, soaking the leg of my trousers as my tongue licks my fingers clean and her taste blossoms on my tongue. It snaps my restraint.

I stand in the stirrups so I can free my cock before sitting back down behind Elowen. With my palm on her back, I guide her to lean forward until she’s draped along Pearl’s broad back. When I lift her dress, gathering it at her waist, her little puckered hole that I have little to no hope of ever fitting in greets me and my cock kicks at the sight of it. Elowen holds her breath as I grip her thighs to lift her rear off the saddle and position her cunt at the head of my weeping cock. She mewls the moment it brushes her entrance and wiggles her hips to nudge it inside.

My eyes are locked to the point where we are joined, breath held as the thickly flared, broad crown of my cock forces the petite pink slit of her cunt to stretch around it. My balls tighten with the need to fill her with my cum, and I stifle it with a clenched jaw and a growl, gradually dragging her further down my length. “Gods damn it, Elowen. Look at this perfect cunt. Are you gonna let me breed you, mea floarea? Fill you with my cum and my knot? Mark you as mine?”

Her voice is a breathy sigh as her pussy clenches around my cock at being forced to take more of me. “Gods, yes. I need it. Need you.”

There’s no way she’ll be able to take my knot like this, especially not without hurting her. I have to work her body properly to prepare her, but I’m loathe to disappoint her.

She rocks her hips, legs trembling, as she squeezes the head of my cock inside her pussy with a grip like a fucking fist. Wet sounds fill the silence between her panted breathing. “More, Sariel, please.”

Akash -almighty, she really is that desperate. Unusually desperate. My eyes lift to the four tiny marks on her throat as realization slams into me.

Oh, fuck. Could it be? From just that tiny bite? I’d barely broken the skin.

Guilt worms its way through my gut, and she whimpers when I try to pull her off me, but with surprising strength she only bears down further, sliding all the way down to top of my knot where she can go no further without hurting herself. And it feels fucking divine. A snarl tears from my throat in the same instant I feel her digging little claws into the flesh of my forearm now barring around her waist as I pull her against me. “Fuck, love.”

My hips give a mindless thrust before I can stop them. I crane my neck to take in her expression to find her face unnaturally pale and sweat beading her pinched brow. With eyes squeezed shut as if in pain, she lets out a heady groan grinding herself on my cock as if trying to take my knot all at once. It provides a pressure that is just on the other side of pleasurable.

My heart drops as my arm wraps tighter around her waist to hold her closer and relieve some of the weight.

Oh, gods... It's happening. She's shifting before she even had a chance to properly fucking think about it.

I caress some of her hair back as she squirms in my hold, hips working over my cock in a way that would have me cumming already if it weren't for my grave concern.

In the months before I'd left for Terreneia, I'd thoroughly researched the stages of a mortal soulbound's shift and how to best care for them through it. I'd basically memorized it.

Initial Stage

Fever

Cold sweats

Achey muscles and bones due to sudden growth

Extreme arousal

Primal urges such as biting, marking, claiming

Small shifts in appearance such as the changing of eye color and/or developing claws

Uncontrollable need to fulfill the bond

Uncontrollable need to breed/be bred

To ease symptoms:

1. Providing sexual stimulation throughout the shift will ease the transition and

solidify the bond, which will help soothe the primal urges.

2. Imbibing the immortal soulbound's seminal or arousal fluid will aid in pain relief and lowering fever temperatures.

Mediary Stage

Fever

Migraine

(in the case of the soulbound developing horns)

Increased primal urges

Thirst for blood

Uncontrollable need to fulfill the bond

Uncontrollable need to breed/be bred

If female, menstrual-like cramps

To ease symptoms:

1. Continue to provide sexual stimulation.
2. Continue to imbibe seminal or arousal fluid.
3. Apply seminal fluid directly to the cervix to relieve menstrual-like symptoms.

4. At this stage, your mortal soulbound will have developed fangs, and will now require your blood. Take care not to overfeed.

Final Stage

Completion of physical shifts

Exhaustion

Slight waning, but still present heightened arousal

To ease symptoms:

1. Gentle skin-to-skin contact such as stroking, cuddling, and kissing.
2. Manual stimulation, such as oral sex, will ensure the soulbound is not overexerted but remains sexually sated.
3. Offer small 'feedings' of blood. Do not overfeed.
4. Continue to provide seminal or arousal fluid for the soulbound to imbibe to keep any lingering pain at bay.
5. Sleep.

So, basically, fuck, feed, cuddle, sleep. While I was both excited and aroused, I was also anxious with worry and guilt. I hadn't even had a chance to prepare her for this. Gathering Pearl's long-forgotten reins, I urge her into a gallop, hissing at the sensation of Elowen cunt clamping around me as she's bounced on my cock no matter how hard I try to hold her still against me. Elowen's cry of pleasure rings through the forest causing bird's to take flight.

Despite how desperately I try to resist, the feel of Elowen's pussy being impaled and jolted to the stampeding rhythm of Pearl's hoofbeats has my painting Elowen's cervix with my cum in minutes. My orgasm washes over me like a fucking tidal wave that makes me feral with need to properly fuck her, but it seems to appease Elowen momentarily. Her desperate, mindless moans and writhing lulling to something less frenzied.

Her breasts bounce, and I can't help but attempt to cradle them atop my forearm as I keep her clutched safely against me. In seconds, she's whimpering with need again and when she opens her mouth on another moan, I see her fangs have come in. The sight steals my breath. My precious soulbound is mine forever. It's further evidence that our lives, our souls are tied together.

Elowen's eyes open, and I'm relieved to see that they are still human despite being wildly dilated. I say a silent prayer that they remain that way. She's utterly perfect the way she is. Though admittedly, the sight of her fangs sings to all of my most primal urges.

The jostling caused by Pearl's gallop has another orgasm tickling the base of my spine again already and Elowen's core still hasn't stopped fluttering around me even as she grinds against me with need for more.

I can't help but chuckle at the sheer madness of this with another climax already on the horizon.

Akash-almighty, I'm going to be fucking wrung dry before I even get the chance to ease her pain by allowing her to suckle my cum directly from my cock.

ELOWEN

Everything aches, and I need Sariel's cock, knot, and cum like I need oxygen. I'm only distantly aware when we finally arrive to his home. It's only the sudden weight of my legs that I realize we're no longer atop Pearl; that Sariel is still holding me against his chest, with his cock still buried in me from behind and his cum trickling down my thighs. His cock thumps deliciously against my cervix with each forward step inside his home. Sweet relief and euphoria suffuse me at the sensation.

Helpless tears spring to my eyes in despair when he lays me down on his bed and his cock slides out of me.

A sob creeps out of me. "God, no, please. I need you."

I'm distantly aware that I'm losing my mind, but all rational thoughts are buried beneath the need to be consumed by Sariel and everything that he is.

A moment later, there's the tearing of fabric and my dress is pulled off me from below. I shiver against the air, instinctively tucking my knees beneath me and raising my rear, murmuring a prayer that is quickly answered.

Sariel's cock glides inside of me, and my body shudders as tears of joy and relief spill from my eyes. His claws dig into the flesh of my ass as his tail reaches between us to caress my clit, inspiring a sob of gratitude for this male. Sariel's voice is soothing and gentle behind me.

"Shhhhh, mea floarea. Is this what you needed so badly? For me to fill and stretch

this perfect pussy and mark it as mine?”

My voice is little more than a croak. “Yes.”

I feel like I’m losing my mind in a feverish haze of frenzied need that is nothing short of disorienting. My head spins, my skin burns with cold sweat, my bones and muscles ache and throb, all while I feel like I’m being held on the cusp of a never-ending orgasm. Even when I do tip over the edge, the sensation never fully abates and I can scarcely catch my breath.

Sariel’s thrusts are steady like he’s afraid of hurting me—a valid concern considering the size of his cock and the knot that could threaten one’s chastity just by looking at it. But it’s not enough to ease the desire and need burning so bright inside of me that it makes me want to jump out of my skin. I can only equate the sensation to that of scratching the itching of hives on one’s skin—too much will never be enough, and it only further urges you to scratch until you bleed.

With gnashing teeth, my fingers—now tipped with claws and something I would be concerned about if it weren’t for the madness rending my body—tear through the fine bedding beneath me as I throw my hips back in counter to Sariel’s movements.

“Oh, god, please, please, please, please, please.”

His fingers grip the thick flesh of my ass and the sensation of his claws pricking my skin seems to alleviate some of the weight from my chest.

“I’m here, mea floarea. I’ll give you everything you need.”

I gasp at the sensation of his knot threatening to break through me—the sweetest pain—and I know that it is the only thing that will provide me any relief.

“More, Sariel. I need more. Give me it. Please.”

His motions slow and just as another sob threatens to spill, I feel him surge forward on a slow glide that reaches so deep it steals my breath. He presses onward, and his knot stretches me further and further as it inches its way inside even though it's still not quite at the height of its girth.

My core spasms frantically, both at the shocking pain of the intrusion, but also at the lightning bolt of pleasure and euphoria streaking through my body. He growls behind me, and a moment later I feel his cock pulsing inside of me. Sweet relief fills me but in the next moment, with the grip on my hips he flips me onto my back, and he's straddling my chest.

The move is so fast and smooth I've only just opened my mouth on a yelp when his cock is already breaching my lips and he continues to spurt thick ropes of cum down my throat. Sariel's hips work deep, slow thrusts as he grips my hair and our eyes roll back in unison.

This. This is what I need.

The dizzying fever and heat making my body slick with sweat immediately starts to ease. Sariel's tail slips between my legs and tips my bent knees to either side before circling my clit. My climax reaches its peak, and I'm moaning around Sariel's thick, veiny length as my throat works around large gulps of his cum.

When he finally withdraws, we're both panting, but I finally feel like some of the haze has lifted.

“What is happening to me?”

A guilty look passes over Sariel's face as he shifts to lie beside me—though his tail

seems to have a mind of its own and is determined to stay buried between my legs.

“When my teeth grazed you earlier, I broke the skin... Enough to spill a little blood. I—I didn’t realize that?—”

His throat works around a ball of emotion, brows cinched and buckling beneath the weight of shame and guilt. The sight makes my heart crack.

“—that it would be enough to incite your shift. Elowen, I’m so fucking sorry. More than anything, I wish that I could take it back. I had no idea that something so small would?—”

I cut him off by pressing my palm to his mouth, and merely the sensation of his skin upon mine is enough to have my arousal blossoming again.

“Oh, darling, no. Please. I want this. I told you that. I want you and everything that comes with you. I only wish I knew more about it.”

Sariel’s chest rises and falls in hard breaths as his frantically eyes search mine for any signs of doubt. His brow relaxes slightly at the sight of my wholehearted certainty, and his large fingers curl around my wrist—and I swear to fuck I feel it in my clit—to move my hand from his mouth.

“I barely even told you what would happen.”

“What? That I might look a little different, need to drink your blood, and our lives would be tied together?”

His eyes dance between mine. “Well, yes... and that we will feel some pressure to produce an heir. I didn’t even get a chance to go into all the royal duties that will laden our shoulders when we take my parents’ throne.”

God, he looks so concerned for me that it makes some twisted part of me delight in his torture. And it makes that burning need to fuck him and be fucked by him return with a vengeance. I shift closer towards him, wantonly pressing my breasts against his thickly muscled chest as I hike one leg over his waist and draw my hips towards his half-hard cock. His cum and my arousal create a delicious glide with my clit against his bulbous crown, my core clenches needily around his tail. The sensation turns my voice into a husked purr I've never previously been capable of.

“My love, you could tell me that my duty as your queen is to muck cow shit from a barn with a teaspoon all day, every day, and I would fulfill it with a smile on my face—because it means that I get to share my life with you.”

Sariel's jaw drops a moment before he snorts his laughter. His tail shifts to coil around my thigh, drawing me even closer, better enabling me to work my leaking sex over the head of his cock. His hand slides over hip, dragging me onto his cock as he thrusts his hips forward and he captures my lips in a dizzying kiss. Pleasure sets every molecule in my body alight with need.

His tongue claims mine as his length impales me. Each time his crown pushes against my cervix, it's like hitting a button that releases more pleasure and endorphins to course through me. Still lying on our sides, Sariel grips me behind the knee, lifting my leg higher as he pounds into me and his tail slides over my waist and dips between us to tease my clit. The new angle allows him to hit pleasure points inside me I didn't even know existed. Within only a few more thrusts, I'm already shattering around him. My head tips back as my vision whitens, and my jaw slackens on a keening sigh.

“Eyes on me, Elowen.”

My eyes open to see his devouring me. His gaze dips between us, to where we're joined, as he angles us so I can share his view—never faltering in his merciless

thrusts.

“See, mea floarea? Look how perfectly you’re pretty little cunt takes me. Slick with my seed and your desperate need, this pussy belongs to me.”

Emotion tightens my chest at the truth of his words.

“Only you, Sariel. It’s all yours.”

The wet noises between us and the sight of my pussy clenching around his long, thick, veiny length spur my orgasm to new heights. His knot still only fits inside to the outermost edge—the majority of it is still neglected. And it makes my fucking heart ache.

I draw a ball of spit onto my hand to add an additional layer of lubrication as I reach between us and stroke over the hot, swollen, and firm flesh. Sariel snarls a curse and his hips stutter. In the next moment, his cock pulses inside me, and I watch in awe and desire as his seed begins to overflow, leaking through the tight squeeze of where we are joined.

The delicious, decadent sound of Sariel’s euphoric groan makes my nipples prick with desire as his thrusts turn languorous.

“Oh my fucking, gods, Elowen ? —”

Still buried inside me, Sariel pins me beneath him, pinning my knees to the bed on either side of my waist. Slowly, he withdraws, his eyes locked onto evidence of his claiming. My pussy clenches beneath his gaze, the action squeezes some of his cum out of me. He growls, and begins pushing it back in.

“Naughty girl.”

Despite his reprimand, my hips give needy little jerks, as if to assist his attempt to put his seed back inside me where it belongs. “You like that, sweetheart?”

I nod, rising to my elbows to watch his efforts. His eyes lift to mine, flaring with a possessive satisfaction. “Because I’ve never seen anything more beautiful or perfect.”

His cock is still heavy between his legs, a thick string of cum stretching between its tip and the mattress. My mouth waters in response, and my core gives another instinctive clench that pushes a trickle of his cum back out of me. Sarel hands smacks my clit, lancing pleasure through me, faintly tinged with pain, and tearing a soft cry from my lips.

He soothes away the slight hurt by stroking soothing, wet circles over my clit with his cum. “You need to keep it inside you. Lest your symptoms return.”

“Oh.”

Oh.

That’s why I feel slightly less crazed.

My lips quirk. “Your cum is the cure to my madness?”

Sarel’s fingers continue to gently work my clit as a corner of his mouth tips up with male satisfaction.

“Among other things.”

I quirk a brow, angling my hips slightly upward so my weeping entrance grazes his cock. I hum my pleasure as his cock twitches, hardening again.

“Hmmm, I believe it. Before I swallowed you down, I couldn’t even see straight...”

My claws reach for his hips so I can drag myself onto his crown. He pumps shallowly inside me, abs flexing so tightly it highlights each of his ab muscles like the fucking keys of a goddamned xylophone I want to play with my tongue. His hands press firmly onto my inner thighs to keep me splayed wide for him.

The heat of a fever returns to me by the time he finally strokes fully inside of me until his balls are pressed against my puckered hole. My breathing turns into panting as that frantic need begins to coil through me, tightening all of my muscles, and I give a pained whimper.

“You need more medicine, sweetheart?”

I can’t form the words. I only manage to nod.

Sariel pulls out of me, and the sudden absence makes me want to curl in on myself. Thankfully, it doesn’t last long. Kneeling beside me, he lifts me and settles me against an enormous mound of pillows propped against the headboard. It creates the perfect height for him to kneel on either side of my hips so I can feed directly from his cock.

Pleasure and relief curl through me as my eyes eat up every sacred inch of giant length. With both hands, I work them over the leaking head with a gentle twisting flourish, before stroking down each and every plump vein of his shaft. Pre-cum drips and splatters against my breasts. Sariel growls possessively, smearing it over my skin and teasing my nipples with the viscous fluid as his tail dips between my legs and begins to gently work inside me with heartrending tenderness.

I have no doubt both of us will be aching and sore by the time my shift is complete, so I’m sure to make my ministrations gentle. My tongue and lips worship him with

gentle, open-mouthed kisses as my hands glide over his heated flesh with a near-feather-light touch, all whilst I moan my ecstasy and take him as deep as I can until tears spill down my cheeks.

Sariel's hips begin to shift in subtle thrusts as he watches me. "Fuck, sweetheart, look at you. You suck my cock like it's sole source of sustenance."

My gaze holds his as I pull his hips toward my face, trying to force his too-long, too-girthy cock deeper than it can fit into the narrow channel of my throat.

I whimper around his cock, staring up at him as my throat works to stifle my gag reflex. His thumbs sweep up my tears, bringing them to his lips for his black tongue to collect. "Look at my good girl. Trying so fucking hard to take all of me."

I draw back to catch my breath, and thick strings connect us. Swiping them over his length, I gently work my saliva over his knot as I suckle from the head of his cock. Obscene, wet noises fill the air—both from my oral ministrations and his tail now working in earnest, pumping inside of me.

My eyes roll back as my muscles tighten, then go lax as my orgasm works its way through me. Cupping the back of my head in one hand, Sariel's climax spills down my throat in pulsing spurts. "So fucking beautiful watching you come undone for me, mea floarea."

SARIEL

After napping half the day away, I wake up pinned beneath Elowen's hips, writhing and painting my cock with her arousal from where she straddles me. Her movements are frantic as she looks down at me with not merely lust but fear. Her fangs have lengthened—another confirmation the time for her to feed from me has come. Anticipation has my heart kicking against my chest. According to the books I read on the nature of a soulbound mortals' shift, her drinking my blood will enable her to complete her transformation.

"I think I'm hungry, but I'm afraid, Sariel. I don't know what to do. I don't want to hurt you."

Emotion fists my heart and has me rising to sit back against the headboard so I can give her the best position for feeding. Her needy hips, however, have other ideas, and it's clear to me her body is at war with which urge will take precedence.

Taking the full globes of her ass in each of my palms, I guide her carefully onto my length that this female commands with astonishing ease. Still, I can only manage to fit the scarcest beginning of my knot inside of her, but it doesn't stop her from working her hips back and forth to try and force more of it in. Once she drinks my blood, however, I know it will ease the pain of it and heighten her fragile body to welcome me fully.

I draw her closer against my chest, tilting my head to the side and baring my throat to her, but her body goes rigid. Tears line her eyes as she shakes her head.

“I don’t want to hurt you... I—I?—”

Elowen’s throat works as her chin trembles beneath the weight of her fear. “I don’t know what I’d do if I ever hurt you, or worse. You’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me, Sariel, and you’ve done so much for me... What if I drink too much? What if I puncture the wrong vein? What if?—”

My body curls around her protectively as if it will shield her from her fear. “You won’t hurt me, love. Have you seen the scars on my body? I was born in Hell. I’ve survived wounds no mortal could walk away from. One of my duties as a prince was to lead the front lines of my parents’ army. I’ve never been to war, but I spent much of my time quelling vicious riots. I’ve been stabbed, impaled, flayed, tortured—shot in the head by that godsforsaken fucking doctor... And how do I look now?”

Tears continue to stream down her cheeks as her eyes devour every visible inch of me, taking in every scar and evidence of my words before her gaze returns to mine. “Beautiful... You look beautiful. Like everything I’ve ever dreamed of and more.”

Sudden emotion swells to bursting in my chest and burns the dams of my eyes. My hands cradle her face, pulling her close to mine. “Perfection does not even begin to encompass your beauty and all your many qualities that never fail to steal my breath. We belong to each other, Elowen. The only thing I wouldn’t survive is your absence. Other than that, do with me what you will.”

I dip my forehead to hers, thumbs stroking her cheeks. “Our souls are bound together, Elowen... My blood is yours to take.”

ELOWEN

O overwhelming emotion washes over me at his words. Sariel tilts his head to the side to bare his throat to me once more, and I steel myself, putting my faith in his words. My hands cup his jaw as I press a lingering kiss to his lips before bringing my lips to hover over the curve of the long, thick column of his neck. My tongue licks a thick stripe along it to explore where my fangs should find their home. I can feel the blood rushing beneath his veins with my newly heightened senses, and in the same moment, an impulse I can no longer ignore spears through me. My lips draw back, and my jaw opens to take his flesh between my teeth. My heart seems to stall, and my breath catches in the space between—when my new fangs sink into his flesh like an anchor in water.

Rich, creamy, sweet copper spills into my mouth and it sets something deep within me—both body and soul—ablaze with what I can only describe as heavenly fire. I can feel his magic, can feel the essence of him pouring into me, infusing me, permeating every cell of my body. A startled and blissful, muffled cry escapes me as I gulp down his blood. Sariel's arms tighten around me as a heady groan rises from his throat. Tingling energy, that almost feels like a rush of cool water, pours through me, and I can feel what I can only describe as a tether connecting my soul—my body—to his burst to life.

A sense of fullness and rightness suffuses me, I know that I need no more blood, but something else. Sariel straightens as I sit back, licking my lips of any lingering blood. His eyes glitter with awe and emotion as his eyes rover over me. I make a mental note to look in a mirror as soon as I can pry myself from him. Later. Much, much later.

Bracing my hands on his broad shoulders, my hips work to and fro over his length, sliding up and down and pressing further to take his knot. Sariel's hands skate over my thighs, around the curve of my ass and up to cradle my waist. The blatant awe and reverence held in his eyes make my heart flutter.

Sariel wills a small, velvet box into one hand and opens it. My efforts slow as my jaw slackens, and my eyes burn at the sight of the ruby and gold-yellow diamond ring. I can feel the beloved, familiar hum of Sariel's daemon magic radiating from it.

“Will you give me the honor and the privilege of standing beside me in all things for all our days, Elowen?”

Tears slip down my cheeks as I manage to nod through my watery smile as he pulls the ring from the box and slips it on my finger.

“Would you take my surname as your own?”

My fingers curl into the muscled flesh of his chest as I give another tremulous nod, eyes flicking back and forth between his handsome face and the dazzling ring.

My soulbound buries his hands in my hair as he captures my lips before tucking me firmly against him and turning us to lay me beneath him. His knees drive mine apart, pinning one to the side with one hand as his tail wraps around the other, spreading me wide. Sariel's strokes deepen on each thrust, and I can feel his knot stretching me further until it's at the thickest point.

“I love fucking you, Elowen Caelestis.”

Caelestis is his last name. My heart bursts with need to weep my joy at where life has led us. Straight into each other's arms, against all odds.

“I love you more than life itself.”

So close to being fully buried to the hilt, his thumb works over my clit, making my core spasm around him, as if trying to grip him and pull him the rest of the way in. My orgasm rises as Sariel inches forward, and I can feel his cock growing impossibly harder. Tears stream from my cheeks the overwhelming, intoxicating melange of bliss, rightness, love, and pleasure.

“Oh, fuck... Sariel, I’m cumming.”

“Me too, mea floarea.”

His eyes hold mine as he finally thrusts the rest of the way forward, forcing my eager body to welcome his knot. With stolen breath, my climax crests, and in the same moment Sariel gives a soul-deep groan as his cock and knot pulse inside me as my pussy spasms, milking him.

“Fucking gods, Elowen...”

His gaze shifts to take in where we are joined. Where his cum is beginning to trickle out from around him as the last of my orgasm shudders through me, squeezing around his knot.

The adoration and gratitude in his expression is hard with emotion when his gaze lifts to mine. “This is all for me, princess?”

“All yours, my love.”

EPILOGUE

ELOWEN

“ L ook at your beautiful little horns.” My cheeks flush as I take in my heightened appearance. Sariel stands just behind me, admiring the little horns now protruding through my hair on either side of the crown of my head. They’re not even the length of my fingers. “Do you think they’ll grow?”

Sariel caresses one, drawing a shiver up my spine. “I’m not sure. I mean... It's possible. In Vassileo, I’d met a few mortals who’d made the shift, but I can’t recall them having horns. My guess would be that your shift is complete since you’re not experiencing any more symptoms.”

I heave a sigh, feeling a little insecure. Sariel’s horns are more than a foot long—curling, and lethal. He could easily impale someone with them should he so choose.

“But they’re so small,” I pout.

A dazzling grin splits Sariel’s face as he chuckles, bending to press a firm kiss to my temple. “Just like you, my precious soulbound. ”

I turn, swatting at his arm. “I am not small. I’m nearly six feet tall.”

He arches a haughty brow, as if I’ve just proven his point. I roll my eyes, but before I can complain any further, Sariel sweeps me off my feet and tosses me over his

shoulder with a firm smack to each of the rounded globes of my ass.

“Come, my parents are expecting us, and I’d like to see if my parents have made any headway with figuring out how to use the mana siphon.”

Sariel’s mother beams from ear to ear when she opens the door. Her eyes glisten with tears as she presses her fingers to her lips, taking in my new daemoness form. As a Sanguinati, she was already immortal, so she’s relatively human-looking—a tall, lithe, ethereal, breathtakingly beautiful one with hip-length silvery hair. She rushes forward with open arms and pulls me against her chest. “How are you feeling, darling?”

I can’t help but take in a big whiff of her sweet, soft, jasmine-y smell.

“Much better, thank you.”

When we pull away, she takes my hand, already knowing what she’ll find. My heart swells with affection for her as our watery gazes and grins meet once more, and something unspoken passes between us.

A powerful presence is the only thing that precedes the sight of Sariel’s father, boasting a soft smile and glittering eyes, approaching. The male, despite being a towering wall of muscle, moves with preternatural silence, as I’m coming to learn Sariel does as well. For all his intimidating qualities, the male is shockingly warm and tender-hearted, it seems. He’d shed more tears meeting me yesterday than even his wife. His voice is like the bass of a drum.

“I found a book on how to utilize the mana siphon.”

“In your mind’s eye, visualize a vein running from the tip of your fingers running all the way up your arm and into the energy center in the middle of your chest. See it

spinning in a clockwise direction and drawing upon the magic held in the mana siphon. Intuitively, you should feel when you've absorbed enough of the magic to do with it what you will, and then you can stifle the flow of drawing the magic into your body. You will then be able to direct the vision to appear in the scrying well here by channeling the energy gathered from the mana siphon by placing your fingers into the water and guiding the energy there."

Sariel's father, Charon, sets down the Encyclopedia of Magical Implements for the Minori Wielder and waits for me to gather the mana siphon where it sits on a velvet cushion.

Grief tightens my chest as I near it. Even standing near it, it feels like her. I can't be certain if it's due to my newfound magical proclivity, but after ten years of mourning her absence, suddenly standing next to something that so very obviously radiates her is enough to have tears welling in my eyes. It makes me wonder how I ever went my entire life without having sensed her magic. The energy that was so uniquely her and something so much more than just any average human magic.

Sariel is a soothing presence at my side, while Evandriel, with Halyra on his hip and Kelestra tucked into his side, watches from beside Charon and Monette. It seems that the last few days have been transformative for them, though I can't help but wonder just how much Kelestra knows about her soulbound's relationship with my mother.

With careful fingers, I lift the siphon, following Charon's instructions. It feels like opening a floodgate as my mother's energy pours into me in a rushing, whirling river of magic. It's like I can suddenly feel not only every individual cell of my own body but those of everyone around me and beyond, connected one to the other by ephemeral veins of electricity and light. No longer am I bound to this world within the confines of my body—I am a floating, microcosmic speck united to an infinite whole. My closed eyes are wide open in this place that appears beyond, yet is so very clearly within.

God, what was I supposed to be doing? It hardly feels as though it matters now.

My body is a distant tether, tense with overwhelm, but as I settle into the sensation of just being , it begins to relax.

And then—that's when it happens. All sense of self seems to disappear, and I only am.

Visions and voices from across every space and time begin to batter me, consume me, and fill me. I feel their joy, their anguish, their fear, their euphoria. And oh god, it's too much. It's too much. I can't even remember who or what I am—only that this feeling, this weight, this act of being is too much to bear.

The sound of familiar voices trickles into my periphery, but there's only one that seems to anchor me. Sariel. I can't quite make out what he's saying, but simply the deep resonance of his voice alone reminds me of who I am and what I need to do. Warm hands guide me, and distantly, I can feel my fingers dipping into water.

Find Sariel's brother.

The painting of Theriel they had shown me returns to my mind's eyes, and in the next moment, I find myself standing in a dark room with a stage. A strange language I've never heard—but that I can somehow understand—echoes through the room, the voice somehow sounding artificial.

“... Please, find your seats, the auction will begin shortly...”

I shift to find where the voice is coming from, only to come face to face with Theriel. My god, the male is a mountain. And he looks far meaner, far crueller, than Sariel. Whereas Sariel possesses a natural warmth and playfulness, this male is the opposite. Cold. Stoic. Fearsome.

Despite being right in front of him, he doesn't notice me. His eyes are locked to the stage just a row ahead of us, and when I turn to follow his gaze, a line of stark naked females stride onto the stage, all linked together by chained collars—most of which have sullen posture. Emanating from the line of females, fear and despair wash over me in such a powerful wave that it threatens to crush me, and the rage radiating from Theriel makes the non-corporeal body I'm currently in burn.

Originating from no particular point in the room, the artificial voice echoes again—like some damning god.

“Welcome to Hexoria's 235th annual Eden Enterprises Breeding Auction. Onstage are tonight's stock, each one a thoroughbred specimen from our labs, guaranteeing the best genetic material, mastery in the mating disciplines, plus the added value of an unperforated hymen and fully lactating teats, ready for high volume production...”

If I had a stomach in this vision, I'd be spilling its contents all over the people in front of me—many of which are bizarre, humanoid-looking creatures I've never seen before.

The females shuffle off-stage before the artificial voice announces one of the females. A moment later, now untethered from the group of slaves, she walks out alone to the center of the spotlight. She's not human—or at least not fully—on account of her lilac skin, unnaturally red hair, and remarkably long pointed ears that I can see are currently trembling along with the rest of her body.

This is a fucking horror show.

Tears burn my eyes as I watch her, and no one else seems to care or notice—outside of me and Theriel, who is also trembling—but with rage.

Bidding begins in a currency I don't recognize and ends in under a minute when a

price is agreed upon. Then she scampers off-stage and disappears behind a thick velvety curtain.

This process repeats over and over until the last female is announced. She walks out with a slight limp to her step—something I hadn't noticed previously when she had been with the crowd of other slaves . A curtain of blonde hair hangs around her head, but when she lifts her gaze—directly to where Theriel stands behind me—shock spears through me like a bolt of fucking lightning.

I'd recognize that port-wine birthmark decorating the right side of her face and neck anywhere. And those rosebud lips, dark eyes, and delicate nose? I spent twenty years looking up into that face. The only difference is the blonde hair and large breasts—though that could have something to do with the breastmilk currently trickling from their tips.

Oh my fucking god.

I want to weep. I want to scream. I want to kill every single person in this fucking room.

Even if her looks weren't a near-mirror copy, the energy I can feel from her is so very much the same as the one I've known all my life. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind who this woman is. Even if she is clearly some years younger than me. Reincarnation is something I've always believed in.

And I know, without a fucking doubt, this woman is my mother.

PLEASE DON'T BE MAD

HERE'S THE FIRST COUPLE CHAPTERS OF MOTH & FLAME TO EASE YOUR PAIN (FROM THAT CLIFFHANGER) + A BUNCH OF OTHER STUFF AFTERWARDS

MOTH & FLAME | HELLA | SIX MONTHS AGO

My fiancé's cock pulses inside me as we drink from one another's veins. If it weren't for our Sanguinati venom, I wouldn't be able to achieve orgasm. Even as I do, it feels less like an orgasm and more like the sad flutter of a once-proud flag, now tattered and torn.

Love is for the poor because they have nothing else to live for.

My mother repeats those words to me every time I plead with her and my father not to force me into a loveless marriage with Alister.

To them, marriage is about strengthening allies, bloodlines, and fortunes— not love.

After a myriad of threats and curses sworn by my parents, our entire family, the entirety of the Blackspire Blood Vaults board, and seven months of procrastinating and desperately trying to escape my fate, I finally succumbed to the inevitable and accepted the engagement proposal to the so-called charming and charismatic Sanguinati male currently sliding his still-hard cock out of me.

I hadn't had high hopes, considering his family is notorious for their unsavory

methods of conducting business, but they are wealthy and powerful, much like my own family—which is all that seemed to matter to them. Our engagement won't be publicly announced, nor our marriage, to assure my safety. My fiancé and his family have many enemies, and if they know who I am, it puts a target on my back.

As Alister's eyes lift to mine, there's no warmth or sign of the charm he so generously bestows on others. I've given him what he wants.

Blood.

And every time I give Alister my blood and my body, I feel less and less like myself. Like he takes a part of my soul with him every time he fills me with his cum and then silently leaves. Thankfully, I won't have to see him again until tomorrow morning. If I'm really lucky, not even until the following day because he'll be too busy with his morally depraved clients and distracted by his harem of mistresses.

Skin crawling with the need to rid myself of his essence, I wipe between my legs with a soiled sheet and lie in bed, waiting for him to shower and leave for work. With my eyes steady on the clock, time moves at a glacial pace. When the bedroom door shuts, announcing his departure, a heavy sigh escapes me. I finally rise out of bed, able to dress in peace without the weight of his soul-crushing presence.

Every day, my driver takes the same route to my office. As usual, numbness suffuses me as I stare out at the pristine steel, stone, and glass architecture that define our crowded, lonely city.

The singular bright spot amongst a palate of grey is the luminous, flame-filled glass sign reading Moth & Flame, framed by elegantly sculpted stone and opaque, mirrored windows. As ever, something inside me stirs at the sight of it, even with its foreboding wrought-iron doors.

When it first opened, only a handful of months ago, I'd searched on Spyder's Web to discover it's a kink house . Essentially, anyone over the age of two decades can show up and be manually stimulated by someone who will act out their kinks.

It's a rather ingenious idea. I imagine it saves many individuals from sexual repression and aggression, not to mention bringing fulfillment and intimate connection to the otherwise lonely populace of Dreadmere, Gothika's capital city.

Since I first laid eyes on it, I've secretly longed to go there—if only to meet its owner, Draven Morainu. Shrouded in mystery, not a single one of the detectives I hired could uncover anything about him. Eventually, I resorted to utilizing the only colleague my fiancé has ever introduced me to—Lazarus, Gothika's most nefarious crime lord, renowned for knowing everyone and everything about them—to help me find out who owns Moth & Flame and uncover any other gems he could find.

In the span of a single breath, I discovered Draven Morainu is a retired Reaper—one of the elite within the Blackspire Empire's special forces division—and an exceedingly rare being: Nykanthros .

One who wields shadows and possesses a bestial form. According to Lazarus, in Draven's case, his bestial form is some kind of monstrous Lykos creature that looks half-fae, half-giant wolf.

Lazarus grinned when he mentioned something about him being a little older. I recently faced my hundredth year, age is just a blur after that.

Now, I imagine you're asking, "Isn't that mildly unsettling, stalker-ish behavior?"

Without a doubt.

Do I care?

Not in the least.

Was it dangerous and reckless to visit the lair of Lazarus himself?

Abso-fucking-lutely.

Do I now owe him a favor because he refused my money?

Yes.

Am I terrified of when and what that favour will be?

Also, yes.

Was it worth it?

Fuck, yes.

My face is rather recognizable, and if anyone were to catch me patronizing a kink house , I'd probably be flayed by family, ostracized by the public, to then be brutally murdered by my horrid fiancé. Not because he gives a batty fuck about who I have sex with or who manually stimulates me , but purely because one of the few things he actually cares about is public perception.

Akash forbid I seek pleasure from anyone but him when he spends every evening glutting himself and his cock on his mistresses. A fact for which I am supremely grateful, as it allows me a brief reprieve.

So, in the shadows, I shall remain, admiring Mr. Morainu from afar.

My heart withers at the thought.

HELLA | PRESENT DAY

I lied. In the shadows, I did not remain. Did I mention I have very little impulse control? Hence, all the stalking of Mr. Draven Morainu. I tried to resist—really, I did. I spent months sneaking out of work and shirking my duties to haunt the vicinity of Moth & Flame, all in the hopes of catching a fleeting glance of the male. But it seems he rarely leaves the building—I’ve only caught him a handful of times. I can only assume he lives in one of the penthouses at the top of the towering stone-and-glass building.

When my patience finally dwindled away, I took the leap—conjured a disguise and slipped inside.

Draven is everything I’ve ever fucking dreamed of, even if I have to pretend not to know his name or anything about him. One of the numerous legal forms Moth & Flame clients are obligated to sign prior to membership states that all Masters and Mistresses of the house are forbidden from giving out their real names or personal details, to prevent any unwanted attention.

I am only ever allowed to refer to Draven as Master , Daddy, My Lord, or Sir— and for the last three months, I’ve spent nearly every evening after work sneaking into Moth & Flame in increasingly elaborate costumes, entering through VIP Members’ discreet alleyway entrance reserved for their more affluent clients who prefer their predilections to remain private. As they should.

As unfathomable as it seems, I’m his only personal client. One evening, after yet another four-hour session, I tried to make a subtle comment by saying, “Thank you

for spending so much time with me. I'm sure you've had a very busy day with your other clients." To my surprise, Draven replied, "You're the only client I personally host."

Each evening, our sessions are booked for one hour, and yet, by the time I leave, several hours have passed. I am also certain we've crossed a great many professional boundaries over the last three months, but much to my dismay, my master has yet to actually fuck me. Well, at least not with his cock. Or at least not the one attached to his body.

And while I have been on the receiving end of a very large, shadowy, lykos-shaped cock—bulging knot and all—I still haven't gotten to experience the real thing. Much to my dismay.

Tonight, however, I will beg. If you thought grovelling was beneath me, you are very much mistaken. And while, admittedly, there isn't anyone else in this realm I would get on my hands and knees for, there isn't a thing in this dreary, lonely world I wouldn't do for Daddy Draven Morainu.

Heaving a lovelorn sigh, I fix my gaze on the display screen where my singular photo of Draven lingers—a rather grainy image I managed to take myself when I'd just happened to catch him outside of his business. My mind travels to a time and place where I can escape my cursed fiancé, my foul family, and live a life beside Draven—if he'd have me.

My fantasizing is rudely cut short by an abrupt knock. My eyes reluctantly flick to the tall, blonde, slender silhouette I can see lurking beyond my office door: my sister.

Fuck.

Moth & Flame

Gothika & The Blackspire Empire, Book One

(a series of standalones)